

# Socialization



## What is Socialization:

Socialization is basically the very lengthy (life-long) desensitization process of exposing your puppy to every new sound, sight, and situation possible. To eliminate any adverse reaction and have your dog view these occurrences as normal, and non-threatening, and non-exciting.

## What is the purpose of Socialization?:

The ultimate goal of socialization is to be able to take your dog any place, any situation, and have him stay calm, relaxed and confident. Over-excitement, anxiety, hyperactivity are all unwanted reactions in a properly socialized dog. It can be done, but this desensitization process does not have an ending, it is something that must be continued every day of your dog's life.

Before that scares you, I'd like you to note that it really is not as hard, or time-consuming as one might think. This is an essential part of responsible dog ownership and every dog should be socialized extensively.

## Why is Socialization so important?:

A well socialized dog can be taken everywhere (allowable by law/regulations). Under socialized dogs are hazards in more ways than just knocking somebody down through over-exuberance. A poorly socialized dog is an unpredictable animal when placed in a new, potentially frightening situation. He may bite, he may run away and be injured. He may cause injuries to others around him.

A poorly socialized reflects badly on dog owners everywhere, and due to just such an image, many dog owners are penalized by restrictive laws and limits. One bad owner WILL spoil the whole bunch. Do YOUR part and properly socialize your dog!

## How to Socialize:

The very first step, regardless of whether your dog is a puppy newly vaccinated, or an adult dog you've acquired, is enrolling in obedience classes that focus on positive training methods. These classes benefit dogs at any age, and are an important step in socialization and developing a bond between dog and you, the handler.

## The Next Step:

Arm yourself with treats, and off you go. Take your dog out to walk the streets, let him experience cars driving by (safely on leash, of course), people walking past, and the noises of everyday life. Praise and reward any wanted reaction (such as sniffing, walking calmly, sitting politely) and ignore all undesirable reactions (jumping, leash pulling, barking, showing fear), while redirecting attention to yourself, and have him focus on something different.

It is very important to remember to praise and reward as soon as the unwanted behavior stops, but also be very careful to not accidentally reward the unwanted as well.

Take your dog with you everywhere. The ultimate goal of socialization is to have a dog you can take into any awkward, noisy, or crowded area, and he will still behave, and be calm, and relaxed. By continuing this throughout his life, your dog will gain confidence, and keep a steady head wherever he is.

### **A "Meet the Puppy" Party:**

A Meet the Puppy, a Puppy Shower, or whatever you would like to call it, a get-together with your friends, their dogs, and your new puppy is a great idea, for fun and to jump-start socialization. Just be sure that all participants are free of communicable diseases and parasites.

### **Pet Supply Stores:**

Most pet supply warehouses allow leashed dogs in their stores. These are great places to let your pup experience a variety of sights, sounds, and smells, and people. An important thing to remember, however, is to save these outings for after your puppy has received his vaccines, and to take him for a bathroom break first so he doesn't have an accident in the store.

### **A Dog Park:**

Another great place that has to wait until after the puppy vaccines are completed, an off-leash dog park is a great place to help your pup learn dog-to-dog interactions.

### **Puppy Kindergarten (and other Obedience classes):**

Not only are these classes great for teaching you and your puppy how to relate to each other, but they also involve close interaction with other people, and sometimes other puppies. Some are safe to attend with 9 to 16 week old puppies as long as the class requires proof of vaccinations appropriate for the age of the puppy. Regular obedience classes as your dog grows will strengthen all that socialization and keep your dog in top shape for social interactions. They are also the perfect place to nip any potential problem behaviors in the bud.

### **In Your Home:**

Bringing a lot of people through your home and possibly other animals as well, is a great way to socialize your puppy. Invite your friends over frequently, and have them bring over their children and other pets (if the pets are agreeable and are fully vaccinated).

### **Why should I take my dog to Obedience classes?**

It's important to remember that obedience classes, puppy kindergarten, and other recommended dog activities are just as much for the owner, as they are for the dog.

An experienced instructor will not only teach your dog how to respond to commands, but also teach you how to treat, react and respond to your dog. Obedience classes are essential to building the dog-handler bond. They also offer extensive socialization opportunities. Socialization is very important for every dog and owner, as it teaches your dog how to handle himself in different situations.

