

## Socialization

Socialization refers to the process of exposing the puppy to a variety of people, situations and places so that s/he grows up to be a confident and well-adjusted adult. This is absolutely critical because a poorly socialized dog can be a very big problem.

The puppy **MUST** have positive interactions with new people on a very regular basis. Further, the puppy **MUST** be taken to new places, and have positive experiences at those places. It is your job to make very certain that the new experiences are good experiences for the puppy. If you see signs of stress in the puppy when your entire office staff starts petting and talking, then have everyone slow down because you really do not want to scare the puppy. Again, we are trying to form habits and impressions, and the puppy should have positive and happy experiences when s/he is exposed to new place, situations and people.

Carry treats at all times to give to strangers so that they can feed the puppy — this helps form a very positive association for the puppy. If you are not comfortable having other people feed treats to your puppy, then you can reward the puppy when s/he has exhibited positive social behaviors. Monitor your puppy's reactions, and be careful not to create or allow a frightening situation. However, do not reinforce fear. This is done inadvertently when owners say soothingly, "its alright baby snookums sweet angel face and etc and etc." Puppies are not fluent in English so that sounds a lot like praise to a puppy! In other words, you are praising for being scared and we definitely do not want that. If the puppy is scared or stressed, simply reduce whatever is going on and then reward bravery/friendliness/other desired behaviors.

Treats can also help take the puppy's mind off of something that is scary or stressful. Getting treats in new places and situations can assist the puppy in developing positive associations and impressions with that place or situation, and with new places and situations in general.

Socialization is happening whenever the puppy is encountering the social world. Make it a point to expose your puppy to new people/places/situations on a daily basis for a very long time. However, there is a balance that must be maintained between socializing and exposing the puppy to diseases. Puppies should not go to places frequented by unknown dogs until they are about four months old. This means no trips to PetSmart, the dog park, or even the local park, although if you carry the puppy at all times the risk might be worth it to you. It is nice to allow your puppy to play with other dogs, but make certain these are dogs that you know well and be very careful with the puppy and bigger dogs. The puppy will need to go to dog school, but such places usually require dogs to be vaccinated so are likely safe. Again, it is a balance between needing to get the puppy out and trying to reduce exposure to disease, especially parvo, and we all need to find the balance that works for us. It is not appropriate to keep the dog at home until three or four months, but it is also silly to take an eight week old puppy to a dog park — find the balance that feels right for you.

Just a word about safety - although puppies typically stay close to home and humans, don't count on it. Something that seems benign to you may scare the dickens out of a puppy and she will bolt with no regard for personal safety — and puppies are very fast and will get faster. ALWAYS keep the puppy on a leash when outside in open areas, and do not ever assume that she will not run off because under the right circumstances, all dogs will bolt and especially puppies.

Further, do not assume that all dogs like puppies. The last thing you need is for your puppy to be attacked and forever be fearful of other dogs. Although most dogs tolerate puppies, there are plenty that would happily shred a puppy. I simply do not allow strange dogs near my puppy, no matter how much the owner reassures me about the great disposition of the dog. The truth is that one does not know how a strange dog will react, and it is not worth finding out at the expense of the puppy.

Finally, do not allow other people, including dog trainers, to scare your puppy. It is your job to protect the puppy at all times, including from well-meaning people. At all times, your goal to allow the puppy the opportunity to have positive experiences with the world – your reward for such diligence will be a well socialized adult dog!