

## SOCIALIZATION OF PUPPIES AND CRITICAL PERIODS

a summary, by Jill Evans

In recent years, some fascinating discoveries have been made about the personality development of very young puppies. Dr. John Paul Scott and his team of researchers at Bar Harbor, Maine worked with numerous breeds and found that there are certain critical periods which vary very little, and are very important for breeders and owners to know about so that they can do the best things at the best times. Since then other scientists have continued the observations and added to the knowledge. But basically, all have found the same things, and most important, they have observed that patterns which are not established properly at the critical periods are never properly established.

FIRST CRITICAL PERIOD--SURVIVAL--about the first 20 days of the pup's life, when warmth, food, the massage of the mother's licking, and sleep, are all the pups need. Their little nervous systems have not hooked up yet, and they can't learn anything.

SECOND CRITICAL PERIOD--SECURITY--21 to 28 days--dramatically, all the puppy's senses begin to work and the nervous system becomes a unit. This week is most vital to the puppy's development--he is suddenly aware that there is a big world around him with other individuals in it, and he needs his mama very much to give him a feeling that everything is OK. He also needs gentle human cuddling to show him people are a good thing too, and he needs his litter-mates to show him he is a dog among other dogs. This is no time to wean a pup or to take him from the nest. Pups removed experimentally at 4 weeks were found to have very poor relationships later on with other dogs--they would fight with them, some were almost impossible to breed, and they were too attached to humans if kept with them at that age.

THIRD CRITICAL PERIOD--EXPLORATION--4 to 7 weeks. This is when the puppies start playing and play-fighting, and establishing a dominance order within the litter. It is also a learning period and a pup can be taught a little simple good behaviour by encouragement ONLY--what he learns then sticks harder than at any other period in his life. What he SHOULD learn is that people are good, other dogs are fun, and that there is nothing to fear in the world. Again, they should not be taken from their mother and litter-mates except for short periods after about 5 weeks, when they can be given some individual human affection and attention away from the others, to counter-balance the doggy dominance-order. This should be done regularly each day. It's the dog-littermate-man time. *Expose to other environments*

FOURTH CRITICAL PERIOD--TEACHING--7 to 12 weeks. This is when the man-dog attachments can be established most deeply, and when complete weaning can be done best. The pup should be exposed to lots of different types of people--men, women, teen-agers, children of all ages and noisinesses--but at 8 weeks be careful. It's the time for teamwork and play-training--an 8 week old pup can learn to ask to go out for the mutual good of both pup and owner. It's the best time for leash-breaking--playfully, putting on a collar and letting a leash drag around at first. The pup needs lots of individual attention to give him a feeling of self-importance. BUT--this time-span includes another critical sub-period:-

### \*\*\* EIGHT WEEKS--FEAR PERIOD\*\*\*

This is an extremely vulnerable stage--formerly friendly pups were found

to come reluctantly when called--if they were well attached to human beings before, though, they would run to a person for comfort if frightened. If they were prevented from doing so experimentally by a mild electric shock they never recovered from the experience and could not be induced to approach a human even much later. Therefore, this is NOT the time for discipline, or for any other possibly fear-inducing experience, such as going to a new home or a trip to the vet for shots or ear-cropping. EAR-CROPPING SHOULD BE DONE EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER THE CRITICAL EIGHT-WEEK FEAR PERIOD. *Expose to other environments - even for a few minutes of exploring*

FIFTH CRITICAL PERIOD--DISCIPLINE--12 to 16 weeks. Now the apron-strings are ready for cutting. The pup wanders away from the nest alone or with a pal, gets into mischief, tries out his teeth, and can be mildly disciplined without becoming fearful or resentful--IF he has been properly socialized toward people before. Now the man and dog decide who is boss, and with Danes, we know who that had better be! You can do training in basic obedience--just kindergarten stuff--but at first do it without distractions. When the puppy understands and is not confused, and has self-confidence that he can please by obeying, you can try training with distractions--at a class, or in a barnyard, or around crowds. So twelve weeks is an ideal time for a Dane pup to go to a new home--after the fear period is safely over, after his shots, and after his ears are cropped and healed. Then he will be ready to take on the world.

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--translated into French by Louise Martin .

*4 1/2 months - fear period - 4 - 5 months take out a lot to all kinds of places + reassurance*