



Absolute Dogs.

SECRETS TO RAISING A PUPPY

The AbsoluteDogs Way

Socialisation

 absolute-dogs.com

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WHAT IS SOCIALISATION

Socialisation is encouraging success in your puppy's resilience in response to interactions and changes to the world around them.

In games-based training, we see it as an opportunity to evaluate our puppy for their weaker personality traits (for example, they may be pessimistic naturally) and grow them into strengths (transform pessimism into optimism).

THE VIEW ON SOCIALISATION HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

There was a time when a desire for a socialisation plan didn't exist. Dog owners and even dog professionals were not aware that they could influence their dog's ability to make better choices. A dog was the dog they would always be, and there was nothing that could be done to improve their navigation of the world around them.

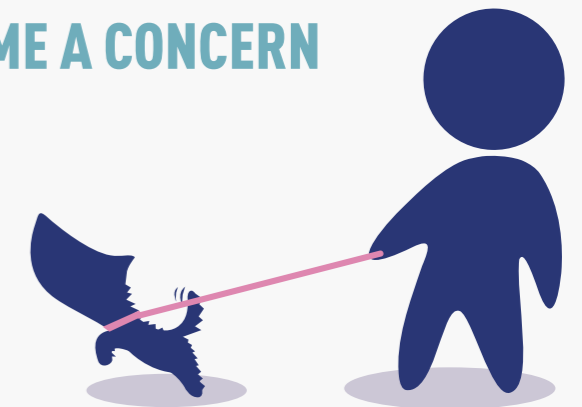
... IT BEGAN TO EVOLVE...

Over the last decade, we started to see an emphasis on socialisation, in dog trainers, as well as the dog owning public (that's you!). Everyone became aware that socialisation was important. In fact, it was key to being able to develop and grow our dogs into the optimal companion for us and our lifestyle.

Checklists were developed, rules were established. 100 people, 100 days. 100 dogs, 100 days. Exposure to everything you could think of within a 2-4-week period with limited time because vaccinations were required prior to any socialisation outings and a critical socialisation period was established and pressured dog owners to fit everything possible into a short period of time. This critical socialisation period was deemed the ONLY time your dog could be properly socialised.

HYPER SOCIALISATION BECAME A CONCERN

Everyone was doing such an amazing job socialising their dogs that they were overdoing it. They were emphasising checklists that made it almost unrealistic and unachievable to do everything you felt you needed to do. It proposed a traditional, static solution for socialisation... and yet socialisation is fluid, dynamic, and bespoke to each dog and their unique personality.



As a result of over-socialising, dogs were feeling pressured to interact. In many cases, the socialisation attempts of well-intentioned dog trainers and owners backfired.

Their dogs felt too much pressure to interact, which resulted in various ways that the dogs would deal with it, some getting defensive and potentially aggressive (that's the extreme version on one end of the spectrum).

Other dogs struggled to control themselves around people and other dogs because of the over-exposure. They would bark, leap, and frantically attempt to access the people and dogs because they never had been expected to just observe, take in information, and move on without some form of interaction.

THE KNOWLEDGE HAS GROWN, AND SO HAS SOCIALISATION

In today's world, it is imperative that socialisation is recognised for what it truly is: an opportunity to prepare our puppy for the world they will live in.

You get to be in the know right now, whether you've just gotten your puppy, or your puppy hasn't even arrived, OR you have a puppy or dog that needs more support in regard to socialisation opportunities. It is never too late to reshape your dog's brain so that they are more resilient and capable.

PREPARING FOR THE SITUATION IS KEY

In socialisation, training and preparing for the situation sets your puppy up for the most success. If they're prepared to behave in a way that you have shaped from the time they come home to when they're ready to take their games into real life situations, they will be a rock star!

Training IN the situation only sets your puppy up for failure. They have not been prepared. They do not have the skills and knowledge to apply and respond. They struggle, and while trying as hard as they can, simply cannot make the correct decision as that decision has not been made clear for them.

A COMPARISON

TRAINING FOR THE SITUATION Vs TRAINING IN THE SITUATION

SCENARIO 1

Training for the situation

You know that you will have visitors to your home and that you do not want your puppy to jump on them. To prepare, you work with your puppy on settling calmly on a bed. You play games that develop and grow self-control and focus on you. They value you above all else.

Training in the situation

Visitors have just arrived to come and meet your new puppy that has no foundation training. As they arrive your puppy is loose and excitedly runs over to them, hopping up on them and trying to grab at their sleeves and pants. Your puppy isn't able to respond at all! It's so frustrating! You can't reward their good behaviour because they're not making great choices. The situation is too difficult.

SCENARIO 2

Training for the situation

You know that you want to take your puppy on walks and recognise that they are worried about new things. To prepare, you play games that focus on growing their confidence and optimism, knowing it will help them face any new situation with bravery. You also work on disengagement so they can say "That's none of my business" when given the chance. Great walks will happen once your puppy is ready!

Training in the situation

You take your puppy for a walk like you've always dreamed of and they're struggling to walk with you, balking at the end of the leash and trying to go back home. This isn't what you thought it would be like! Your puppy isn't ready.

SCENARIO 3

Training for the situation

You've always wanted to take your dog on hikes and to have them swim in the water. With this in mind, you work on games that grow water confidence, as well as flexibility and optimism in the face of novelty. Hiking will throw all kinds of strange things at you and your dog, so you want your puppy to be ready. They ace water confidence games and then when you're out hiking for the first time and your puppy sees water, they don't hesitate. They jump in!

Training in the situation

It's your first hike. Your puppy knows all of their basic obedience commands and you hope to introduce them to water on the hike as there is a nice, shallow creek. You try to lure them into the water, and as their paw dips in they pull back! Woah! What's that and it's cold! They won't go anywhere near it now, no matter how much you coax them with treats or even a toy on the other side. They hop over so they don't touch it but won't interact with the water anymore. They weren't prepared.

PREPARING YOUR PUPPY FOR THE SITUATION allows you to really build an amazing, trusting relationship. They know that you have their back and will set them up for success every step of the way. As a result of being prepared they are much less likely to fail and the choices that are GOOD, the ones you definitely want them to make, are made clear and obvious to them. Less failure, more success! That sounds like a win!

WHEN CAN I GET STARTED?

You can get started **today!** It is never too soon nor too late to get started on socialisation with your puppy OR dog.

HOW CAN I GET STARTED?

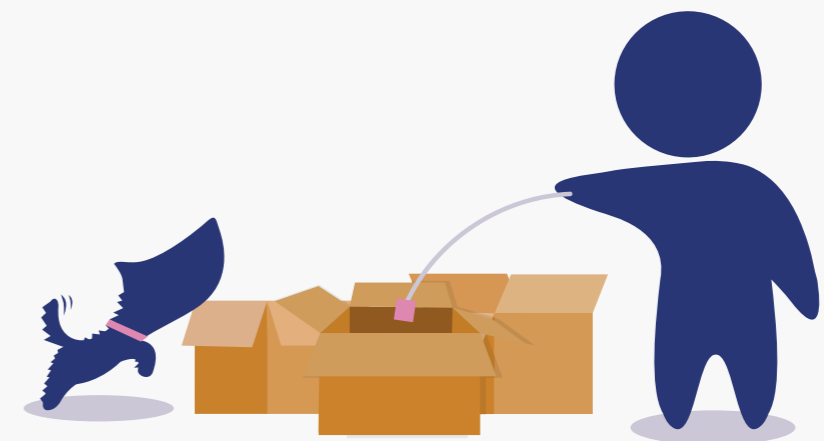
Start with focusing on your puppy's confidence and optimism. Play games that encourage your puppy to problem solve, to navigate puppy-appropriate obstacles, and to encourage resilience.

You don't have to wait to get started when the weather is more agreeable, or when your puppy has received all of their puppy vaccinations. Socialisation can start in your home and in your garden. You get to have fun while also providing your puppy with training and games that will help them navigate the real world and all of the novelty it wants to throw at them.

GAME #1 CARDBOARD CHAOS

Cardboard Chaos is a great game to play with any puppy of any age. With this game, you are using your puppy's daily food and sprinkling it around several boxes that are in a single layered heap.

Start with a single, shallow box so that your puppy doesn't feel overwhelmed. If you find that it's too easy, add more in the next session to meet them at their level.



Sprinkle the food all throughout the boxes before letting your puppy have access so they can independently explore. This is a game that you get to observe. It gives you so much information about how your puppy responds to movement beneath their feet, the sounds of the boxes as they move, and how resilient they are when faced with a challenge or novelty.

While Cardboard Chaos is the name of the game, you can get creative with what you use to play. Increase the challenge based on how confident your puppy explores the chaos. If you have children, letting them set up the chaos (with a quick quality and suitability check from you) can help them be included in the puppy's socialisation plan.

MY PUPPY IS NERVOUS AND HAS STARTED TO BARK AT THINGS. WHAT DO I DO?

In traditional socialisation, the thought was: If your puppy was nervous of people, let people feed your puppy and interact with as many people as possible to overcome their nervousness.

While well intentioned, this approach does not set the puppy up for success. If your puppy loves food and yet is worried about the person, this technique introduces conflict. "Do I grab the food despite the scary human?" And once the food has been eaten, the person is suddenly looming and even more frightening (even if they're the nicest human ever!).

Instead, people watching and rewarding your puppy for calmly observing can be the better interaction plan. A trip to the car park to watch the world from a distance allows your puppy to observe, take in information where they're comfortable, and doesn't introduce a decision wrought in conflict.

NOVEL SOUNDS PREDICT A GOOD DEAL

What is a good deal? A good deal is when your puppy receives something as payment for their amazing behaviour that exceeds expectations. They determine if something is a good deal (not us). You know you are giving your puppy a good deal when their behaviour improves, and they are focused and engaged.

Positive pairings are when we take a distraction (sound, change in environment, dog, person, bird, plane, etc.) and we reward with a calm delivery of food reinforcement. Sound is one area where positive pairings come into play and this can be done whether you have an overly confident puppy or a puppy that thinks their way through things and are more cautious.

GAME #2 - DID YOU HEAR THAT? IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL.

Sound sensitivity is the basis of why dogs struggle with fireworks or loud, booming thunder. It's a fairly common struggle for many dogs. While it may not be something that is experienced often, that is the perfect reason to make sure to introduce the idea that any sound, no matter it's volume, no matter it's pitch, is okay and predicts a good deal.

To start, any time a sound occurs, reward your puppy with their daily food for calm awareness of the sound (head turns toward it, ear flicks toward it, etc) or even reward your puppy if they have no response! Make sure you're delivering their food in a calm, quiet way as too much excitement can create too much emotion connected to the distraction.

You can expand to playing recordings of sounds at low volume that your puppy may not be exposed to but may be part of their life. If you get a puppy in the winter, keep in mind they will experience different environmental sounds in the spring,

summer, and fall. You can also use recordings of sounds you know your puppy will experience to help prepare them in case they occur at a volume that may be unanticipated in any given scenario.

When playing recordings, increase the sound only as your puppy demonstrates an “That’s none of my business” response to the current volume. Use a Bluetooth speaker in random locations to make the direction of the sound source unpredictable. This game can be played whilst you play other games, inside or outside, and it can be fun to get creative about what sounds may be the focus of your next session. It’s important that the sound occurs and then you reward. Reward calm awareness as well as no response at all!

CHANGES IN THE ENVIRONMENT HAPPEN!

We can’t possibly predict every environmental distraction that we will face with our dogs. Checklists can put socialisation into a box, a box full of pressure, and it’s important to think outside of the box. In fact, there is no box!

Every puppy should have an individualised approach, one bespoke to their unique personality traits, growth, and development.

The world throws novelty at us all of the time. That’s guaranteed! As the best owner for your puppy, your role is to prepare your puppy for when that happens. Rather than putting them in the situation and hoping all of the different variables fall into place perfectly so that the experience is a great one, prepare them for when things don’t go as planned. Encourage your puppy to be flexible to change; adaptable! How can you do this?

Through games!

EVERY DOG HAS A BRAIN

And that brain can be reshaped to handle anything life throws at it! Games are powerful because we can customise the approach and tailor it to our dog’s individuality. Their brain is made up of all of their unique personality traits that can be defined through concepts.

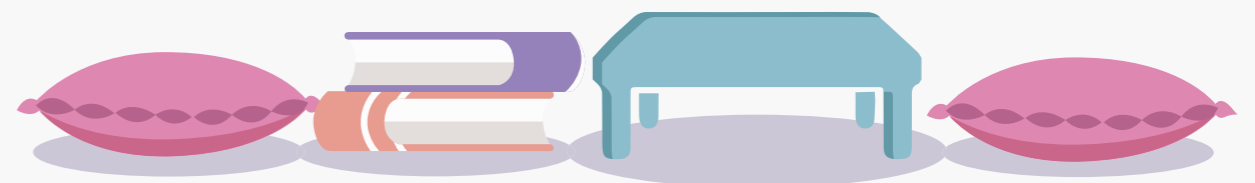
Your puppy wants to make connections and wants to thrive. We take real-life concepts, and we can start applying them from Day 1. We can assess our puppy and re-evaluate every day and a single approach won’t work for every puppy! Games allow us to be flexible to the puppy’s needs and to evolve with them.

GAME # 3 - BALANCE PATH

You never quite know what is up ahead. A Balance Path is an obstacle course we set up for dogs of all ages. You can use anything in your house that is puppy safe as an obstacle.

When setting up a course for your puppy, make that that you use items that don’t have too much height, and alternate wobbly and solid, immovable surfaces so that your puppy doesn’t feel overwhelmed.

You can use chairs, tables on their sides to create a hallway of obstacles, mats, rugs of varying textures, bumpy objects for texture, umbrellas, platforms, cones, yoga mats, pillows, hula hoops, hanging empty plastic bottles, and more! Get creative.



It helps to sprinkle food throughout prior to your puppy interacting with the balance path for the first time.

You can also help your puppy navigate by placing the food directly in front of your puppy on the obstacles. Reward for movement forward generously. The aim is not speed as a fast-moving puppy may actually be worried and concern is more difficult to observe and acknowledge when the puppy is moving too quickly. To really encourage confidence and awareness, keep fun on a Balance Path slow and steady. Experiment with the reward volume to support your puppy in the best way possible.

THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS

One of the most important skills you can teach your puppy is that the world is none of their business. You are the most valuable part of the world and everything else just doesn't bring the excitement and awesomeness that you do!

Encourage your puppy to be aware and reward them! Set them up for success by playing easy games like the one below:

GAME #4 - TWO FEET ON

Having a myriad of games that your puppy is a rockstar at playing allows you to take them on the road to success in real life opportunities. If your puppy is willing to play the games, they're also in a great state of mind to navigate the environment they're in.

Field trips to places where distractions are low, at a distance, can help your puppy prepare for more challenging environments. Play games that your puppy knows very well. If they're playing and focused, they feel safe and confident with you in that habitat.

Two Feet On is what we call a conversation starter. A puppy

that knows it well will feel more confident in new situations, especially if the game has been played at home and in the garden and they're really good at it! It has a high rate of success and is a pressure free game.

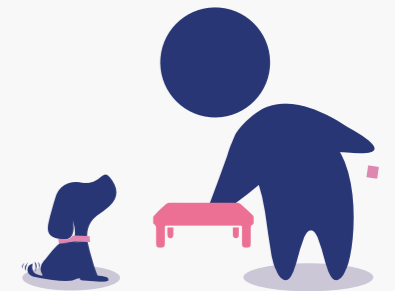
STEP 1

Locate a sturdy box or bowl that won't slide. For the bowl, it will be upside down.



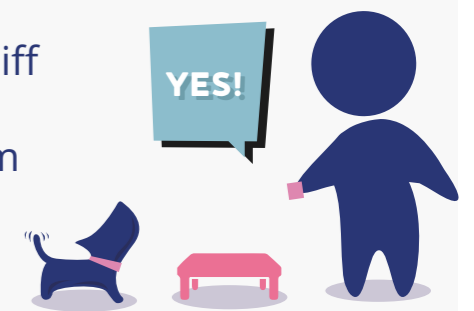
STEP 2

Have food ready in one hand (or in a treat pouch) and the object in the other. With your puppy ready and attention on you, place the object down in front of them.



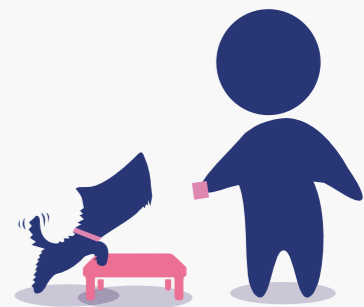
STEP 3

As soon as they moved toward the object, sniff the object, or interact with it in any way, say "Yes" and then toss a piece of food away from the object. It helps to place the food on their mouth and then bowl it lightly away so they can follow the food better.



STEP 4

Continue doing this with the aim being for them to place their front feet on the object. As soon as this happens, feed them directly to mouth while encouraging them to keep their foot/feet on the object.



STEP 4

Once they are reliably placing their front feet on the object, feed in position several times, and then toss food away to reset. Start moving the object over a few inches in random directions each time.

GREETING OTHER DOGS AND PEOPLE

In traditional socialisation this was over-prioritised, creating so many behaviour-struggles in dogs all over the world. It was well intentioned, and sounds logical, except dogs have taught us that there is another way to approach socialisation, one with improved outcomes.

ONE BAD EXPERIENCE OUT WEIGHS 100 GOOD EXPERIENCES.

Other people and other dogs are unpredictable and often access to them can reinforce your puppy for naughty behaviours you don't really want them practicing (like jumping or dismissing you as playing with another dog is far more important!).

For a worried puppy, their fear can be justified, as the experience can be unpredictable and outside of their control, causing their fear and their desire to communicate their fear to escalate.

Instead, non event socialisation can be incredibly beneficial. Appropriate, adult dogs that play infrequently and will ignore a puppy's overzealous attempts at interaction set great examples! Be calm and we can hang out and I might even play with you! But if you're rude and pushy, you'll get nothing from me!

That's the ideal – so setting up individual (not group) play dates with dogs that play well without getting over excited or that often play less, and just explore together more, is much more powerful. In fact, it's what the real world will expect from your puppy as they grow and mature, and so will you.

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

If your puppy will be expected to stay with you rather than running off to say hi to every person or dog they see, that is the expectation that should be established from the very get go!

Play games with your puppy that encourage proximity and value in closeness to you. Ultimately, you are where the fun happens, not the rest of the world. Awareness to distractions is perfectly acceptable, and also the ability to disengage from those distractions is equally valuable.

GAME #5 - ORIENTATION GAME

That's where the Orientation Game comes into play! With food ready and a happy, ready to play puppy, let's get started!

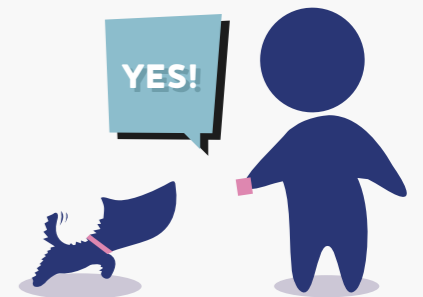
STEP 1

Place a piece of food to your puppy's nose. For older dogs this step may not be necessary but for puppies that are not as coordinated or able to follow food, it can help them track the food once you toss it. Toss it lightly so that it only goes a foot or so away.



STEP 2

After your puppy eats the food, wait quietly until they re-orient back to you. At first it may be that they do not offer eye contact. That's okay! Say "yes" as soon as they choose YOU by turning to you.



STEP 3

As they return, toss a piece of food in the opposite direction. It may look like you're bowling! Repeat.



Orientation game – At first you want to introduce this game in a very low distraction setting like your living room or kitchen or a hallway in your house. This is also a game that you can take on the road and is an excellent way to make sure your puppy is warmed up and ready for the adventures they'll have with you out and about.

DON'T INVADE MY SPACE!

Socialisation also includes body handling and preparing your puppy for those moments where invasiveness into their physical space cannot be avoided in order to keep them healthy, and happy.

Practice handling your puppy when they are calm and relaxed from a day full of well-deserved rest (remember puppies need 17-20 hours of sleep!) and adventure.

This may mean touching them gently on their shoulder and rewarding them. Break it down as much as possible, and between every 1-3 seconds of touching, reward to keep it happy and fun. At any point, if your puppy pulls away or seems distressed, simply take that as information that you've pushed your puppy too far and make the next repetition easier.

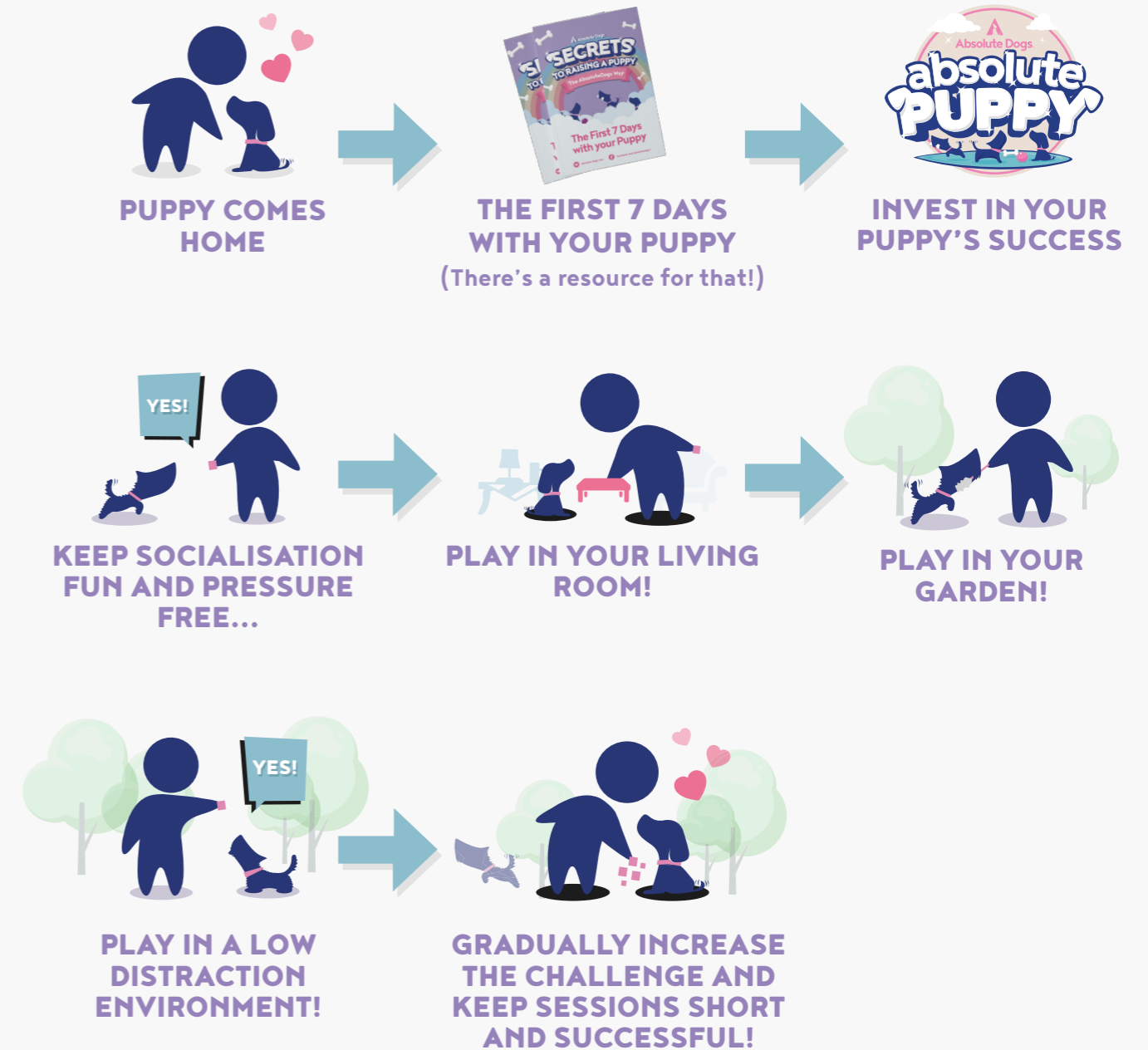
Keep body handling sessions very, very short, some even just one repetition of a hand on their side, a finger gently stroking down their leg, etc.

SOCIALISATION IS SO VITAL FOR YOUR PUPPY (AND ANY OTHER DOGS YOU MAY HAVE)

While we could probably write several books on socialisation, keep it simple and make sure that you are moving forward at your puppy's comfort level. Play games that will prepare them for the changes that happen in real life scenarios. In this way, your puppy won't bat an eyelash when the world throws something new and novel at them!

They'll just go, "Wow, that's cool AND it's also none of my business!"

YOUR MAP TO SOCIALISATION



[Get First 7 Days with Puppy resource](#)



PUPPY SOCIALISATION BINGO

We've made a separate bingo sheet as a fun prompt to encourage appropriate socialisation with your puppy. Socialisation is encouraging success in your puppy's resilience in response to interactions and changes to the world around them. Socialisation is all about preparing the puppy for the situation, rather than putting them in the situation and expecting a hopeful outcome. Guarantee the outcome through games!

Focus on providing your puppy with plenty of amazing and wonderful deposits into your relationship bank account. They can trust you to provide them with a fun adventure and a safe path to get there. Play with you (through games with food and toys) can help to grow positive associations with events around them.

