

BARK U Educational Sheet: Understanding Fear Periods in Puppies

What Are Fear Periods?



Fear periods are a normal part of puppy development during which your puppy may suddenly become more cautious, fearful, or reactive to new or even familiar stimuli. These phases are temporary but critical for shaping your puppy's long-term behavior and confidence. Understanding and handling fear periods correctly can help your puppy grow into a well-adjusted adult dog.

When Do Fear Periods Happen?

Puppies typically experience two primary fear periods:

1. 8-11 Weeks (Early Socialization Phase):

- This phase occurs as puppies are learning to navigate the world and often coincides with their adjustment to new homes.
- Fearful reactions may arise to unfamiliar sounds, sights, or experiences, even those they seemed comfortable with before.

2. 6-14 Months (Adolescence):

- The second fear period often occurs during adolescence when your puppy is becoming more independent.
- This phase may coincide with growth spurts and hormonal changes, making them more sensitive to their environment.

Signs of a Fear Period

- Avoidance of people, objects, or places they previously enjoyed
- Cowering, trembling, or hiding





- Startling easily or showing exaggerated reactions to noises or movements
- Barking, growling, or lunging at perceived threats
- Hesitancy to explore or approach new things

How to Support Your Puppy During Fear Periods

1. Stay Calm and Patient

- Your puppy looks to you for guidance and reassurance. If you stay calm, they are more likely to feel safe.
- Avoid scolding or forcing them to confront what they fear, as this can reinforce their anxiety.

2. Use Positive Reinforcement

- Reward your puppy for calm, confident behavior with treats, praise, or play.
- If they approach something they're wary of, mark the behavior ("Yes!") and reward generously.

3. Gradually Expose Them to New Experiences

- Introduce your puppy to new people, places, and objects at their own pace.
- Keep interactions short and positive. If they show fear, take a step back and allow them to approach when they're ready.

4. Avoid Overwhelming Situations

- During a fear period, limit exposure to chaotic or overstimulating environments, such as crowded parks, loud events, or busy streets.
- Monitor their body language and remove them from situations that feel overwhelming.





5. Create Positive Associations

- Pair potentially scary stimuli with positive experiences. For example, if your puppy is nervous about a vacuum cleaner, give them treats when the vacuum is nearby (but turned off), and gradually work up to having it on.

6. Provide a Safe Space

- Ensure your puppy has a quiet, comfortable spot to retreat to when they feel overwhelmed. A crate, playpen, or quiet room can be a safe haven for them.

7. Be Consistent

- Maintain predictable routines and training during fear periods to provide stability and confidence.

What NOT to Do During a Fear Period

- **Don't Force:** Never push your puppy toward something they fear. Let them explore at their own pace.
- **Don't Punish:** Punishing fearful behavior can increase their anxiety and make the fear worse.
- **Don't Overexpose:** Avoid flooding your puppy with overwhelming stimuli. It's better to take small, manageable steps.

Homework: Building Confidence

1. Confidence-Building Activities:

- Play games like "Find It" to encourage sniffing and exploration.
- Introduce safe agility obstacles like tunnels or low platforms to build bravery.





2. Controlled Socialization:

- Expose your puppy to new experiences gradually, ensuring they remain comfortable.
- Invite calm, friendly people or dogs for short, positive interactions.

3. Short Training Sessions:

- Work on basic commands like “Sit,” “Stay,” and “Touch” to reinforce focus and positive engagement.
- Reward heavily to keep their spirits high.

Conclusion

Fear periods are a natural part of your puppy's development, and with patience, understanding, and positive reinforcement, you can help them navigate these phases with confidence. By providing a calm and supportive environment and taking steps to gently expose your puppy to new experiences, you're setting them up for a lifetime of success and resilience. Remember, every small step you take now builds a foundation for a confident, well-adjusted adult dog!

