

Article 38

Dogs do not need to be social with people or other dogs outside of the family.

Dear Gus,

Now that the warm weather is here, my dog and I are spending a lot more time out and about. We are running into lots of other dogs and how do I get my dog to become more social?

Lisa V. Orange

Lisa thanks for the question.

This is a topic I cover all the time with my clients, and your question is different than providing early socialization to a puppy so that it is a well-adjusted, rather than fearful, dog. The first thing that I think needs to be clear is that although dogs are pack (and therefore "social") animals, that doesn't mean that your dog needs to be "social" with people or dogs outside of his pack (family).

This will not be popular with some folks but in a nutshell - my feeling regarding being social are that unless the other dog belongs to a family member, or a real close friend, unfamiliar dogs should pass one another like ships in the night. That means that when walking your dog, you need to maintain perfect control over your dog at all times. Your dog should be on his leash, and, if you do stop to talk to someone you see when out, he should either sit or be in the down position.

I recommend avoiding allowing socialization with unknown dogs since you don't know how the other dog will behave, whether it is current on vaccinations or its general health status. Two males and sometimes even two females can be like oil and water - they don't mix!!

I also find that problems can start with dogs that spend time in dog parks and doggie day care under the mistaken idea that the dog needs socialization.

The dogs spend their time sniffing rear ends, jumping on one another, biting and playing rough. Then when they are at home and company or family come to visit, the first thing the dog does is jump on your guest and then gets scolded for it!! The dog gets confused because we've been letting the dog be a dog all day, now we want the dog to be perfectly mannered. It's very important to be consistent with what you expect and what you allow your dog to do.

Our dogs are definitely social creatures, but being social to me means leave other dogs alone and always have good manners and be happy to meet everyone they are introduced to.

I hope this helps.

Gus.

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