

Socialization

Why do puppies need social exposure?

The primary and most important time for puppy socialization is the first three months of life.

- During this time puppies should be exposed to as many NEW people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing over-stimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior.
- *For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated.*

What are the repercussions from NOT socialization your puppy?

Because the first three months are the period when sociability outweighs fear, this is the **primary window** of opportunity for puppies to adapt to new people, animals, and experiences. ***Incomplete or improper socialization during this important time can increase the risk of behavioral problems later in life including fear, avoidance, and/or aggression.***

- Behavioral problems are the greatest threat to the owner-dog bond.
- In fact, behavioral problems are the number one cause of relinquishment to shelters.
- Behavioral issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age.

While puppies' immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behavior problem.

Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every SAFE opportunity to expose young puppies to the great variety of stimuli that they will experience in their lives.

The above information was taken from the AVSAB Position Statement on Puppy Socialization

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Recognizing Stress or Fear in your Puppy During Social Exposures

When giving your puppy the opportunity to experience new social exposures, approach each encounter with your puppy's level of sensitivity and mental development in mind.

- ***Be aware of and recognize changes in body posture and expression that indicate your puppy is overwhelmed, stressed or fearful.***
- **Signs of Fear and Stress**
 - Lower Body Posture
 - Tucked Tail
 - Ears Back

If your puppy shows signs of being overwhelmed, stressed or fearful, then he needs *more gradual exposure* to these situations.

- When you see signs of stress or fear get far enough away that he shows no signs of fear. He should be allowed to investigate or observe at his own speed. Gradually, as he masters new situations successfully, his confidence will begin to grow.
- Play a fun game with the puppy or ask him to respond to simple direction so you can reward him while he is relaxed and not fearful. Make your own behavior light and cheerful.
- Then gradually get closer. *Eliminating the stress or fear cannot happen in one day.* It will be a gradual process and if done slowly and carefully, will benefit your puppy tremendously and build confidence in him.

Three Things to Remember When Socializing Your Puppy

- 1) Keep it positive by not overwhelming your puppy when exposing him to new things and people.
- 2) Be aware of the first signs of stress and/or fear and move farther from the stimulus.
- 3) Expose your puppy to whatever you want him to be comfortable with as an adult: care rides, busy sidewalks, noisy schoolyards, rowdy crowds, parties, other animals, sport games, traffic, elevator rides, stairwells, noisy appliances, etc.

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Suggested Safe Places for Exposures/Experiences

You want to take your puppy places that are not highly visited by dogs of unknown vaccination history or disease.

- Those are places without much grass that have cement or asphalt; grocery store parking lots, bank-parking areas, outside schoolyards, etc.
- Places with shiny floors and/or linoleum
- Stairwells and Elevators

Suggested Things to Expose Your Puppy To

This is a very short list and a few suggestions only. Make make sure that your puppy sees things that are in his environment that may not occur daily as well as outside of his environment that will be new to him. This can involved sounds, items, places, people, etc.

- **Strollers**
- **Umbrellas**
- **Rolling Trash Cans**
- **People/Children wearing hats**
- **People/Children of various ethnicities**
- **Motorcycles**
- **Wheel Barrows**
- **Delivery people in uniform**
- **Balconies**
- **Vacuum cleaners**
- **Friendly adult dogs**
- **Other gentle puppies**
- **Walks after dark**
- **Babies / Toddlers / Children**

- **Both Men and women**
- **Stairwells**
- **Elevators and Automatic doors**

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Puppy Socialization Classes

What are the benefits of Puppy Socialization Classes?

Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socializing puppies in an environment where risk of illness can be minimized.

Puppy socialization classes can offer a safe and organized means of socializing puppies and more quickly improve their responsiveness to commands.

- Each puppy should have up-to-date vaccinations and be disease and parasite free before entering the class.
- Where possible, classes should be held on surfaces that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. indoor environments).
- Visits to dog parks or other areas that are not sanitized and/or are highly trafficked by dogs of unknown vaccination or disease status should be avoided.

Classes and at-home training should be based on positive reinforcement with frequent rewards praise, petting, play and/or treats. Positive and consistent training is associated with fewer behavioral problems and greater obedience than methods that involve punishment and/or encourage human dominance.

In general, puppies can start puppy socialization classes as early as 7-8 weeks of age. Puppies should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days prior to the first class and a first deworming. They should be kept up-to-date on vaccines throughout the class.