

A Change In The Air

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"... while we flatter ourselves that things remain the same,
they are changing under our very eyes from year to year,
from day to day."

Author: Charlotte Perkins Gilman



After 6 Months of Age

You are now heading into a new developmental stage with your TM puppy that is akin to the early teenage years of the human child. The little dimmer switch that controls many of the facets of the TM character, including the guardian instinct, is starting to turn up a notch or two and many of you may be surprised to learn just how strong your TM's character can be.

The Boys

One of the least obvious signs of maturity is a basic fact of life and, perhaps, has already happened for your male Tibetan Mastiff puppy. Males are, or soon will be, producing sperm. Please don't be fooled by the innocent look on your puppy's face or his antics. These male puppies can and will easily sire a litter if given the opportunity. Before the cold autumn days arrive, make sure to check yard fencing, double gate latches and strengthen any weaknesses that may exist on your property that will enable your male to escape. Your TM does not care that the furry Golden Retriever girl down the street isn't a Tibetan Mastiff. For multiple dog households, be very careful to protect any intact females that may live with you. Watch for signs of your young girl coming into season. Make plans now to board your male or find a safe and secure containment solution.

The Girls

Within the next 3-6 months, intact females will be going through their first fall/winter season and, consequently, their first heat cycle. Girls may start acting a bit wonky or become much more affectionate toward you. They may become "clingy." Like the Tibetan Mastiff male, the females often show a very strong desire to reproduce when their time is upon them. That need (combined with the TMs agility and magical escape artist powers) will amaze you if proper steps

are not taken to ensure your female's safety. Speak to the breeder of your puppy and discuss suitable containment solutions.

Raging Hormones

As happens for young teenagers, raging hormones do rule the day and you may notice definite differences in your Tibetan Mastiff puppy. Physically, young dogs can "break out" with skin conditions. When it comes to temperament, this is a time when both males and females typically become more challenging, more headstrong and independent, more territorial, bark more often and for longer periods of time. Hormonal changes will also signal a **STRESS** period in your dog's life. Your dog's demeanor may change as he may go through a fear period. Noises, car rides and being out and about may intimidate your Tibetan Mastiff. Most dogs will have a sudden change of attitude when it comes to having guests or strangers in "their" homes, "their" yards or approaching "their" cars.

The Owner's Role in Socializing the Tibetan Mastiff On and Off-Property

Regardless of all of these changes it is still the owner's responsibility to socialize your puppy. And if you haven't been paying particular attention, a slight shift in priority might now be given to inviting people into your home. While it is important to do everything you can to ensure that your puppy becomes an exemplary example of the breed OFF-PROPERTY, you can in no way forget how important it is to hold socializing sessions ON-PROPERTY. Your Tibetan Mastiff needs to be introduced to others on his own turf so that he can be taught appropriate reactions/responses.

Off-Property Socialization

Off-property socialization does **NOT** include off-leash sessions!

There's nothing quite as pretty as an early morning walk on the weekend. Leaves softly rustling in the breeze, birds twittering in the treetops, dewdrops of crystal sparkling on the grass, an enticing dirt path inviting you and your dog with promises of relaxing adventure. It's so easy to slip that collar....

As caregivers we seem to want to find a kind of fulfillment in seeing our "dogs be dogs" in natural settings. Admittedly, there may be nothing more satisfying than watching your TM youngster have complete freedom to explore a hiking trail, a deserted sideroad, an unfenced part of your own property or an open field but these pictures of Disney happiness can soon shatter in the real world.

The trouble with the freedom scenario is the predictability of the unpredictable. The problem is that you and your TM are bound to meet up with a lone figure, a team of owner and dog, traffic or wildlife and your TM is going to feel challenged or want to investigate and/or protect. A brief encounter with a stranger may trigger your TM's guardian instincts, or, in turn, he may be attacked by another dog. (And just because you haven't ever seen your TM be anything other than sweet, you can rest assured that your dog is **NOT** going to back down.) It may be that a merry chase after a squirrel or rabbit means your dog is led away from you and lost forever. Perhaps the innocent spying of an unfamiliar animal such as your neighbor's prowling new

kitten can explode into a tragic event. Disasters can occur simply because of the TM's motivation to explore, attack or kill an animal within his reach because he feels the need to defend against the unknown or due to sheer prey drive.

It is irresponsible and reckless to begin the habit of letting your Tibetan Mastiff off-leash in the first place. For those that have begun the practice it is with the intention that "at the first sign that he will not listen" you will begin confining your dog to a collar and leash. This thinking is illogical and flawed. It may very well be that the first time that your TM does not respond to you is the time when he meets the bumper of a car or scares/bites a child. As with any off-leash circumstances, you have no way to intervene with what is unfolding before your eyes and what you thought was a secure situation can pose a dangerous or even life-threatening moment for your dog. While it may not present as pretty a picture, you will easily avoid calamity and heartbreak by a simple tug on the leash.

Off-property socialization sessions do **NOT** include off-leash parks!

While a fun place for many breeds, the average Tibetan Mastiff does not do well in an off-leash park setting. A Sunday romp with his furry little buddies in a fenced-in park all sounds perfect enough until "that moment." When "that moment" comes for your Tibetan Mastiff varies from dog to dog but the results of "that moment" are all the same. Socialization of this type eventually provides an opportunity for your TM to establish his independence, bullying skills and outright dominance because of his territorial instincts. He will challenge or be challenged. He will guard or square off. He may even jump the low park fence, run off or be killed in traffic. To repeat, as with any off-leash circumstances, you have no way to intervene with what is unfolding before your eyes and what you thought was a secure situation can pose a dangerous or even life-threatening moment for your dog.

Dogs Are Not Little People in Fur Coats!!

As seasons blend one into the other, life's routines naturally change for many of us. Humans are typically quite flexible when it comes to turning the pages of the calendar but remind yourself often that the TM is not comfortable with change. Sudden deviations of routine, weather, different work schedules or a variance in family traffic in and out of the house does mark a time when a young TM will feel the need to challenge. Those people employed in a home-based business or employees such as housekeepers may not be viewed as friendly anymore. Daughters who return to school, begin dating and suddenly show up wearing their boyfriend's jacket, friends coming over who wear hats, dark sunglasses or bulky fall/winter clothing may put your TM on high alert. Should you have older children going away to college or university, their sudden return at Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays may be viewed as threatening. Take a little extra time and use sensible strategies of re-introducing family members.

Owners can easily come to terms with the fact that dogs may become guardy over such things as dogfood/bones or possessions but we often don't think ahead to the fact that a dog may also show guardian tendencies when it comes to any regurgitated food, animal holes dug in the yard or even underwear that he's stolen out of your bedroom. While these examples may seem frivolous and silly to you, they are actual problems that escalated into biting episodes that breeders have had to council owners about when young dogs have shown that they are willing to establish their dominance. Despite the fact that we call him man's best friend, we need to remind ourselves that a dog is not a little person in a fur coat. Humans and animals do not perceive the world or communicate in the same ways.

Having the Run of the House and Yard

While cute and cuddly, extremely affectionate and loyal to you and quickly winning your heart, please take a deep breath and call attention to the fact that you have brought a primitive **GUARDian** breed into your home. And whether you have thought about this or not, allowing your puppy complete freedom throughout your home and yard signals to him that you already trust him to have the maturity, intelligence and response-ability to guard "his" territory. Of course that simply just isn't the case. Granting complete access of your household and property to your TM is tantamount to handing over the keys to your house, car and safety deposit box to a 13-year old. Just as children need rules, boundaries and a guiding hand to learn responsibility, Tibetan Mastiffs need an established set of rules, restrictions and an authoritative reassuring hand on the leash to get them through their puppyhood. Take sensible precautions when others enter your home. Do not allow your Tibetan Mastiff to rush the door when visitors come a-calling. Teach him that knocks on the door or a door bell ringing signals a time when he must know his manners. Also do not allow your Tibetan Mastiff to charge at strangers/guests that are coming on your property. Strategies such as crating, putting the puppy safely in another room or having a leash handy to secure your dog is always a good idea. Train for behavior that you want your Tibetan Mastiff to exhibit. Make your TM earn the privilege of being out in company and proceed with a slow introduction of dog and guests. A more relaxed approach will help ease the natural excitement/tension that will build in your dog. Incorporate indoor leash training and verbal commands to help show your puppy what kind of behavior is acceptable. Start out with intervals of minutes so that your TM can make the acquaintance of your guests and earn your praise by his good behavior. Establish that this is YOUR territory and not the Kingdom of Tibetan Mastiff. Because TMs are acutely responsive to the activity going on in your home or out in your yard, **NEVER** allow your Tibetan Mastiff to lie down in doorways, across stairways (inside or outside), or set up to "sleep" in hallways. These strategic areas are your TM's best bet to supervising and controlling the movement of family, guests and/or domestic help in the house. Many TMs will decide that guests may sit and visit in the living room but unannounced, sudden and unaccompanied departures to other parts of the home (such as a quick trip to the bathroom, for example) may trigger your TM's internal security alarm, especially if your guest is forced to step over your dog at the threshold of a room. Keep TMs away when social situations call for the serving of food. A small child that is running around with food in hand or an adult that has a plate of food balanced on a knee may serve to create a competitive and dangerous situation. Instead, plan accordingly and give your puppy intervals of downtime away from the stimulation of loud talking/laughing and unfamiliar movements by strangers. While you don't want your puppy to spend all his time in a crate, in a room or behind fencing when you have guests, your TM also doesn't need to be on display for your callers' entire visit. There has to be a happy balance.

While YOU may gauge your puppy's level of character to be sweet and non-threatening, your Tibetan Mastiff is learning more and more to listen to his own guardian instincts. And no matter how much we just want everyone to "get along and play nice" dogs do not always respond in the ways we would like them to or in ways we can easily and immediately understand. Along with the guidance and experience that your dog's breeder can offer you, it is imperative that you use a combination of common dog sense and intuition when it comes to interpreting situations that caring for a TM may present to you. Before problems arise, strategize to reduce your puppy's need to be on alert, to guard, patrol and protect.