

Chapter 3

The formative period — the wolf's greatest gift

Prevention is better than cure. The most important message in this book is to do the right thing at the right time. Miss that period and your pup will be mal-socialised, which can create terrible suffering — both for you and your pup.

It is important to realise that the puppy is like a whole different species compared with the adult dog, with the extent of change similar to that which takes place from a caterpillar to a butterfly. However, this maturation depends on what genetic and epigenetic switches are turned on (or not) through exposure to various stimuli. Pups don't just adapt to the human world by themselves: it is our critical role as their mentor to offer them the appropriate exposure at the right time. Puppy Zen looks closely at which behavioural switches we need to turn on and when, to guide the raising and training of our pups in the most effective, loving way. We use this information in Parts D and F to guide our training.

If these behavioural switches are not turned on, we begin the difficult and traumatic path of behavioural issues and mal-socialisation — dogs that don't know how to be social, and instead are anxious, fearful, aggressive and compromised. The importance of getting this right is highlighted by the American Veterinary Society, which in a paper on puppy socialisation states that behavioural issues are responsible for 80 per cent of euthanasia for dogs under 3 years old.

We can be so captured by our pups' cuteness that we forget that love also requires understanding. Resist the urge to purely mother or father your pup. Also grow your understanding, ability and commitment to do what your pup needs you to do. We have to bring our hearts and minds together: love with all our hearts, and grow our

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