

Rescue Puppies and How Best to Help them

Much of this information is taken from the talk by Julie M Bedford, Clinical Animal Behaviourist at the 2018 Puppy Conference UK.

Weather - one of the biggest advantages of rescue in warmer climates

Puppies that have access to being outside generally develop better because they experience a wider range of experiences including different surface textures, different levels of ground and a more interesting environment. Providing as much to explore as possible is essential in puppy development - tyres, cardboard boxes they can shred, sand, grass, gravel, carpet, safe things to climb over and around and even unstable surfaces like wobble boards - but always under supervision.

Foster Homes

As most of us already know, the best way for a puppy to grow up is in a home in order to understand how to live with humans and in a human world. They get to hear household noises, see household sights and scent household smells. They may experience and socialise to other animals and it is great if they can experience children of different ages.

Toys and Play

Lots of toys in particular appropriate chew toys like Kongs are important. However, using Kongs wisely and not just leaving them lying around will increase their benefits. Teaching puppies how to get the food from the inside by making it easy and then working up to where the Kong is stuffed and frozen will do a number of things.

- Increases problem solving ability
- Develops frustration tolerance (see more this and impulse control below)
- Helps puppies make decisions
- Helps puppies learn that they can be on their own
- Is a boredom buster as dogs need to learn that there are times when they will be bored
- Helps appropriate chewing and redirection away from other things

Kongs can be made more interesting and more interactive by tying them to tyres suspended from trees so that they bounce around or are more difficult to access. Of course the height should be suitable for puppies and all equipment safe and monitored.

Puppies should not have too much unsupervised play - this is vitally important because the more they interact with other dogs and puppies only, the less they will orient to humans. As soon as mum starts to move away from the puppies or have some time for herself or can leave them for a short time, we need to proactively interact with puppies and start to handle them as individuals. Having some time alone - even for a few minutes each day can make a huge difference and prepare puppies for when they will leave mum and go to a new home, often alone and without their siblings.

It is much more beneficial to home puppies as individuals and not with siblings - for the same reason as not allowing too much unsupervised play with their siblings, other puppies and dogs alone. There is always a higher risk of sibling rivalry and exclusion of the human family where dogs are homed together. If dogs are homed together it is even more important for each puppy to be treated and worked with as an individual even to the point of attending classes or day care without the brother or sister. Homing siblings together requires more knowledge of dogs, dog care and dog psychology.

Where puppies are sent to multi dog families it is even more important to help them socialise with dogs from outside the home. It is too easy for dogs to become a tight knit family unit which gives the false impression of being dog social - in fact, these dogs are more likely to be less dog social. New owners need to be made aware of this.

Puppies from stressed mothers or poorly cared for mothers - the chemicals released by the mother into the womb will greatly effect the puppies during their time there and will influence how well they deal with things in the outside world. Where a mother is highly stressed or has been in poor health, it is vital to increase the confidence building of these puppies once born.

Mums who run into birthing difficulties say at puppy 4 will have puppies that are more likely to show fear issues later on and these will generally occur in puppies 4, 5, 6 and so on. The puppies born without difficulty will be more resilient. Mark the puppies so that you know which ones to observe and possibly work with more.

Puppies that have been stressed in the womb or that do not have the right work done with them during weeks 3-5 (see below) or who have a fright during this time - can show fear issues as late as 6-8 months of age. These are often the puppies who seemed to be totally confident and their fear appears as if out of nowhere. Puppies become increasingly nervous or fearful usually around weeks 6-8 and may take longer to approach new things or work out that they do not need to be afraid. They should be allowed time to explore and encouraged and supported during this time. Some puppies will deal with this time much better than others and it should be kept in mind that the other factors discussed here may be effecting those that are less resilient or more nervous of new things.

Best time to increase learning experiences and confidence - Week 3 - 5!!

At this point mum is often starting to have some time away from the puppies too. This is the best time to handle puppies, give them some one to one time and also to introduce any number of things. Massaging them, inspecting ears, under the tail, inside the mouth, gently squeezing paws, scruff and nose and getting them very used to calming touch.

Where mothers are OK with humans touching puppies and not made anxious by it - puppies should be handled daily from days 2-21. Evidence shows that puppies handled during this time are calmer, explore the world more, are more emotionally stable and are overall more confident.

Puppies that allow us to cuddle them like rag dolls and relax in our arms are also usually more emotionally stable and able to cope with things humans need to do around them. The wiggling/squirming puppy should be taught to relax in the arms. Squirmers, if inadvertently grabbed later for example around children, may have a higher potential to bite. As it is not natural for a dog to like cuddling they need to be taught this. Many dogs tolerate it rather than truly relax with it.

When mum starts to wander away from puppies this is the first more stressful period for a puppy since birth and it can be classed as a time when some fears will develop. Puppies start to open their eyes and ears but we already need to be introducing things to them **BEFORE** this point. Each puppy may develop at a different rate and one ear may hear before the other or the hearing is not as acute. We can not wait to introduce noises after the puppies are hearing because we may have already missed the opportunity with one puppy who is hearing better and noise may come as a surprise. **Start noise introduction at a low level before week 3** and observe the puppies. This is your best opportunity to get puppies used to the sound of shooting, fireworks, door slams, storms and so on - done correctly and introduced gradually you can make a big difference now. Once dogs are over 8/9 weeks then this can continue, but it has to be done well and ideally paired with meals fed by hand in a steady stream - food based reward/Classical Conditioning.

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/dog-behaviour-health/sound-therapy-for-pets>

The above link provides access to noises that can be downloaded for training.

We have the BEST opportunity to influence how a puppy will turn out and to give it the best chance of a good life if we are proactive in weeks 3-5. Too often owners don't do enough between weeks 8-20 but even if they do, they can suffer set backs because the puppy will still hold issues that developed in the womb or in weeks 3-5.

Where possible it is better for a puppy to go to a new owner around week 9 rather than week 8. Puppies develop so fast that there can be significant differences between one week and the next.

Re-home based on what is suitable for each individual for example: Where there is early sibling rivalry or even signs of early aggression it can be beneficial to re-home into a proactive home that will work on this and give the individual more attention and redirection training at an earlier age. An example given at the puppy conference was a Patterdale that **benefitted from being re-homed to a knowledgeable home at 6 weeks rather than waiting until 8 or 9 weeks.** The dog was already attacking siblings and causing serious injuries. Redirection training onto appropriate toys and games was taught and the puppy went on to live as a part of the family. However the dog still needed a more knowledgeable home.

Weaning - the next most traumatic time for puppies - this is when more fear can set in as mum is starting to wean the puppies. Another time for us to step in, be proactive, redirect puppies into enjoying time with us and making nice experiences.

Get puppies used to being in cars and on their own BEFORE they go to their new homes - as we can see, there are definitely two and possibly three stressful periods in a puppy's life before it even finds its new human family - the womb, mum moving around and leaving the puppies more and weaning. If we don't do anything and if we don't get puppies used to cars, the first time they may experience this alone is when they leave their mum, siblings and comfort zone and travel alone to a new place where everything is new and often by car. It is no wonder so many dogs find this highly stressful and it impacts on how they adapt to their new life. It is not helpful to just put all the puppies in the car when they go for vet checks and think that this will habituate them to car travel. It is so much more than this!

10 minutes per day alone from week 5 - having each puppy alone and bonding with a human and enjoying play with them from week 5 is important. Each puppy only needs around 10 minutes per day of this for it to be very effective and greatly reduce issues of separation anxiety.

Socialisation - Great idea to help puppies meet more types of humans!

So what happens if we are raising puppies in a household without children (babies/toddlers/teenagers) or old people or men etc. They all smell different! **Well, there's good news - use scent cloths!** Although it is not a perfect substitute and ideally you and new owners will introduce puppies to as many new and different people as possible, we can use scent cloths. Ask friends or family who have children, babies, older people etc to rub a cloth over their hands, faces, necks and bodies and give them to you to put in with the puppies so they can experience that scent. Dogs see the world through their noses and are born with their sense of smell - so use it! You can do these introductions long before eyes and ears open and go on long after.

Fear Periods - Be especially aware of fear periods and when they occur. In addition to those that occur at around 12 weeks, 6 months, 12 months and 18 months we need to be aware of the times outlined above when mum is leaving the den more and weaning. Although natural, dogs do not just grow out of fears - they need to be actively addressed and confidence built. The first fear period usually coincides with a puppy's socialisation period and when the puppy first arrives in a new home. The window of opportunity for dealing with things is very narrow

This is the same with impulsivity - puppies do not just grow out of it. It is possibly the most neglected area of training classes and leads to the most commonly listed problems. If not redirected and dealt with impulsivity can cause major issues for owners later on. Impulsivity needs to be worked on while the puppy is still malleable and the brain highly plastic.

- Jumping up
- Chasing
- Leash pulling
- Lunging
- Barking
- Resisting recall as everything else is more exciting

When trying to get puppies used to different types of people be very aware that they may be tolerating and coping rather than accepting. This is the problem with asking many different children or people to touch puppies or even reward them - watch the puppy's overall body language. It can be more helpful for the handler to reward or feed the puppy his or her meal by hand near to a new person rather than asking the person to feed/reward the puppy.

Be VERY careful not to reward over submissive behaviours such as rolling over - again watch the overall body language. A puppy tummy is tempting to rub but if the puppy is not offering a confident/relaxed state of mind but is offering deference/over submission (look at the eyes, ears, body, presentation and angle of the head, is there urination) we can do more harm than good. Over excitement is another - this will feed impulsivity.

Rules and Boundaries - the more that are provided, the easier it is for puppies and dogs to adapt. Without them dogs do not know what behaviours and perhaps more importantly, what emotions should be displayed