



Socializing Your Puppy

Socializing your puppy is very important as it will help the puppy develop into a safer and more enjoyable pet. These puppies are less likely to behave fearfully or aggressively if they have been exposed to a wider variety of situations. You can socialize your puppy a bit, or a lot, but the wider the ranges of experiences they are exposed to the better their chances are of being more comfortable when they are an adult.

Puppies are most accepting of new experiences between 3 and 12 weeks old. This is the best time for them to be social and enter new situations. After that age, they become much more cautious of anything they haven't yet encountered.

How Does a Puppy Need to Be Socialized?

Socialization is a big project. It requires exposure to the types of people, animals, places, sounds and experiences that you expect your dog to be comfortable with in later in life. While it's impossible to expose a young puppy to absolutely everything, it's essential to get him used to the common types of people, dogs, sights, sounds and physical handling that will be a sure part of his daily life. The more bases that you cover during the peak socialization period of 3 to 12 weeks, the more likely the puppy will be able to generalize from his prior experiences and find something reassuringly familiar in a new situation.

You need to make sure that the situation is not overwhelming for him, and that he becomes more comfortable each time you expose him to something. Puppies can be overwhelmed by meeting a bunch of strangers all at once. Take it slow. If your puppy is cowering in the corner, then he's not learning anything good about strangers. Keep a close eye on your puppy's reaction to whatever you expose him to so that you can tone things down if your pup seems at all frightened. It's important to introduce your puppy to that scary situation much more gradually. Make a big effort to do something your puppy loves during the situation or right afterwards, and always follow up a socialization experience with praise, petting, a fun game or a special treat.

Vaccinations and Disease Risk during Early Socialization

Most young puppies aren't fully protected against the diseases we vaccinated them for until they've had all of their puppy shots. This is mainly because the antibodies they get from their mother can interfere with the ability of the vaccine to have its full effect. Even though puppies' immune systems are still developing during their early months, if we wait until a puppy has all of his shots before socializing him, we miss our chance to do it. He'll simply be too old. The



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good news is that if you take some commonsense precautions while socializing your puppy, the risk of infection is quite small compared to the much larger risk of your puppy developing serious behavior problems with fear and aggression later in life.

Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every opportunity to socialize young puppies in environments like puppy classes, where the risk of illness can be minimized.

The experts now agree that the risk of a puppy being given up or later euthanized for behavior problems is so huge that young puppies must be socialized before they are done with their vaccinations. Well-run puppy classes—indoor classes where all the puppies have been vaccinated at least once—are a safe and smart way to socialize a puppy.