



WHY IS SOCIALIZATION IMPORTANT FOR PUPPIES?

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Raising a puppy in a social/environmental vacuum is more likely to cause behavioural problems in an adult dog than is abuse or being attacked. Socialization is more complicated than simply exposing a puppy to other dogs. Poorly executed attempts at socialization can be as harmful as not trying at all. Below are important points to consider when bringing a new puppy into your home.

When to Start?

The critical window of socialization ends around 16 weeks of age, and your pup must have many good and varied experiences within that timeframe. Every day should include safe and novel experiences. The first day home your new pup will be exposed to daily activities – this might include the sounds of pots and pans, the windshield wipers in the car, and voices and movement around her. Once she is settled, she'll be ready for other new experiences. Sign up for a puppy socialization class that starts approximately 7–10 days after her first set of vaccinations. (Read this open letter from veterinarian R.K. Anderson regarding common concerns about vaccinations and socialization: <http://www.diamondsintheruff.com/RKanderson.html>)

Positive Experiences Only

It is important that every new exposure is strictly GOOD. If you bring your puppy to a dog park and she is picked on by older dogs, she is going to learn that dogs can be frightening. If you introduce your puppy to children who poke and prod her, she will learn that children cause discomfort. For a puppy to grow into a comfortable, confident, and resilient adult dog, her formative years should be filled with great experiences.

Counter-conditioning Makes Everything Better

Counter-conditioning involves pairing something bad with something good in such a way that the bad thing predicts that the good thing is about to happen. Your dog will associate his emotional response to the good thing with the unpleasant thing, causing it to be less unpleasant. (To learn more about counter-conditioning, visit http://drsophiayin.com/resources/video_full/counter-conditioning_a_dog_to_blowing_in_face.) A puppy should be exposed to new experiences incrementally. If your puppy is afraid of a busy street, you could stand far enough away from the street so your pup isn't afraid and feed him a bit of cheese every time a car goes by. Gradually decrease the distance from the corner as your pup becomes comfortable through the association of the car with cheese. This is also a great proactive approach for pups who do not appear concerned at all. If they learn that every new experience is followed by something tasty, they will remain convinced that the world is a great place to be. Seek help from a qualified positive-reinforcement trainer if you are experiencing difficulties with a fearful/reactive puppy.

More than Just Dogs and People

Socialization with animals and people is very important, but so is socialization with environmental

stimuli. This means you should help your pup make positive associations with noises, objects, movements, and footings, such as fireworks, roaring trucks, fountains, umbrellas, bikers, skateboarders, linoleum, sewer grates, open stairs – the list goes on!

Variety Is the Spice of Life

A puppy who grows up with only greyhounds may be frightened by a bulldog. A pup raised with a white family and socialized only with their white friends may be apprehensive of an Asian person. A pup who has only had contact with the other family dog will not be comfortable with other dogs. A dog raised with no contact with children cannot be expected to happily accept a new baby or a child reaching for him on the street. Being introduced to a large variety of people, dogs, other animals, and environmental stimuli is a very important aspect of socializing a puppy.

Puppies Are Not Blank Slates

Despite popular conceptions, puppies are not “blank slates.” Genetics greatly influence how a pup makes sense of the world around her, and lineage has a significant impact on her ease of sociability and resilience to stress. A pup's prenatal environment will also impact her resistance to stress. Many experiments have shown that the offspring of a mother who is stressed throughout her pregnancy will be less resilient than the offspring of a mother who was not stressed. A pup's postnatal environment – even before her ears and eyes open – will also impact her behaviour. Good breeders will safely expose their litter to as many experiences as possible during the two months or so that the pups are in their care.

Play It Safe!

Properly executed socialization not only means keeping your pup mentally/emotionally safe by having great experiences with a large variety

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