

The PsychoSocial Stages I follow for Raising English Springer Spaniels

Puppy Socialization:

Early environment and socialization make a lasting impression on a puppy. The critical periods in a pup's life are from birth to sixteen weeks, with a peak between six and eight weeks. Any trauma occurring during the second and/or fifth period(s) will have a permanent effect on their life and although may be modified through training, the dog will never be as well adjusted to people, new experiences or to it's characteristic work in life.

First Stage: Birth to 3 weeks

Basic needs- warmth, food, sleep, mother

Mental capacity- nearly zero

Special needs- little or no handling by humans

This is the neonatal period when puppies need warmth food and lots of sleep in close proximity to their dam. Neurologically, the pups are not developed and are essentially unable to learn. They respond to gentle stroking and caressing. The tactile stimulation is the beginning of a dog interacting with humans. Quiet music played in the room with the dam and pups provides auditory stimulation when they are ready to receive it. The ears start to open about the tenth day provide soft voices so they become a part of the environment. When the eyes open between day ten to twenty pups receive additional sensory input by interacting with different shapes, sizes and textures encouraging them to early environmental responses to variation.

Second and Third Stages: 3 weeks to 8 weeks

4th week-

Basic needs- warmth, food, sleep, mother

Mental capacity- all sense functioning, awareness of living beings

Trainability- slight

Special needs- EXTREME critical period, do NOT remove from littermates or dam. Careful and controlled human introduction

5th-8th week-

Basic needs- canine socialization within the litter. Human socialization

Mental capacity- response to voices, able to recognize people

Trainability- developing

Special needs- Aware of differences between canine and human

At three weeks pups will take wobbly steps and within a couple of days they begin play with littermates and dam.

Four weeks they start to bark and growl. Rapid sensory development, the brain is receiving messages the pups can see, hear and have the ability to learn. At the same time they are vulnerable and they should be handled gently and avoid any trauma. Supplemental feedings but not weaned. It is very important to remain with the dam. As they begin to play they need more space and the dam needs an escape. They need to be kept in familiar surroundings with protection from drafts and temperature changes.

They need to be handled gently and introduced to various auditory stimulations, gradual increase in intensity. Puppies are instinctively clean and will wobble from their bed to relieve themselves elsewhere.

Five to seven weeks is the time to get serious about weaning but should remain with the dam after feedings and at night. It has been proven that pups removed from the dam and/or siblings during this time may be unable to socialize with other dogs and they are the ones most likely to become fighters later in life. Short individual training periods and human contact is important. This is the period when pups are gradually encouraged to transfer dependency and affection from the dam to humans but must still

associate with the dam and littermates. This is the time when the stage is set to become a great companion dog later in life. Hand contact **MUST BE GENTLE** and a calm approach to a minor accident can reverse an unfortunate, harmful stimulation to one of trust and affection for humans. Puppies handled with love and care will not shy away from people or from a judge when approached for examination they learn to trust humans.

Six weeks puppies should run eagerly to humans, children and strangers. The ability to move with agility should be encouraged with ball chasing, climbing and gentle lead training. A puppy should never be pulled or jerked on lead. Introduce to the outside textures and sounds.

Fourth Stage: 7th -13th week

Basic needs- remove from littermates and dam. Supervised human socialization. Love and security requires new mother image.

Mental capacity- brain waves can be recorded, ability to establish a permanent bond, human & dog relationship. Capable of accepting gentle discipline

Trainability- learns by association. Can learn simple behavioral responses. Begin housebreaking

Special needs- children and other animals should not be allowed to scare or hurt the pup. Introductions are important and should be careful and supervised. Gradually expose to loud noises.

By this point the pups should be fully weaned and their brains are fully developed. Pups should live and play with their littermates and should be introduced to unfamiliar surroundings. The time has come for the pups to transfer their affections from their dam to humans.

Fifth Stage: 13th-17th weeks

Basic needs- love, attention, discipline, socialization and security

Mental capacity- fully developed needing only experience. Will establish self as dominant being the mind is still being influenced.

Trainability- capable of undergoing formal obedience training. Capable of developing a positive or negative attitude to training.

Special needs- obedience trainers should be selected with great care, the pup's mind is being influenced. Praise for correct behavior is most effective training tool. Meaningful praise is highly important to shaping a positive attitude.

Evaluate the pup's play area from the pup's point of view. Puppies are curious and everything goes into their mouths. Use caution. Puppies are naturally destructive at this stage. The flooring should be non-skid the pups bones are still ossifying (till about 9 months old). Excursions to new sights and sounds are great stimulators. Carry the pup in your arms and devote a great deal of time to the pup—this will greatly influence the pup's lifetime. Any struggle should be diverted and praise given when the pup settles down or acts appropriately.

Playing with puppies is the most satisfying thing there is a dog's world. Everyone in the household should be included. Puppies should be picked up, comforted, petted and played with often.

You are shaping your puppy's personality this is the first seventeen weeks but what you do the first eighteen months can establish a lifetime.

Take advantage of this time play with and teach your puppy and love the puppy enough to discipline when needed.