



Socialising Your Puppy

Socialisation and puppy training are of utmost importance, as puppyhood is the most important and critical time in your dog's development. What you do and don't do right now will affect your dog's behaviour forever.

- **Puppy Socialisation**

Socialisation is the process during which the dog develops relationships with other living beings in its environment. While socialisation takes place throughout the first year of life, the first 2 to 16 weeks seem to be the most important time for young puppies to learn about their environment.

A properly socialised dog is well adjusted and makes a good companion. It is neither frightened by nor aggressive toward anyone or anything that it would normally meet in day to day living. Un-socialised dogs are untrustworthy and an unwanted liability. They often become fear biters and fight with other dogs. Un-socialised dogs cannot adapt to new situations and a simple routine visit to the Veterinarian is a nightmare not only for the dog itself, but for everyone involved. Don't let this happen to you and your dog. Start socialising your new puppy NOW! The socialisation period lasts up to about 12 – 16 weeks (3-4 months) of age. However, at 12 – 16 weeks, the puppy must continue socialisation to refine its social skills.

Socialisation most easily occurs before the puppy is 3 months old. Any later than that and it becomes an excruciatingly difficult and time consuming process that very few owners have the time, energy, money or patience to cope with.

- **Socialisation Do's**

Make sure that each of the following events are pleasant and non-threatening. If your puppy's first experience with something is painful and frightening, you will be defeating your purpose. In fact, you will be creating a phobia that will often last a lifetime. It's better to go too slow and assure your puppy is not frightened or injured than to rush and force your pup to meet new things and people.

- Invite friends over to meet your pup. Include men, women, babies/children (always under supervision), elderly, different ethnic backgrounds, etc.
- Invite friendly, healthy, vaccinated dogs, puppies and even cats to your home to meet and play with your new puppy. Take your puppy to the homes of these pets, preferably with dog friendly cats.

- Take your pup to shopping centres, parks, school playgrounds, etc; places where there are crowds of people and plenty of activity. (Do not take your pup to public places until they are fully vaccinated)
- Take your puppy for short, frequent rides in the car. Stop the car and let your puppy watch the world go by through the window.
- Introduce your puppy to umbrellas, bags, boxes, the vacuum cleaner, etc. Encourage your puppy to explore and investigate its environment.
- Get your puppy accustomed to seeing different and unfamiliar objects by creating your own – eg. Set a chair upside down, lay the trash can (empty) on its side, set up the ironing board right side up one day, upside down the next day.
- Introduce your puppy to new and various sounds. Loud, obnoxious sounds should be introduced from a distance and gradually brought closer.
- Accustom your puppy to being brushed, bathed, inspected, having its nails clipped, teeth and ears cleaned and all the routines of grooming and physical examination.
- Introduce your puppy to its own collar and leash. Introduce anything and everything you want your puppy to be comfortable with around.
- **Socialisation Dont's**
 - Do not put your puppy on the ground where unknown animals have access. This is where your puppy can pick up diseases. Wait until your puppy's shots are completed. Do not let your pup socialise with dogs that appear sick or dogs that you don't know, that may not be vaccinated.
 - Do not reward fearful behaviour. In a well meaning attempt to soothe, encourage or calm the puppy when it appears frightened, we often unintentionally reward the behaviour. It's normal for the puppy to show some signs of apprehension when confronting anything new and different.
 - Do not allow the experience to be harmful, painful or excessively frightening. This can cause lifetime phobias in you dog.
 - Do not force or rush your puppy. Let your puppy take things at its own pace. Your job is to provide the opportunity.
 - Do not do too much at one time. Young puppies need a lot of sleep and tire quickly. It is much more productive to have frequent and very brief exposures than occasional prolonged exposures.
 - **DO NOT WAIT!!** Every day that goes by is an opportunity of a lifetime that is lost forever. You can never get these days back. If socialisation does not happen now, it never will.

- **Puppies at Play**

Play is very important for puppies – as well as a lot of fun to watch. The Puppy Preschool classes devote a lot of time to play. Through play, your pup will learn how to socialise and communicate with other dogs. This is especially important between 4 and 12 weeks of age. Your puppy will learn acceptable behaviour around other dogs of all breeds, sizes and ages. Some puppies play very roughly and make lots of noise. The play sessions are designed to be fun for you and for your puppy, so enjoy!

- **Children and Puppies**

It is important to be always mindful of the potential danger of young children with dogs. Train your children how to behave around puppies and how to handle your pup.

- Avoid excessive amounts of rough, crazy play.
- If your puppy is jumping up on your children, teach them to walk away and ignore the pup, avoiding eye and physical contact.
- Train children to greet the puppy with a food treat at the puppy's level, to help prevent jumping up

ALWAYS supervise any contact between very young children and dogs. NEVER leave toddlers or young children (under 12) unsupervised with a dog. They can both behave unpredictably.

- **Introducing Your Puppy to Novel Items**

We want to eliminate any fears that your pup may have of strange objects and noises, such as vacuum cleaners and thunderstorms. It is best to do this now while it's a puppy. It's important to expose your puppy to various items and noises in a positive, non-threatening way. If something traumatic happens at this age, it could develop a fear that is hard to eliminate later.

Start by introducing a noise at low volume or an object from a distance. Do this while your puppy is doing something it enjoys such as eating or playing and keep rewarding. Then gradually move the item closer or make the noise louder, and reward your puppy for not being afraid. Take it slowly. If your pup shows any sign of fear, terminate the activity immediately. You'll then need to take a backward step. Try again later with the noise at a much lower intensity or the object further away. Puppies are most fearful at around 8 – 10 weeks of age, so be especially careful doing exercises like this during this time.

Note: **Never** cuddle or protect your puppy from the noises and objects that it fears. This will reinforce its fears and could make it worse next time.

- **Introducing Your Puppy to Adult Dogs and Cats**

Introducing your puppy to adult dogs teaches it how to interact with bigger and older dogs. This will reduce any problems with fear, aggression or other unsociable behaviour later on. Introducing your puppy to a cat is also important. This will reduce the tendency that some dogs have to be aggressive to cats later on.

- **The Socialisation List**

Your puppy should be socialised to as many things as possible on the attached list by the time it is 16 weeks old. Use this list to give you ideas of different situations, sights, sounds, environments, smells, etc. that you need to expose your new puppy to. Check off each item as it has been completed.