

AnatShepJuly2019B

Trying Times : or Teenage Mutant Anatolians

Teenagers of any species are a handful. Anatolian Shepherds are no different. They're neither fish nor fowl – no longer pups, but not quite yet adults. They have their adult height, but not the mass that they will achieve. They have puppy brains mixed with adult drives. They are testing boundaries and becoming more guardy, but they still have moments of insecurity where they behave like the pups they are. They still need input and direction – shepherding – from us as their owners, but they're ready to leave the kennel, so to speak, and strike out on their own.

It's their last puppy hurrah before they turn into the staid adults that the breed produces. When it's happening it seems to take forever, but one morning you wake up and have an adult dog that is everything you've ever wanted on your hands, when only a week before you were questioning why you ever kept the dog to begin with.

This is a stage of maturation where younger dogs will act out their insecurities with more barking than necessary given the threat on hand. They will react to things that they have never shown interest in, or fear of, before. They respond to a mouse with the same ferocity they would a bear.

With stock, they may engage in rough play and attempt to chase, when as younger pups they seemed perfect. This is the time when we, as owners, must step up our shepherding of our livestock and dogs. The erroneous notion that you can simply turn a puppy loose with stock and have an instant livestock guarding dog is never more apparent than during the teenage stage.

It helps to create an environment that has appropriate stock for the dog, including exposing the dog to animals that will not tolerate antics and misbehaviors, but will not overcorrect the dog and create a fear situation. When not able to supervise teenagers who still make poor life choices, it is best to fashion a kenneling situation where the dog can still be around the stock without getting in trouble. If you have older dogs with your stock you will come to appreciate them even more for the sensible role models that they can be for your younger dogs. If your older dogs will actually correct your teenaged dogs and keep them in line, then you have older dogs who are more than worth their weight in gold.

Dogs that aren't around stock will still exhibit an uptick in pronounced adolescent behaviors. You may have a pup who suddenly feels the need to guard you from just about everyone who approaches, in spite of the dog having always been friendly and outgoing. Some dogs will have a definite pattern to the people they single out for the canine equivalent of an enhanced TSA pat down, and others won't. Make a note of what the dog seems to react to (black hoodies, sunglasses, hats, long duster coats, skateboards) and try to engineer calm situations where you can present the dog with appropriate people that fit that profile, and then allow the dog to investigate *at his own pace*. If he will take treats from you or the stranger for being brave and tolerant of this novelty, be generous with the treats. If the dog won't take treats, increase your distance from the stranger until the dog is comfortable and *reward his calm behavior*. Some things take longer to get used to than others, and this is where early socialization pays off.

Never force the dog to go beyond the level of interaction that he is comfortable with. This threshold is important and forcing a dog to go beyond it can have very negative consequences. If you find yourself and your dog in a situation that is simply too much for the dog, err on the side of caution and calmly

walk away from it. Remember that your dog is still young, in spite of his size, and you are dealing with a breed that is not meant to be friends with all he meets. Be thankful if your dog is willing to tell you that he's uncomfortable by vocalizing his fears. This is a period when you should use all the tools available to you as a dog trainer.

This is also the time during which your Anatolian will likely begin to exhibit more pronounced reactions to strange dogs. Teenagers are generally more interested in being at the top of the social heap and dogs are no exception, especially in a breed where defensive behavior around other predatory animals is part of how the breed does its job. If you are one of those who takes your dog to a dog park, you may wish to curtail this activity. Should an altercation arise at the dog park, it will not matter who started it, your dog is likely to get blamed based on his size and breed. There are no winners in a situation of that sort.

The goal should always be a dog that can safely be taken out in public, whether a working dog, a show dog, or a pet. He may not be everyone's best friend, indeed, it is not his job to be so, but he will be a dog that can travel with you, go to the vet when necessary, and if you choose to show him, go to a show and not behave in such a manner as to have to be asked to leave. Socializing your Anatolian does not cut down on his ability to guard. I would argue that it actually makes him a better guardian because he is exposed to the wide range of human behavior and is therefore more likely to make good decisions regarding humans and their foibles.

Jo Lynne York

Eboracumk9@yahoo.com

www.asdca.org