

SOCIALIZATION



Socialization is the process of exposing your puppy to new people, places, and things in a way that creates a positive association. The goal is to teach your puppy that new things are either boring or predict a good outcome- like a treat! It is important to make sure that your puppy is relaxed and happy during socialization experiences, otherwise we can accidentally teach them that new experiences are sometimes stressful and overwhelming!

Dogs who are not properly socialized are more likely to experience behavioral issues later on like fear, reactivity, or aggression. It is arguably the most important aspect of your puppy's development!



Desensitization

This is the process of gradual exposure to a stimulus with the goal of achieving a neutral response. When we socialize our puppy, we are actually desensitizing them to new sights and sounds. The key to doing this successfully is go slow keep your puppy in a state where they not exhibiting any signs of fear or stress.

When exposing your puppy to new things, try to think of everything they may encounter in their life. Here are some common "scary things" that you'll want to include:

- People who look different than you (different ages, gender, skin color, height, facial hair, etc)
- People in hats, bulky clothing, sunglasses, backpacks
- Vet's office
- Groomer
- Grooming tools
- Statues
- Ballons
- Children
- Things on wheels- skateboard, bike, wheelchair
- Cats
- Dogs of all different sizes and breeds
- Different flooring surfaces- grass, slippery floors, carpet, stairs
- Noises- thunder, doorbell, car, vacuum
- Traffic
- Car rides
- Drive throughs

An important note: You can socialize your puppy without allowing them to directly interact with dogs, kids, and people. Your puppy will benefit from observing from afar. If you have access to calm kids or dogs that can meet your pup- even better!



Body Language

In order to know whether your puppy is stressed or fearful, you need to know what signs to look for. Dogs show their emotions through their body language. Here's what you should look out for when socializing your puppy:

the sweet spot!

Happy and relaxed: Body will be loose and wiggly. Tail may wag in a wide loose pattern or hang in it's natural position. Eyes will be soft and will look around the environment naturally. Ears will be in their natural position. Mouth will loosley pant or remain closed.

treat + distance

Alert or avoidant: Body may stop moving or look stiff. Dog may attempt to walk away. Tail may start to tuck or stick up high and wag quickly. Eyes will stare directly at the scary thing, or dog might turn gaze and head away to avoid. Ears will perk up and forward.

get outta there!

Fearful: Body will be stiff and hackles may go up. Tail will be fully tucked or very stiff and wagging tightly. Whites of eyes may be showing. Ears may be flattened against head. Dog may try to bolt or hide. Barking or growling may occur. Dog may pant with a tight, wide mouth.



How to socialize a puppy

Step by step guide

1

Pick a new person, place, or thing to introduce your puppy to. It's best to choose situations in which you can control who and what your puppy is exposed to so that they don't become overwhelmed.

2

Start at a far distance (low intensity) and slowly work your way closer. Allow your puppy to investigate the new thing on their own. Don't force your puppy to get closer or lure closer with food if they are scared. Simply remain neutral, say "what's that?" in a normal voice, give a treat, and move away if needed.

3

Stay positive and confident. Lead by example showing your puppy there is nothing to be afraid of! Use treats to reward your pup for their bravery.

4

Take note of anything your puppy finds frightening so you can spend time working on it. Repeat! It's a good idea to introduce your puppy to the same thing several times in different contexts.

Safety: Many new puppy parents are hesitant to socialize their under-vaccinated puppies. While there is always a risk to exposing under-vaccinated puppies to illness, behavior professionals agree that early socialization is imperative for your puppy's long term behavioral health. You can implement your own safety procedures like carrying your puppy and bringing a blanket from home for your puppy to walk on. Consult your vet with additional questions!

