



Puppy Socialization

Puppies need to learn how to interact with people, dogs, and their environment. Dogs should be conditioned to accept the activities of everyday life outside the house. This will make your dog more self-confident, secure, and predictable. Proper socialization can improve your bond with your dog and make sure they won't be relinquished to an animal shelter.

When Should it be Done

The critical social development period for dogs is between 3 and 14 weeks. At this age they are most accepting, less cautious, and curious about their environment. Even though dogs can be socialized at any age, it will take longer for an older dog so it is important to start early.

How to Do It

1. Your puppy's first interactions with the world will shape their behavior so try to make them positive. Give them treats to reward good behaviors. From the first day you bring them home, get your puppy used to being handled (look in ears, feet, mouth, etc). This will make things easier when you take your dog to the vet or groomer. During these new experiences, watch your dog for signs of stress, such as a tucked tail, licking lips, yawning, or ears back. Try to remove your dog from these situations so they don't associate them with fear in the future.
2. Have your puppy experience multiple, brief encounters by the time they are 14 weeks old. Make them pleasurable, but short until your puppy builds up their confidence.
3. Go out of your way to have your puppy encounter different types of people, places, animals, walking surfaces, noises, etc. You can even try giving treats to friendly strangers to give to your dog. Some suggested encounters include: enrolling in a "puppy preschool" class and start training early, sitting on a bench near a school when the kids are leaving for the day or in a park where people jog or ride bikes, letting them play in a baby pool full of water, or taking your puppy with you when you run errands or go through a drive thru (don't do this on a full puppy stomach!).

Vaccination Concerns

While you want your puppy to socialize with other dogs, until they receive all their vaccinations at 16 weeks, you'll want to be careful. Only let your puppy interact with dogs that you know are physically and behaviorally healthy and vaccinated. Also, don't let your puppy play in unclean environments, such as dog parks. Contact your veterinarian for more information about socialization and health care for your new puppy.