

Socializing Your New Dog or Puppy

Congratulations on your new family member! Bringing home a new dog or puppy is an exciting time, filled with fun and joy. But did you also know this is a time of great opportunity? This is the time when we will create our bond with our new friend, and the time during which he will learn his place in the household. Let's talk about how to make this time a success that ensures we start off on the right paw.

First, let's talk about what socialization is and what it includes. Socialization is simply ensuring your dog or puppy gets lots of exposure to people, places and life events so he's comfortable in all situations. Socializing your dog or puppy is the single most crucial thing you can do to ensure a well adjusted, stable, safe, balanced companion. It's also the most often overlooked part of raising or having a dog. Early socialization is the best way to go, but even if you've adopted an older dog, socialization is still important and effective. Socialization and training is every bit as critical to a dog's development and well being as good food, clean water, exercise, and veterinary care, and as your dog's guardian and caretaker, it's your responsibility to ensure his social development. It's also the key to avoiding problem behaviors such as fear, aggression, barking, destruction, separation anxiety and other unwanted behaviors that are not only unpleasant for owners, but significantly diminish the dog's quality of life. Socialization need not be a chore – it can be just as fun for you as it is for your dog or puppy!

Puppies

Between the ages of six to twelve weeks (three months), your puppy is in what is known as the *critical development period*. He comes into the world hard wired to learn and accept certain things during this time. After that, the acceptance window closes a bit, though socialization can still occur, and indeed, occurs throughout his lifetime. However, the critical development period in puppies is our opportunity to 'bomb proof' our dog. The more he experiences during this time, the better adjusted he will be. It is absolutely imperative that his experiences and exposure be happy and enjoyable.

Puppy Safety First! Before embarking on socialization exercises, be sure your puppy is in good health and is current on vaccines. Puppies do not have mature immune systems and are highly susceptible to illness and disease. Keep puppy's health in mind when visiting people or places frequented by other dogs.

Experience and exposure should include:

- 🐾 People, people, and more people. Men, women, children, people of different ethnic backgrounds, people with handicaps, people in hats, sunglasses, etc. People outside the home, people in the street, people that visit your home. Variety is the key. Take your puppy on outings or walks that will expose him to as many people as possible, and invite people to give your puppy treats and affection. Monitor your puppy to ensure he's not too stressed or overwhelmed, be sensitive to his personal pace and space. We want puppy to grow up to see people as good and welcome/enjoy their touch and company.
- 🐾 Dogs, dogs, and more dogs. Same as with people, all kinds, all varieties. Be careful with this ... make sure puppy meets dogs you know are friendly and will be gentle with puppy. Give puppy treats, praise and rewards when around other dogs and allow him lots of play time. As with people, monitor puppy closely to ensure he's not overwhelmed.
- 🐾 The Vet and Groomer. Throughout puppy's life, your vet will be an integral part of your dog's care. It's important your dog not fear the vet or groomer and be comfortable being handled and examined. Take puppy to the vet/groomer for fun outings. While at the office, have the staff and visiting clients give



puppy treats, petting and affection. Let puppy explore on lead. This is also a great place to meet people and dogs, just watch out for dogs that may be ill or unfriendly – your vet or groomer and their staff should help protect you in this area, warning you if a sick dog is coming in or has been present. As puppy learns to enjoy his visits, practice exam/grooming handling that will acclimate puppy to having his teeth and ears examined or cleaned and his body touched. Give lots of treats and praise to make this enjoyable. NOTE: Your vet, groomer and their staff should be a willing participant in this important part of your puppy's development. Most vets and groomers encourage and welcome these social visits at no charge. In some cases, they may ask that you call ahead or come during certain times, or possibly pay for an office visit, which is reasonable. However, if you're vet or groomer and their staff is unwilling to accommodate socialization and be positive participants, you may consider choosing a different caregiver. Be respectful and courteous during your visits, and be sure to thank the office and staff for their assistance. Often, a framed photo of the staff interacting with your puppy is a wonderful thank you the office will appreciate.

- 🐾 Handling. Just as with the vet, practice handling puppy's feet, ears, and other body parts. Simulate grooming, dental care, toenail trimming and medical exams. Pair these activities with petting, treats and praise so puppy learns to welcome handling. Reward puppy for being still and patient while being handled, looked at, or touched. This includes bathing. If puppy will be bathed in the tub, let puppy play there while eating a favorite meal or enjoying a favorite toy. Give lots of treats and praise. Puppy may appreciate a towel or mat to eliminate slippery footing. Make the tub a happy place and progress to running the water and playing water games, all while praising and rewarding puppy. If puppy will be bathed elsewhere, such as outdoors with a hose, use the same methods to make it fun.
- 🐾 Eye contact. Dogs interpret direct eye contact as a challenge. Teaching puppy not to fret over and accept eye contact is important. Play games such as 'watch me' to desensitize puppy to eye contact and reward puppy for making and maintaining eye contact with praise and treats.
- 🐾 The car. Sooner or later, puppy will need to go for a ride. Start by letting puppy spend time in the car while eating his favorite meal or playing with his favorite toy. As puppy becomes comfortable, introduce the harness, crate or tether system that will keep both you and puppy safe while he rides. Progress to treats, games and praise while the car is running in the driveway, then move up to short trips, maybe to a place puppy loves, such as to visit his doggy buddy down the street. As with everything, make the car a fun place to be and car rides a fun thing to do. Practice in several different cars/models. Note: Many puppies are prone to car sickness, which often resolves on it's own between six and twelve months of age. Elevating puppy so he can see out the window will help reduce nausea. If your puppy suffers from carsickness, speak to your vet about anti- nausea medication to ensure carsickness does not condition puppy to dislike the car.

Auto Safety: NEVER leave dogs unattended in a vehicle in hot or cold weather. Dogs should always be restrained so they do not pose a danger to themselves or the driver. While a partially open window for fresh air is fine, never allow dogs to ride with their heads out the window and make sure they can't jump out, and never allow dogs to ride in open truck beds. For small dogs and puppies, provide a ramp or step to avoid injury from jumping in and out of the car on entry/exit.

- 🐾 The Boarding Kennel. Many people forget or overlook this important member of your puppy care team. Even if you have a friends and family support network that would help care for puppy in your absence, it's a good idea to locate and visit a boarding kennel you're comfortable with and know will take good care of your dog. No matter how good your support network is, life has a way of throwing curveballs. What if you became sick or had to leave town for an emergency and no one could care for puppy? Or if you decide to go on vacation – along with your family and friend support network? It's at that moment you'll be glad you took the time to locate and acclimate puppy to a good boarding facility. When choosing, try to select a facility that offers after hours emergency drop off. It's not a bad idea to have puppy go for a



couple 'sleepovers' to ensure he's comfortable and ready if it's needed later. When puppy goes to boarding, be sure to leave him a scent item with your scent on it, along with his familiar toys.

- ❧ The Trainer and Basic Obedience. Paws down, basic obedience class is one of the most important components of your puppy socialization program. Even if you've been through class with another dog or puppy, even if you've successfully trained dogs in the past, there's no replacement for the benefits of a basic obedience class. A group class setting has the built in benefits of allowing your dog to meet people, other dogs, learn to enjoy car travel and practice obedience skills under mild distraction with the guidance of a professional trainer. If you've opted for private in home obedience instruction, training will incorporate social exercises that will include other dogs and people, as well as a social outing to teach you how to accomplish outings on your own. In addition to teaching basic obedience skills that are crucial to puppy's development, your trainer can also help troubleshoot problems before they develop and help tailor your socialization plan to best benefit your puppy.
- ❧ Environmental Factors. Wow, what a world we live in! Cars, trains, planes, sirens, thunder, vacuums, televisions, radios, mail and delivery personnel, rain, snow All this stuff for puppy to learn. Take a moment and think about all the things that puppy may encounter, either every day in his environment, or occasionally throughout his life. Make sure puppy gets lots of fun, positive exposure to these things. Play a siren on your computer or TV for him, if it's summer, run the snow blower or model your heavy winter coat and hat for him, if it's winter, introduce him to the lawnmower. Give puppy treats and praise or play fun and distracting games during thunderstorms so he learns not to be frightened.

As you can see, there's a lot for puppy to learn and experience. The key is to make sure that each experience is enjoyable and pleasant. As you socialize puppy, be sensitive to his personal pace and make sure he isn't overwhelmed or forced to remain in situations he finds uncomfortable. If puppy does show signs of being uncomfortable or frightened, simply remove him from the situation quietly without making a fuss. Stroking, cuddling, or cooing over a nervous, scared or uncomfortable puppy in an attempt to soothe him can actually reinforce his fear. Whatever you do, never reprimand or correct a puppy for being nervous in a new situation. Simply slow things down and work harder to make it pleasant for him. If puppy seems to have a specific or generalized fear that affects his ability to function well in the world, seek professional training assistance before things escalate. The longer a fear, dislike or problem behavior continues, the more difficult it is to correct.

While it's important to take advantage of the critical development period, always remember that socialization is a lifetime endeavor. Repeating socialization exercises occasionally as your dog ages will ensure he remains comfortable and balanced in all situations throughout his life.

Old Dogs, New Tricks – Socializing Your Adult Adoptee

If your new family member is an adult dog, he still needs socialization. Even though he may have passed the critical development period, socialization can still be accomplished. Adult dogs should receive the same socialization as puppies, however you may need to go at a slower pace and work a bit harder to create positive associations with new things. It's also a good way to identify things your new dog may find challenging, such as going to the vet or groomer. If your adult dog was not well socialized as a pup and is experiencing difficulty in particular situations, it's best to enlist the help of a professional trainer to ensure the problem is correctly identified and treated in a safe, humane manner that will best benefit your dog. Accomplishing the socialization exercises and attending basic obedience class is also a great way to establish the bond with your new adult pal.

When introducing adult dogs or puppies to a home with dogs already in residence or while on outings, there are several things that can help the introductions go smoothly. Some tips for success:

- ❧ Before bringing the new dog or puppy into the home, rub each dog down with a hand towel, concentrating on the rump and rear where the scent glands are located. Exchange the towels between



the dogs so they can experience one another's scent prior to meeting. Offer treats and praise to create a positive association with the other dog's scent.

- ❧ Before meeting, spray each dog, as well as yourself, with a common scent, such as Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) or perhaps a waterless shampoo so everybody smells alike.
- ❧ Arrange the first meeting on neutral territory, such as a park or parking lot. Some people will simply use the sidewalk in front of their house or perhaps the neighbor's yard, which is fine as long as none of the dogs would perceive that area as their territory.
- ❧ Create a 'puppy free zone' for older dogs where they can take a break from boisterous youngsters. Take care that this space does not isolate the older dogs.
- ❧ Protect puppy or small dogs from over excited play, excessive correction, or rough play from older, larger dogs.
- ❧ Use a technique known as *parallel walking*. Parallel walking is just what it sounds like, walk the dogs together side by side, allowing them to see and smell each other before getting close enough to touch. Keep the dogs moving, and as they relax, stop to have the dogs perform a sit or take a treat. Be careful not to use food with the dogs too close to each other, as competition could result. As the dogs become comfortable and relaxed, move closer together, eventually allowing them to sniff and greet. If you are uncertain about conducting this exercise or introductions on your own, a Canid trainer would be happy to assist.
- ❧ Feed the dogs together but at a distance from each other and restrict toy distribution to avoid resource guarding scuffles.
- ❧ If brief separations are needed to allow the dogs time to acclimate, separate the new dog, allowing the current residents their usual spaces and places.
- ❧ Exercise your dog or puppy moderately prior to meeting others or outings to prevent overexcitement from unspent energy, but avoid overtiring your dog to the point of wanting to rest or becoming cranky.
- ❧ When meeting unfamiliar dogs, avoid a tight leash and head on confrontation. If possible, approach the other dog as if walking past, allowing the dogs the natural inclination to circle one another. Limit puppy interactions to dogs you know are vaccinated and healthy.
- ❧ Praise and reward all friendly interaction and play!

Socializing Social Etiquette

Where would we be in talking about socialization without discussing social etiquette for us humans? It's important to be a good citizen and guest when socializing your dog. Some basic etiquette includes:

- ❧ Always have your dog or puppy on leash and/or under control; supervise your dog or puppy at all times.
- ❧ Carry clean up materials and tidy up after your dog if he should potty while out – no matter where it happens.



- 🐾 Before approaching people or other dogs, ask the person or dog owner if they'd like interaction and if it's alright if you approach, and if the dog you're approaching is friendly; do not allow your dog to be a pest, nuisance or intimidate others – some people are frightened of dogs, and even dog lovers don't appreciate sudden confrontations with an unknown dog; do not permit your dog to jump on or paw others.
- 🐾 Always ask a parent's permission before allowing their child to pet or interact with your dog or puppy.
- 🐾 If you're inviting people to offer treats or pet your dog or puppy, carry some disposable hand wipes so folks can freshen up when done, as well as a bag to collect the used wipes.
- 🐾 Call ahead to vets, groomers, etc., before showing up with your dog and conduct your visit so as not to disrupt their business; be polite and respectful to their other clients.
- 🐾 On outings and visits, don't overstay your welcome and remove your dog if he becomes unruly. Refrain from allowing your dog to pick up merchandise or other items during outings unless you intend to purchase it as his reward.
- 🐾 Make sure your dog is clean and groomed. Everyone appreciates a primped pooch!
- 🐾 Understand and respect that not all visitors to your home wish to interact with your dog or puppy.
- 🐾 Be sure to thank everyone for their help and cooperation!

Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support. From the moment you bring your new dog or puppy home, you become his advocate - his defender and protector. During socialization and throughout his life, you must act as advocate for your dog and ensure his safety, comfort and well being in all situations.

During the socialization process, your dog will visit many places and meet many new people and dogs. Be ready for anything, and be ready to defend and act as advocate for your dog. Some people may want to hold or even walk your dog, others will offer all sorts of advice and offer to demonstrate training or disciplinary techniques. Some may interact inappropriately, sometimes deliberately, sometimes unintentionally. (Small children are often rough or pet/pat too hard.) You know your dog better than anyone. Watch for signs that he is becoming stressed, overwhelmed or not enjoying being handled/treated a certain way and intervene on his behalf. Never let anyone walk away with your dog or give treats/food that you have not provided. If someone wants to show you a technique of some sort, ask they describe it first to ensure it won't be harmful to your dog.

Keep an eye on your environment to head off trouble ... the two year old that just escaped his parent's car and is headed your way, the teenager with the cheeseburger and a generous look in his eye, the kindly grandmother offering a chocolate. When intervening and advocating for your dog, be polite but firm. For example, simply explain your dog is uncomfortable with being patted on the head, ask they pet under his chin. Sometimes a little white lie will help, such as explaining your dog has food allergies or a sensitive stomach and can only eat what you provide. If all else fails, remove your dog from the situation.

But what about the professionals? The vets, groomers, trainers, dog walkers, boarding kennels? If you would like your dog handled or managed in a certain way, politely explain your expectations or describe specific handling/care instructions. As long as your requests are reasonable and humane, true professionals should make every effort to accommodate your wishes. If not, you may wish to seek another professional that shares your philosophies or is at least willing to act in accordance with your wishes.



Dog Parks

Ah, the dog park. In our mind, we picture a sunny summer day with dogs frolicking over manicured lawns of lush green grass, shiny coats gleaming in the sun, pink tongues lolling, sparkling white teeth flashing in happy smiles, and tails wagging in the gentle breeze as dogs of all breeds chase balls, catch Frisbees and play together in a picture of perfect health and harmony. Loving dog owners stand and chat happily, sipping lemonade and sharing stories about the cute things their dogs have done, complimenting each other on how attractive and nice their dogs are. The freshly whitewashed gate and fence create the perfect backdrop for this idyllic scene.

The reality is a bit different. The dogs have worn away or killed all the grass and you arrive at a sea of mud and whatever else dogs leave on the ground. When you finally wrestle open the rusted chain link gate, you mentally calculate the date of your last tetanus shot. As another dog approaches to play with your precious girl Fifi, you wonder about what caused his fur to fall out in patches like that. Thank heavens his owner intervenes by running over and screaming, "Patches! Get back! That dog will bite you! Control your dog, lady!" You move further into the swampy park, careful to avoid the discarded trash and broken bottles, looking for a place to frolick. Deciding on the center near the picnic table to avoid the dog fight taking place in the corner, you see the resident self-appointed dog expert headed your way. As the dog expert performs hand signals worthy of an aircraft carrier landing deck and diagnoses the dominance anxiety disorders in your dog, you hesitantly toss your Frisbee, hoping you can find it later in the mud. Not to worry, it's caught in midair - not by your dog, but by the owner of the growling Rottweiler who smoothes back his pompadour and sidles over to offer you a beer. The expert dashes off to aid a poodle in need of a pack leader, promising to be right back to show you some championship agility moves. The Rottweiler owner adjusts his gold chains and invites you to join him at the picnic table, but you decline as you don't want to disturb the sleeping wino. You decide the dog park isn't for you, so you pry the amorous Chihuahua off Fifi's leg and make your departure.

Okay, not all dog parks are that bad. Some are very nice, with friendly dogs and pleasant people who are courteous and responsible. However, unless you're using a members only park that requires health and temperament screening, you open yourself and your dog to certain risks. While dog parks can provide a good place to socialize and practice off lead skills, you can't be certain of the temperament and health of the other dogs frequenting the park. Use good judgment and discretion when choosing or visiting a dog park.

For all outings with your dog, whether to a dog park or other location, always bring your own water source for your dog and be on the look out for trash or debris that could injure or poison your dog. Supervise your dog carefully to ensure his safety. It's also a great idea to take a first aid class and carry a first aid kit for emergencies. Canid offers Red Cross Pet First Aid and CPR classes for your dog which includes a fanny pack first aid kit that's perfect for in the car or outings.

An Ounce of Prevention

As you've figured out by now, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It's much better to take the time to socialize your new dog or puppy than to correct problem behaviors that result from a lack of socialization. Remember to make all exercises, events, introductions and outings happy, fun experiences for your dog. The time invested now will pay off in a happy, balanced, well adjusted companion and best friend for many years to come.

Puppy and New Dog Management Summary

- 🐾 May require more work in the short term to achieve long term results
- 🐾 Clearly define family member roles, responsibilities and expectations
- 🐾 Success will depend on commitment and ability to achieve/accomplish consistent behavior
- 🐾 Supervision and consistency are the keys to success.



Managing Puppy

- 🐾 Place the crate(s) someplace where Puppy is included. Avoid excited rushing to accommodate Puppy's requests for out, wait for a moment of quiet so she understands that calm behavior = out of crate.
- 🐾 Make sure Puppy is taken out frequently on lead to potty. Pick and Stick – pick a consistent potty spot, give the cue 'go potty' at the spot, then stick there until Puppy goes. Don't allow Puppy to roam or play off leash until she potties. Praise and reward successful eliminations. If Puppy doesn't go, crate for a bit and try again until you get the behavior so you can praise. Interrupt accidents only while they're happening and take Puppy outside – if you find that Puppy had an accident, clean it up and vow to supervise more closely. Once Puppy gets the hang of things, you can consider switching to a potty tether or unsupervised release into a fenced yard.
- 🐾 Supervise and restrict access/movement. Tether Puppy to hip or furniture, then offer appropriate diversions. Take Puppy into rooms with you and shut the door. Use baby gates to expand Puppy's environment while still limiting access.
- 🐾 Welcome to teething age – four to seven months. Have an appropriate chew available at all times. Puppies can't eat couches AND a chewie at the same time.
- 🐾 Basic obedience – It's not enough to tell Puppy what not to do. Rather, we need to tell Puppy what to do instead. This is called 'interrupt and replace' or training an incompatible behavior. The Name Game is your best friend in this department. Interrupt inappropriate or unwanted behaviors and replace with an acceptable activity. Remember to 'bust' Puppy doing good things, too, and reinforce with praise and rewards.
- 🐾 Set up for success. For example, if there are five chew toys and no shoes on the floor to choose from, how many pairs of shoes will be chewed up?
- 🐾 Make sure Puppy is getting appropriate exercise. A tired puppy is a good puppy. Exercise can be walks, playing ball, etc.
- 🐾 Divide and conquer. Instead of tackling all the issues at the same time, prioritize and focus your energies on the issues with the most impact.

Remember

- 🐾 Dogs need to be interrupted/corrected or praised/rewarded while the behavior is happening, not after.
- 🐾 Physical and verbal attention is a reward for a dog – now you're playing, barking, etc., too.
- 🐾 Violence begets violence, movement begets movement, excitement begets excitement, calm begets calm.
- 🐾 As a family, Pick and Stick. Decide on what's acceptable and what's not, which verbal cues will be used, and how things will be done, then stick to it.
- 🐾 Break exercise and training up into manageable, opportunistic sessions. For example, a quick ball session while the game is loading, a little name game or obedience during the commercial break.
- 🐾 People decide how the household will run, not puppies. While we need to be sensitive to their limitations due to age, we don't need to capitulate to their every whim.



The Good News

Puppies grow up. Puppyhood lasts from one to two years, and while there are no guarantees, most dogs turn a corner around the six month mark. Also, *management* is the bridge to make life with Puppy pleasant until *training/learning* occurs. The effort you put into your dog or puppy now will get results and pay off later. The effort and resulting payoff are up to you.

As we develop our relationship with our puppy, there will come a time when management, training and maturity come together and we find ourselves with a well behaved companion.



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