

How to Properly Socialize a Puppy ©

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The best dog that one can have is a dog that is well socialized. What exactly does that mean? American Heritage Dictionary defines it as follows:

1. To place under government or group ownership or control.
2. To make fit for companionship with others; make sociable.
3. To convert or adapt to the needs of society.

In other words, a well socialized dog could be described as being comfortable where ever it may be and under what ever diverse circumstances it may encounter, neither being aggressive towards nor intimidated by other animals, including human beings. This "says it all" for such a dog can be taken anywhere, any time and under any circumstances!

Most people want a dog that is under control, is a good companion, and can adapt to new situations easily. Some dogs naturally adapt to new situations whereas others not so well. There are things that can be done to help puppies become well adjusted and adaptable so that they can be great companions.

It is hoped that breeders can use these concepts for the proper socialization of their puppies. And for those people that have obtained an unsocialized puppy, our intent is to give you some insight as to how one might go about correcting that.

Training and socialization should start early at the breeder's home. Anyone that has a litter of puppies should have different people come over to handle and play with the puppies. Attempts should be made to include men, women, and children of all ages in the socialization process. Puppies can sometimes be fearful of people and situations that they have never encountered before. Because of this, it is to the puppy's advantage to see and meet all kinds of people and have good experiences with them. Each time that a puppy meets a new person, they register in their brain whether it was a good experience or not. The more positive experiences a puppy has with a diverse group of people allows them to realize that people are fun and good. It's a good idea when the puppy is introduced to a new person, that this individual helps to make it a pleasant experience by offering the puppy a treat whenever the puppy comes to them or lets the person touch, pet or handle them.

Equally as important for a puppy to be a good companion, is the socialization of the puppy with other animals, especially dogs, but cats and whatever other animal might be easily available for the puppy to meet. This begins at home with the other puppies in the litter but should include each and every other dog one has in his kennel or home, or might be included in the puppy's future home. As the puppy matures and becomes lead trained it should be taken frequently on walks where it can be introduced to other dogs of varying sizes, shapes and breeds. A good place to go is the pet store, where other people are doing the same with their pets, or to parks with playgrounds or other areas where he can meet other dogs and people. It is best not to take your puppy to parks where dogs are allowed to be off their leashes. Remember that all dogs are permitted in these areas, and that there is no training requirement for them to either enter a store or a park. Please be aware that not all other dogs are well behaved, so one must be constantly alert to the potential aggressiveness of other animals. Cautiously let your puppy meet the new dogs, but be prepared to grab your puppy to protect it should something alarming happen. Keep a tight lead and look for signs that another dog might bite. Puppies need to learn that you will keep them safe at all times. It may take many hours of work to undo the damage caused by a bad experience, and sometimes it may do irreparable damage.

Puppies also need to experience different environments, including various floor surfaces. As they are developing and growing, they should be introduced to walking on carpet, concrete, grass, tile or whatever

different flooring surfaces are around the breeder's home. The pads on a puppy's foot are sensitive and they can easily recognize when their feet are touching a surface that feels different than anything that they have been on before. They soon learn that just because something feels different on their feet doesn't mean that it is something to worry about. Building their confidence by having new and different experiences without adverse consequences makes them realize that everything is going to be okay, regardless of the surface on the floor or other environmental situation. Some people take this kind of training a step further by laying various items on the floor for the puppies to walk on. The different things one might use can be as simple as newspaper, a plastic garbage bag, a piece of wood, or a piece of plastic fencing. The puppy may be encouraged to walk on the new surface by offering treats. One can lead a puppy across these strange surfaces by placing the treat in front of its mouth, but not letting him have it until he steps on the obstacle. This training does two things: It builds the puppy's trust so that he knows nothing bad will happen. It also teaches the puppy that just because something either feels or looks different it doesn't mean that it is bad.

Puppies need to experience a lot of different noises as well. One can run the vacuum cleaner, at first some distance from the puppies, but one can then gradually operate it at closer distances. The first time they hear it they will most likely take off running, but soon they will recognize that there is nothing to fear from that noise, and thus be able to accept it as a part of daily activity. They also should be taken outside so they can hear cars going by and any other sounds one can expect out of doors. Of course, this activity must be done in a safe environment, so that the puppy doesn't get startled and dart into the traffic. One can accomplish this experience by setting up a puppy pen in the front yard, or by waiting until the puppies are leash broken.

Use the things that occur in your every day life as an opportunity to socialize your puppy. For instance, my sons were on the football team, so at several different times I took the puppies individually to the school when the team was walking to or coming back from the practice field. The cleats on their shoes made a distinctive noise on the pavement, and the puppies learned not to fear it. As a bonus, on occasion some of the players would even come over to pet the puppies. Each person has opportunities that are unique to their lifestyle that can be used as a means to expose a puppy to new experiences in a controlled manner...look for them and use them to your advantage.

Also, taking the puppies over to an elementary school when it's time for school to let out for the day is a good experience. Kids make lots of noise when they are dismissed for the day. One starts at a distance, and gradually works closer to all the activity. Caution should be used to insure that the puppy doesn't escape! A frightened puppy in an unfamiliar environment is an absolute disaster! As long as your puppy is safely in tow, a visit to the elementary school can be a valuable experience. There are cars starting up and moving, and kids running around everywhere. Plus many kids love puppies and can't resist coming over to pet it. Other places to take your puppy would be little league games, soccer games, or just about any outdoor sports activity. Before venturing out with your puppy, it is important to remember that they should have at least some of their vaccinations first though.

The puppy soon learns that such experiences are lots of fun and that there is nothing about which he should be either worried or frightened. This type of activity helps to build in your puppy's mind a history of good experiences, and thus helps him to readily accept new situations, experiences and environments – making him comfortable and confident.

Placing one's puppy on a table is an invaluable experience. When a pup is young, it is important to practice placing the puppy on a table and gently handle the pup. As the puppy gets older and experiences visits to the vet's office they should be accustomed to being placed on the vet's table. By getting them used to that activity early in life – building yet another new experience – it will make vet's visits easier. This advanced training will be much appreciated by the Veterinarian and his staff. As a side note, vet's tables are made of stainless steel and may be slippery. Some vets cover the table with rubber mats but others do not. It is a good idea to take a bath mat when one goes to the vet's office. Place it on the table before putting one's dog on the table. The mat

gives the puppy more traction, and because it came from home it is something that is familiar in unfamiliar surrounding. Again, this makes the puppy feel comfortable and more confident.

Good breeders try to do as many of these things as possible; however, if they don't have children for example, it may be difficult to expose puppies to children on a regular basis. Hopefully the breeder of your puppy has done at least some of these things. If not, once you have your new puppy, you can begin doing these things right away. Pups are more adaptable to new experiences when presented at a younger age.

Training classes are excellent places to take one's puppy. One can go with one's puppy just to visit, but an even better idea is to enroll him in a puppy kindergarten class. Such classes are especially designed to instruct the owner in the methods one uses to train a new puppy the basics of becoming a good companion. Usually the puppy is taught simple commands like "sit," "stay," and "come," and is exposed and practiced in walking nicely on a leash. An added benefit is that one's puppy is introduced to and thus learns to socialize with puppies of various breeds. Other family members should be encouraged to go along to observe the lessons.

Socializing one's puppy early on is the best thing that one can do to develop one's puppy into a well rounded good companion. Unfortunately some breeders just leave their puppies in the kennel and don't do any work to socialize them. Such breeders may sell a puppy that is six months old and perhaps fearful of everything. It may be terrified to be in its new house and worse yet of its new owners and family. Since this kind of dog has no history of good experiences, one must really work hard to correct this type of behavior. Sometimes one may be able to correct this problem with lots of work and dedication and exposure of the puppy to positive experiences, and other times it may very well be too late!

When contemplating the purchase of a puppy, if one has any questions about whether or not the puppy has been properly socialized, ask the breeder the following questions:

1. Has this dog ever been inside a house or any building other than a kennel?
2. Where was this puppy raised?
3. Has this dog ever been around kids?
4. How does this dog get along with men? women? kids?
5. How does this dog travel in the car?
6. How does this dog get along with other dogs?
7. What steps have you taken to socialize this puppy?

A dog that has been socialized as described is never any more expensive than one that has not been properly socialized. It is worth investigating whether or not a breeder has invested time and energy in socializing the puppy before contemplating a purchase. It is well worth one's money to invest in a dog from a breeder that has invested their time and energy in helping to insure that one acquires a well adjusted dog by having the proper socialization before it goes to its new home. After meeting the puppy, if there is a question in one's mind as to how well the puppy was socialized, you might wish to look elsewhere for the new companion for your family. Remember that the ideal pet is one which is comfortable with anything and everything that comes into its life! With proper socialization done by the breeder and your continued efforts, you should have a great companion.