

Socialising Your Puppy

Have you ever been told by someone that you need to socialise your puppy but you're not exactly sure what they mean or what you need to socialise your puppy with?

This is a quick, but not complete guide to helping you understand what socialisation is and what you need to consider when working through the socialisation process with your puppy.

What is socialisation?

Puppy socialisation is about exposing a puppy to many sights, sounds, people, objects, surfaces, places etc early on in life, during what is commonly referred to as the "sensitive period", when they are generally more open to taking new experiences in their stride.

During this time puppies are not immune to fear or even trauma, which is why it's so important to do appropriate socialisation. They need to make positive associations with a whole catalogue of sights, sounds, smells, and experiences so that they fall under the heading of "safe" to the puppy.

The bigger the range of pleasant early experiences the more likely they are to learn that "new" doesn't mean "scary" and carry this into later life. As they become older dogs naturally become more suspicious so a dog that is more readily accepting of things is less likely to perceive things as threatening and therefore react fearfully or aggressively towards them.

Create a socialisation plan:

When to socialise your puppy...

Between 3 and 12 weeks old, puppies are most accepting of new experiences.

Between 12 to 18 weeks old the window starts to close and they become much more cautious of anything they haven't yet encountered.

After 18 weeks old the opportunity to easily socialise the puppy ends and each week it will become harder to get the pup to accept and enjoy something that they are initially wary of.

Appropriate and positive socialisation should take place whenever your dog encounters something new - so it is a lifelong process.

What to socialise your puppy with...

Socialising a puppy is a big project. To succeed in adult life it requires exposure to the types of people, animals, places, sounds and experiences that you expect your dog to be comfortable with when they are older.

The lifestyle you have planned for your dog, will help dictate the priority areas for your socialisation plan. For any pet dog though, it's essential to get them used to the common types of people, dogs, sights, sounds and physical handling that will be a part of their daily life.

While it's impossible to expose a puppy to absolutely everything they will ever encounter in life, the more bases that you cover during the peak sensitive period, the more likely the puppy will be able to refer back to their prior experiences and find something reassuringly familiar in a new situation.

Exposure checklist for socialisation... this checklist is to give you some ideas

Exposure to: (add or replace contents to suit your living situation)		Age in weeks:								
		8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
People:	Babies, toddlers, children									
	Drunk people, people with odd gaits, people dancing									
	In-line skaters, cyclists, skateboarders, scooter riders									
	Kids at school grounds, joggers									
	People in uniform, veterinarians									
	People of various ethnicities									
	People with hats, beards, glasses									
	People with parcels, capes, sacks									
	People with umbrellas, helmets, masks									
	People with wheelchairs, crutches or strollers									
	Repair people, delivery people									
	Teenagers, adults, elderly people									
Animals:	Cattle, horses, sheep, deer or chickens									
	Other pets (cats, rabbits, birds, guinea pigs)									
	Other puppies, friendly adult dogs									
Locations:	Elevators, automatic doors									
	Airport, train station, ferry terminal									
	Veterinary hospitals and clinics									
	Drive-thru's, car washes, tunnels									
	Beaches, parks, rivers, bush, farmland									
Sounds:	Crowds, clapping, cheering									
	Lawn mowers, weed eaters, chain saws									
	People yelling, singing, babies crying									
	Traffic, busses, trains, motorcycles, airplanes, sirens, boats									
	Appliances that beep, washers, microwaves, dryers etc									
	Fireworks, sporting events, fairs									
	Vacuum cleaners, hair dryers, coffee grinders, blenders									
	Construction and machinery noises, nail guns									
Surfaces:	Gravel, asphalt, mud, sand, stones, grass, astroturf									
	Manhole covers, grates									
	Shiny floors, tiles, icy streets									
	Swinging bridges, balconies, stairs									
Weather:	Walks after dark, in bad weather									
	Wind, rain, thunder, snow, hail									
Handling:	Touching ears, paws, tummy, tail, mouth, eyes, back etc									
Other (add your own):										

How to socialise your puppy...

Your puppy needs to have either positive or neutral experiences so you need to make sure that the situation is not overwhelming for them, and that they become more comfortable - not more worried - each time you expose them to something.

As an example, you may plan a puppy party where a group of people will gather to help you socialise your puppy right at your home. But some puppies can be overwhelmed by meeting a bunch of strangers all at once. Even though your intentions are good, if your puppy is cowering in the corner at their own party, then they not learning anything good about a bunch of new strangers!

So you need to keep a close eye on your puppy's reactions are to whatever you exposing them to so that you can tone things down if your pup seems at all frightened.

Always include in socialisation experiences praise, petting, a fun game or a special treat.

Socialising an unvaccinated puppy...

The experts now agree that the risk of a puppy being given up or later euthanized for behaviour problems is so huge that young puppies must be socialised before they are done with their vaccinations.

The recommendation is to socialise puppies as safely as possible by exposing the puppy to people, places and other animals while not taking unnecessary risks. Well-run puppy classes - indoor classes where all the puppies have been vaccinated at least once - are a safe and smart way to socialise a puppy.

Other options for a puppy who is not yet fully vaccinated include:

Driving to a busy place or shopping centre to hang out with your pup on a mat at the entrance. Strangers will flock to you because they want to pet your puppy and they'll willingly feed them the treats that you've brought with you. Remember not to overwhelm the puppy!

Hosting a puppy party, inviting friends and family over, to play some music, feed your puppy treats, play with the pup and pass them around.

Bringing your puppy to pick up the kids from school. Supervise the children interacting with the puppy to make sure the pup's not frightened by them and they're being gentle.

Taking your pup on car rides through different neighbourhoods, drive-thru's, car washes, and out into the country where they'll see and smell a variety of farm animals.

Arranging play sessions with other puppies and adult dogs who you know are healthy and friendly.

While some dogs are born with genetic predispositions that can make this difficult or impossible, most dogs are very impressionable when young and can learn to take everything in stride. Socialising your puppy gives them the greatest chance possible to develop into a dog who's comfortable in his environment and a joy to be with.

Courtesy of your instructors at

Central Allbreeds Dog Training School

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