

Socializing your Newly Adopted Puppy

The most important time to socialize your puppy occurs within the first three months of life. From three to five weeks of age, puppies learn from their littermates appropriate play behaviors and how to control how hard they bite, called “bite inhibition,” so that they learn not to bite other dogs, or humans, while interacting with them. During this period social and emotional stability begins to develop. Single-litter puppies tend to develop behavior problems including fear and aggression towards other dogs and unfamiliar humans, intolerance of being handled by humans (possibly due to the lack of physical contact with littermates during nursing), and an inability to cope with frustration and a lack of impulse control (perhaps because single-litter puppies do not have to compete for the mother’s nipple during nursing).

Socialization with, and handling by, humans is of the utmost importance between five and twelve weeks of age, as well as exposure to other dogs, exposure to novel objects and exposure to a variety of places. Puppies who are not adequately socialized during this time period can become fearful of unfamiliar people and dogs, different sounds, novel objects, and/or new environments. An 8-week old puppy’s learning ability is nearly at adult level, so his training ability is optimal at this time.

How to Socialize your Puppy

- 🐾 Enroll your puppy in socialization and training classes. All of the puppies in class should have already received their first round of vaccines, be parasite free, and the training facility, preferably indoor, should be maintained in a hygienic manner. A clean training facility minimizes the risk of illness, thereby providing a safe environment for puppies to socialize with other puppies. Training helps to establish, and strengthen, the bond between you and your puppy.
- 🐾 Invite a variety of adults, and children, over to meet your puppy. If the child is young, teach her how to properly pet and play with your puppy. Ask your guests to wear hats, hoodies, sunglasses, backpacks, canes, and a variety of different types of clothing. Invite men with beards. Have your guests give the puppy treats, and have them play with your puppy to ensure the experience is positive.
- 🐾 Have puppy play dates in your home or in the home of other puppy owners. Be sure that all dogs are up to date on their vaccinations. If adult dogs are involved, make sure they are dog friendly and know how to play gently with a puppy. If there is a cat in the home you are visiting make sure the cat is dog friendly.
- 🐾 Take your puppy for short car rides to get him used to riding in a car.
- 🐾 Walk your puppy on different surfaces (e.g. tile floors, rugs, concrete, wet and dry grass, metal, snow). If outdoors, expose him to motorcycles, buses, work trucks,
- 🐾 On a daily basis place objects on the floor for your puppy to investigate including umbrellas, boxes, garbage cans, and paper bags. Gently roll a skateboard near him, or walk a bicycle next to him. Offer treats to your puppy when introducing him to anything novel, especially if he appears afraid.
- 🐾 Sweep and run the vacuum so that he gets used to the noise. Gently bang pots and pans. Rustle garbage bags. Beginning at a low volume, play recordings of thunder, babies crying, fireworks, and sirens. Ring the doorbell multiple times. Speak to other house

members in soft and loud voices. Again offer treats, or play with your puppy at the same time.

- 🐾 Encourage your puppy to walk up and down stairs, with you present of course. Some adult dogs develop a fear of stairs and refuse to walk up or down them. Place treats on the stairs if the puppy will not walk on them.
- 🐾 Give your puppy “alone” time to play with his toys, or to nap in his crate. This teaches your puppy to be content being alone so that behavior problems, such as separation anxiety, can be avoided. Crating your puppy also helps to reduce stress if he must be confined to a crate in the future (such as when traveling or during a hospital visit).
- 🐾 Groom your puppy, including brushing his coat, bathing him, and clipping his nails. Placing him on a table, preferably made of metal, will help him get used to veterinary exam and grooming tables.
- 🐾 Touch your puppy’s ears, look into his mouth, squeeze his toes, tug on his collar, and wipe him with a towel. Offer him treats while doing so.
- 🐾 Take your puppy to your veterinarian just to say “hi.”

What to Avoid

- 🐾 Unpleasant experiences. Experiences that are overly frightening or too stressful may cause your puppy to fear the person, object, or situation to which he is being exposed. This fear can then extend to similar situations or people.
- 🐾 Visits to dog runs or dog parks where you do not know the vaccination or disease status of the other dogs, or visits to any high traffic area that is not sanitized.
- 🐾 Completely puppy-proofing your home. Allow for a safe area where you puppy can explore his environment.
- 🐾 Training techniques that use punishment. Research classes that implement positive reinforcement (includes play, petting, praise and treats).

Finally, socialization should not stop once your puppy turns into adult dog. Continuing to socialize him throughout his lifetime will help ensure that he remains a happy and sociable dog.

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