

# Puppy/Dog Socialization

Socialization is most critical for young dogs from 4 weeks to 4 months. However, maintaining your dog's socialization is a life-long process. Your dog needs to be exposed to all sorts of people, environments, and different looking dogs. Socialization is accomplished by gradually allowing your dog to investigate different looking people, children, environments, objects, and dogs. It is critical that the dog is exposed to new stimuli on a voluntary basis and not forced to interact with beings or objects s/he is afraid of.

## **4week-16 weeks = Socialization**

- During this period, puppies need opportunities to meet other dogs and people.
- By four to six weeks they're most influenced by their littermates and are learning about being a dog.
- From four to 12 weeks they're most influenced by their littermates and people. They're also learning to play, including social skills, inhibited bite, social structure/ranking and physical coordination.
- By three to five weeks they're becoming aware of their surroundings, companions (dogs and people) and relationships, including play.
- By five to seven weeks they're developing curiosity and exploring new experiences. They need positive "people" experiences during this time.
- By seven to nine weeks they're refining they're physical skills/coordination (including housetraining) and full use of senses.
- By eight to ten weeks they experience real fear -- when puppies can be alarmed by normal objects and experiences and need positive training.
- By nine to 12 weeks they're refining reactions, social skills (appropriate interactions) with littermates and are exploring the environment, spaces and objects. Beginning to focus on people. This is a good time to begin training.
- Most influenced by "littermates" (playmates now include those of other species).
- Beginning to see and use ranking (dominant and submissive) within the pack, including humans.
- Teething (and associated chewing).
- At four months they experience another fear stage.

It is possible to accidentally force socialization on a dog. One way to do this is to cue a dog to touch something they are afraid of, or to use food to force them to go close to the being or object they fear. Proper socialization is **force free and completely voluntary on the dog's part.**

Many of us make the mistake of giving strangers food and basically forcing our dogs into a vulnerable position. Just wait, patience is a virtue. Let the puppy /dog figure this out for itself. Stand and talk to a friend sit on the ground let the puppy just experience this in its own time. If it's a footing problem you can certainly toss food around on top of the floor but don't force the puppy to "Get IT".

Socialization is much more than just exposing your dog to your family and dogs and maybe a few kids in your neighborhood, this is a good start but not nearly enough for most dogs/puppies. Socialization is taking the dog/ puppy everywhere you go exposing the dog/puppy to hundreds of people young and old alike and all kinds of dogs. You want your dog/puppy to meet many unfamiliar adults, young old in wheel chairs using crutches real life events school yards with lots of yelling and screaming kids, and dogs of all different sizes and colors. This socialization will need to continue throughout most of the dog's life. An under-socialized dog is more likely to bite and or become stressed in unfamiliar environments and situations. Here is a schedule to follow.

## **The Puppy's/ or Foster Dog's Rule of Socialization**

Make sure all experiences are safe and positive for the puppy. Each encounter should include treats and lots of praise. Slow down and add distance if your puppy is scared!

By the time a puppy is 12 weeks old, it should have:

(If your puppy or foster dog is over 12 weeks start right away with this socialization guide.)

**Experienced many daily different surfaces:** wood, woodchips, carpet, tile, cement, linoleum, grass, wet grass, dirt, mud, puddles, deep pea gravel, grates, uneven surfaces, on a table, on a chair, etc.....

**Played with many different objects:** fuzzy toys, big & small balls, hard toys, funny sounding toys, wooden items, paper or cardboard items, milk jugs, metal items, car keys, etc.....

**Experienced many different locations:** front yard (daily), other people's homes, school yard, lake, pond, river, boat, basement, elevator, car, moving car, garage, laundry room, kennel, veterinarian hospital (just to say hi & visit, lots of cookies, no vaccinations), grooming salon (just to say hi), etc....

**Met and played with many new people** (outside of family): include children, adults (mostly men), elderly adults, people in wheelchairs, walkers, people with canes, crutches, hats, sunglasses, etc....

**Exposed to many different noises (ALWAYS keep positive and watch puppy's comfort level – we don't want the puppy scared):** garage door opening, doorbell, children playing, babies screaming, big trucks, Harley motorcycles, skateboards, washing machine, shopping carts rolling, power boat, clapping, loud singing, pan dropping, horses neighing, vacuums, lawnmowers, birthday party, etc...

**Exposed to many fast moving objects** (don't allow to chase): skateboards, roller-skates, bicycles, motorcycles, cars, people running, cats running, scooters, vacuums, children running, children playing soccer, squirrels, cats, horses running, cows running, etc...

**Experienced many different challenges:** climb on, in, off and around a box, go through a cardboard tunnel, climb up and down steps, climb over obstacles, play hide & seek, go in and out a doorway with a step up or down, exposed to an electric sliding door, umbrella, balloons, walk on a wobbly table (plank of wood with a small rock underneath), jump over a broom, climb over a log, bathtub (and bath) etc....

**Handled by owner (& family) many times a week:** hold under arm (like a football), hold to chest, hold on floor near owner, hold in-between owner's legs, hold head, look in ears, mouth, in-between toes, hold and take temperature (ask veterinarian), hold like a baby, trim toe nails, hold in lap, etc...

**Eaten from many different shaped containers:** wobbly bowl, metal, cardboard box, paper, coffee cup, china, pie plate, plastic, frying pan, <sup>TM</sup>Kong, Treatball, <sup>TM</sup>Bustercube, spoon fed, paper bag, etc.....

**Eaten in many different locations:** back yard, front yard, crate, kitchen, basement, laundry room, bathroom, friend's house, car, school yard, bathtub, up high (on work bench), under umbrella, etc....

**Played with many different puppies (or safe adult dogs) as much as possible.**

**Left alone safely, away from family & other animals (5-45 minutes) many times a week.**

**Experienced a leash and collar many different times in lots different locations.**

It is important to understand that there is a large genetic component in socialization training. Breed rescue volunteers have seen dogs chained in backyards that had no socialization that display gorgeous social behaviors toward all dogs and people. But you see many hardworking trainers that spent many months socializing their pup only to have the dog grow up to repeatedly bite humans. If you are not sure about your dog's temperament have an evaluation done by experienced shelter worker or clicker trainer. Always error on the side of caution, if your dog shows fear responses, know that s/he is much more likely to bite. Fear is the basis of almost all dog bites.

Ray and Lorna Coppinger in the book "Dogs – A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior, and Evolution" discuss how 80 % of a dog's brain is fully formed by 4 months of age, from 4 months to a year the remaining 20% of the brain develops. Most of a dog's brain growth occurs from 4 weeks to 4 months this is the most critical time and when socialization will make the biggest difference. Once the brain's growth stops, it becomes far more challenging to "change the wiring". At birth a puppy has essentially all the brain cells it is ever going to have during its whole life time. If the puppy brain has essentially the same number of cells as the adult brain, how can it grow ten times bigger? The answer is that brain growth is almost entirely in the connections between the cells. Of all

the brain cells present at birth, a huge number are not connected or wired together. What takes place during puppy development is the wiring pattern of the nerve cells. (Coppinger, 2001)

Coppinger's writing makes it clear that consistent socialization from 4 weeks to 4 months is critical for healthy brain development. So what are you waiting for!

Short story:

### **Why is socialization so very important**

When Daisy was adopted at 8 weeks of age from a private party (a friend), she was a sweet puppy - a little shy, but friendly and bright. She approached her new owners readily enough at the friend's house and bonded with them quickly. Almost at once, they considered Daisy a beloved family member. Two years later, Daisy was a large, powerful dog who had snapped at, even broken the skin several times. She was wary and defensive towards everyone outside her family, and often growled or bit if she thought strangers might approach her or her owners. Reaching out to pet her; moving through the living room; reaching over her fence; handing her treats: Daisy had come to view all these seemingly innocent activities as threats. What happened? Well, the simple answer is nothing. Daisy's owners didn't abuse her; in fact, they were exemplary owners in nearly every way. But between the ages of 7 weeks and 1 yr, Daisy just didn't meet very many new people. It's hard to imagine that this alone could cause serious aggression, but trainers see similar scenarios every day. The problem is that many puppies just never develop an extended view of their family "pack."

Working owners may be too tired when they come home to take the dog to the park or to have guests over. Families with small children may be too busy. But the end result is that since the puppy doesn't meet many people outside the family, she begins to distrust anyone not in her magic inner circle. This is normal for wild canids, such as wolves, who live in small, tight-knit family groups and reject outsiders. But it's a sure failure for domestic dogs, whose behavior can signal their fates. The kindest thing we can do for dogs is to help them extend their concept of "family" to encompass any and all friendly people they meet. Even working people can do this by dealing with socialization proactively.

We call this technique the "Rule of Many." From the age of 4 weeks until 2 yrs, a puppy should meet many new people every day. Everyone he/she meets should give the puppy treats, or play with its favorite toy and as much variety as possible in terms of size, age, color, and personality type should be represented. The puppy should also go to 7 new places every 7 weeks (or at least one new place a week), and the places should be as different from each other as possible, such as a lake, a park, a shopping mall parking lot, the vet's office, a pet store, etc. And don't stop there!

***These recommendations are minimums*** – the more people and places your puppy/dog experiences, the more well-adjusted she'll be as an adult.

Keeping track of the people your puppy meets and the places she goes can be fun for young children and will ensure that you meet your goals. Be sure the puppy is put on her own four feet for these introductions and visits; holding her in your arms can send her the wrong signals and prevent her from experiencing the world on her own.

The wonderful end result is that, by seven months of age, a puppy whose owners have followed the Rule of Sevens has met and received treats, pets and praise from at least 196 new people and has gone to at least 28 new places! This lucky puppy will feel relaxed and happy around all types of people and at home almost anywhere. Best of all, whenever she meets someone new or goes to a strange place from now on, she'll tend to assume the best, rather than the worst. For the next 12-15 years, she'll truly be a companion to her family. And what about Daisy? Since no effort was made when she was a puppy to ensure that she experienced as many new people as possible, Daisy ended up with a first class case of defensive aggression. Fortunately, she isn't a lost cause, and she's come a long way with behavior modification. Every new person she meets plays ball with her which is her favorite game. But as her owners now realize, what happened to Daisy could have been prevented if they had known about and followed the Rule of "many" right from the start. They'll definitely be following it next time around. This is a fictional story based on 100's of dogs I have worked with. (this is a common occurrence of the many, many dogs and puppies that I have seen come into the shelter over the past 6 yrs..)

Whether socializing, play training, or just hanging out around the house, being consistent with your dog will make a big difference in helping you achieve your goals with your dog.

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