



# Surviving Adolescence

When your good puppy “forgets everything” — a one-page survival guide

PETSLIKEMINE  
NEW PUPPY & KITTEN

PET NAME

AGE NOW

WHAT’S HARDEST RIGHT NOW

Somewhere around six to eight months, a lot of owners quietly panic. Recall becomes optional, known cues earn a blank stare, and your dog looks at you as though you have never met. Here is the truest reassuring thing first: **your dog has not forgotten anything, and you have not failed.** This is adolescence, a real, documented developmental phase where the feelings have raced ahead of the brakes. It is a brain rebuild, not a character verdict — and it ends.

## WHAT IT ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE (ALL NORMAL)

- ☐ Selective deafness and recall breakdown, usually outdoors near something exciting
- ☐ A second wobble of fear — things they were fine with suddenly seem alarming
- ☐ Reactivity to dogs or people on lead that seems to come from nowhere
- ☐ Testing what still works: jumping up, mouthing, ignoring known cues resurface
- ☐ More energy, shorter fuse; a bored, under-slept teenager is a difficult one

## THE ONE THING YOU MUST NOT DO

Do not treat this as a dominance contest. When a biddable dog starts ignoring you, the internet will tell you to be firmer, to dominate, to use a check chain, shock collar or “alpha roll”. Please do not. Aversive, confrontational methods are linked to more fear, anxiety and aggression, not less, and to poorer welfare than reward-based training. A second fear period is the worst possible time to add a bad experience. Reward-based training is not the soft option here; it is the effective one, and it keeps the trust intact for the decade that follows.

## WHAT GENUINELY HELPS (MANAGEMENT AND PATIENCE, NOT TRICKS)

- ☐ **Go back to basics, without shame:** short sessions, high-value rewards (chicken and cheese, not dry biscuit), be the most interesting thing there
- ☐ **Protect recall with a long line:** don’t let them practise ignoring you off lead; reward every return lavishly, even the slow teenage ones
- ☐ **Meet the needs behind the behaviour:** appropriate exercise, plenty of sniffing and enrichment, chews, and — crucially — enough sleep
- ☐ **Manage the environment so they can succeed:** distance, calmer times, gentle graded exposure; never force them towards what scares them
- ☐ **Keep up the socialisation:** it is a use-it-or-lose-it stage; keep experiences calm, positive and ordinary

## DON’T REACH FOR NEUTERING AS A SHORTCUT

Neutering is not a behavioural fix, and for some fear-driven behaviours it can make things slightly worse. The old “just do it at six months” rule is out of date; timing is a genuine breed-and-size decision for you and your vet. Handle the behaviour on its own terms.

## WHEN IT IS MORE THAN ADOLESCENCE: ASK FOR HELP EARLY

“It’s just a phase” should never leave a struggling dog without help. If there is genuine fear or aggression, escalating reactivity, panic when left alone, or things getting worse rather than slowly better despite your kind efforts, ask your vet for a referral to a qualified, **reward-based** behaviourist (accredited through a recognised body). Steer clear of anyone selling dominance, “pack leadership” or “balanced” training with aversives. A vet check is worth doing too, in case pain sits underneath a change.

*If you are reading this at eleven at night after a day where your dog unlearned everything: this is a stage, not a verdict, and it passes. Keep being kind, keep being consistent, keep the trust intact, and your good dog comes back. He was never really gone.*  
Written and reviewed by Dr Alastair Greenway MRCVS and Claire Greenway BVMS MRCVS. This sheet explains and records. It does not diagnose or prescribe. Always follow your own vet’s instructions.

**How to use.** Shrink the sessions, raise the rewards, protect recall with a long line, meet the needs behind the behaviour, and never give up or turn to aversives. Ask for reward-based help early if it is more than a phase. A wellbeing aid, not a substitute for veterinary advice.

**REWARD-BASED, NEVER AVERSIVE — AND IT PASSES**