

Dog: Puppy Socialization



What It Is

Socialization is the process by which your puppy learns to be comfortable with all the things in her environment. If this sounds like a big project, it is. Your puppy needs to get used to people of all ages, sizes, and ethnicities; the sights, sounds, smells, and surfaces of many different environments; as well as to dogs and other animals.

Why Puppy Socialization Is Urgent

In the time between your puppy's 3rd and 16th weeks, she is more accepting of new experiences than at any other point in her life. Both good and bad experiences will have a profound and lasting effect on her behavior habits and character as an adult dog. If your puppy isn't well socialized, she is at great risk of developing problems with fear or even aggression in adulthood. By contrast, well-socialized puppies usually develop into relaxed, confident, and enjoyable canine companions.

How to Socialize Your Puppy

- Pack every day of puppyhood with new socialization experiences. It is crucial that those experiences are positive.
- Be mindful that you are guiding and cheerleading your puppy to enjoy new situations. Give her extra yummy treats when she experiences new and potentially frightening things. That way, your puppy is more likely to have increased confidence the next time she has a similar experience.
- Manage every situation carefully to make sure your puppy isn't too scared or traumatized. If she is overwhelmed, take her away from the situation and reintroduce a similar experience or place at lesser intensity.
- Don't ever force your puppy to interact with someone or something if she seems reluctant. Always give her the option to approach at her own pace or put some space between her and the thing scaring her. If she is nervous about meeting a person or child, give them some treats or toys to toss to her a few times.
- Take lots of walks in different neighborhoods. Take walks at night, too, and bring your puppy on elevator rides. Puppy class is a must, as are puppy socials.

What about Vaccinations?

Socialization is your puppy's behavioral vaccination. If you wait until your puppy is fully vaccinated, you will miss the socialization window. You can and should begin socialization as soon as you have your puppy. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Outings. Carry your puppy in a sling, take her on a car ride, or have her with you on a blanket on a bench. Try taking her with you to a playground, children's soccer game, car wash, Home Depot store, department store, flea market, skateboard park, etc. Make sure she meets all types of people and children: In uniforms, using crutches or wheelchairs, with a beard or wearing a hat, carrying boxes, and so on.

Puppy party. Host a puppy get-together in your home with friends who have healthy, fully vaccinated dogs (provided they are social and tolerant with puppies).

Additional information: http://avsabonline.org/uploads/position_statements/puppy_socialization.pdf

For more information call 1.415.554.3030 or visit us online at sfspca.org