

# How to Socialize Your Puppy

One of the most valuable lessons you can teach your puppy is that the world is a safe place with kind humans and friendly dogs. A critical time for your puppy's learning is 7 to 16 weeks of age. During this time, puppies can absorb a great deal of information. If they have positive experiences with people and animals, they are less likely to be afraid of them later. Here's how you can properly socialize your puppy:

## #1: Meet Other Dogs

Soon after you bring your puppy home, it's time to start his socialization training. It's important to expose your pup to different dogs at an early age so that he learns to get along with them. Puppies who are not socialized sometimes never learn to "speak dog" and have fear or aggression problems. It's very important to only pick safe dogs to interact with your puppy so that she has positive experiences.

## #2: Get Vaccinations

Don't expose your puppy to other dogs or public places until he's had vaccinations. Most puppies will not get them until they are 15 to 16 weeks of age. You may be wondering: If the ideal window for socialization is 7 to 16 weeks, how can you safely do so? Read on to #3.

## #3: Use Controlled Environments

**Invite friends and family over** . If your puppy isn't allowed out, bring the people in! Ask them to remove their shoes before coming into your home just in case they've stepped in something that can spread harmful bacteria.

**Invite safe, friendly dogs to your home** . If you have friends who have friendly, healthy, vaccinated dogs, invite them to come meet your puppy at your place.

**Visit those friends' homes, too** . This is safer than letting your puppy walk in a public park or in a neighborhood where you don't know the dogs who have been there. Be sure to carry your puppy from the car into your friend's home.

## **#4: Don't Bring Your Puppy Near Random Dogs**

This is especially important when you're at the vet. Dogs who visit the vet may be sick. If you let your puppy greet them, you could be exposing him to a contagious disease. Carry your young puppy into the veterinarian's office, and keep him in your lap (or in a crate) until his immune system is protected.

## **#5: Meet Other People**

**Pick different people.** Puppies should be exposed to people of different genders, ethnicities, ages, shapes, and sizes. The more variety you introduce, the quicker he will learn that variety is the spice of life!

**Pick the right people** . Make sure that everyone you choose to interact with your puppy knows how to do so in a positive manner. If children cannot hold or pet your puppy correctly, they should not interact with him. Remember, a negative experience during this critical time can make your puppy afraid.

## **#6: Play Socialization Games**

### **Pass the Puppy**

Divide your puppy's meal of kibble into small plastic bags, one bag for each person visiting. Before starting the game, explain to everyone how to properly hold the puppy by supporting her rear end. The first person then picks up the puppy and gives her a piece of kibble. The person touches one of her paws, gives her a piece of kibble. Touches another paw, gives a piece of kibble. Touches her ears, gives a piece of

kibble. Touches her tail, gives a piece of kibble. Looks at her teeth, gives a piece of kibble. Then the person passes the puppy on to the next person, who goes through the same routine. This game teaches your puppy that it's rewarding to have people handle her.

## **Puppy Recalls**

Divide your puppy's meal of kibble into small plastic bags, one bag for each person visiting. Have everyone sit in a circle on the floor, with the puppy in the center of the circle. One person calls the puppy to come and holds out the piece of kibble. When the puppy goes to the person, she gets the kibble and lots of petting and praising. Then someone else in the circle repeats the routine. This game teaches your puppy that it's rewarding to approach people.

## **#7: Avoid Negative Interactions**

All socialization is not good socialization. Bad experiences at an early age can make negative impressions for years to come. Sometimes, certain situations are just too much for your puppy. If he is having a good time, he will look the part. Ears will be up, eyes will be bright, and he may wag his tail or whole body and actively seek interaction. If your puppy is not enjoying himself, learn to recognize signs of stress to avoid causing emotional harm, including:

- cowering or clinging
- ears down and back
- lip licking
- sleeping (all young puppies take frequent naps, but if you find your puppy sleeping a lot when you have her out or at a busy event, she may actually be shutting down)
- tail tucking
- turning the head or body away from people who approach
- yawning

## **Real-Life Scenario**

For example, let's say you take your puppy to your child's soccer game. You see that he's flinching at the loudspeaker and getting a bit clingy. He starts to whine. Your child's team rushes around her to pet her. He licks his lips, turns his head away, and yawns. He tries to crawl in your lap or under the bleachers. These signs mean that your puppy is having a stressful experience. You may inadvertently be teaching him that children, large groups of people, or playing fields are cause for worry. If you see signs of stress in your puppy, immediately remove him from the situation until he relaxes. Take it much slower and gradually get him used to this level of stimulation.

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