

Socializing Your Puppy

Set your little one up for success!

Why does my puppy need socialization?

- At the young age of three weeks, your puppy entered a very important stage in his or her life: their sensitive period for socialization. This is the time when sociability outweighs fear and your puppy is primed for learning that other animals, people, and environments, and body signals are safe. This period runs from about 3 weeks of age to about 12 weeks of age and is the most important socialization period in your dog's life. Without adequate socialization during this time, dogs tend to be fearful of unknown people, dogs, experiences, objects, and sounds. This fear can lead to behavioral problems such as aggression and anxiety later in life. To prevent these problems from occurring, it is recommended that all puppies receive adequate socialization during this important time.



Won't exposing my puppy to many things also expose them to many diseases?

- It is important to note that improper socialization leads to behavior problems, and behavior problems are the number one cause for relinquishment to shelters. In addition, behavioral issues are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age. Even though a puppy's immune system is still developing during their socialization period, the combination of vaccines, maternal immunity, and appropriate care makes the risk of contracting infectious disease less concerning than the risk of death due to a behavior problem. It is important to note that risk of contracting infectious disease is still present and can be reduced by socializing your puppy safely. This includes exposing your puppy to properly vaccinated and well cared for animals and keeping them away from unvaccinated dogs and places where unvaccinated dogs are frequent visitors (dog parks and pet stores).

I understand socialization is important, but how is it done?



- The goal is to give your puppy as many *positive* experiences to new things, people, and environments as you can. You can help to ensure that the experiences are positive by giving treats during the exposure. If the puppy seems at all fearful or cautious during the experience, more delicious treats can be given or the distance needs to be increased. If the puppy still seems fearful, it is important to remove them from the situation. *Your puppy needs to love the experience, not to be afraid.* If a puppy socialization class is available, this is a great resource to socialize your puppy to other dogs. In addition, the class will usually work with your puppy to socialize them to other people, objects, and experiences as well.
- Here are a few examples of goals for socialization
 - o Other animals- other sizes and breeds of dogs, cats, other animals in your home (it is important to make sure the other animal is healthy, vaccinated, and is safe around your puppy!)
 - o People- Tall and short people, men and women, adults and children, delivery men, service men
 - o Environment- inside and outside, different houses, the veterinary clinic and lobby
 - o Objects- nail trimmers, grooming clippers, wheelchairs, strollers, vacuums, and the dryer
 - o Experiences- getting their feet and ears touched, car travel, going through a drive through, and a veterinary exam.
- The reverse side of this handout contains a checklist for you to keep track of what you have socialized your puppy to, feel free to add your own items to the list! A good goal is to check off at least one item per day.

Socialization Checklist

Check off each item when your puppy is exposed while eating a food treat and does not appear to be fearful. The goal is for your puppy to be calm, relaxed, explore the object or environment, be playful, and be focused on food. Ideally, your puppy would eventually become calm, relaxed and playful even without food. The following are examples, please feel free to add as many items as you would like, the more the better!

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Big dog | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Little dog | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Broom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Cat (if the cat isn't fearful) | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Vacuum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Squirrels | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing the toenail trimmers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Tall man | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Someone wearing a hat | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Noise of washer/dryer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Rollerblader/Skateboarder | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Feet touched |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Infant | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ears touched |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Toddler | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary exam |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Person in wheelchair | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Drive through |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Person with cane/walker | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Elevator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Mailman | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Slippery floor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Jogger | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Reaching for the collar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinarian | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Mud/wet grass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Deliveryman with packages | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Rain/snow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Biker | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Person at the front door | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Loud stranger | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly person sitting | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Stroller | |

Sources:

Yin S. 2011. *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days: How to Start Your Puppy Off Right*. Davis (CA): Cattledog, p. 127-140, 151-6.
AVSAB Position statement on puppy socialization, available at <http://www.avsabonline.org/>
The Behavior Clinic: Handout on puppy socialization and social butterfly checklist