

SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is the process of developing relationships with other living beings in your environment. A young pup is continually learning about his environment. Every new encounter, every person he meets, pleasant or unpleasant, will have a lasting affect on his temperament. The first twenty weeks of your puppy's life is the critical period for social development.

Start the socialization process as soon as possible. Introduce your puppy to all types of people – tall people, short people, old people, men with moustaches and beards, people with glasses, people with hats, etc. Supervise child introductions. Start with quiet, one-person introductions. Taking a new puppy to a loud party or large family gathering may be too much for the more timid dog.

Always let the puppy approach the person. Never force or drag a frightened puppy into an interaction with a visitor. The social experiences he has now will stay with him for the rest of his life. If your puppy is shy, have people squat down and extend their hand. Try offering a food treat. If puppy will still not approach, try tossing the treat towards the pup.

Let him gain confidence at his own comfort level. Bending over a dog and putting your hand over his head can be a scary experience for some puppies, that is why lowering your body posture can be more inviting. Ask the visitor to speak gently and not shout at the puppy.

As soon as your veterinarian says your puppy is adequately vaccinated, take him on as many walks and adventures as possible. Take your puppy to the soccer game, for car rides, to the beer store or the park. Introduce him to as many different breeds, sizes and shapes of dogs as possible. Always FRIENDLY dogs who tolerate puppies well. Attending a puppy play group or joining puppy training classes is also an excellent way to socialize your puppy. If puppies are allowed off leash play together, make sure the class instructor is monitoring the action. It should be a supervised play time not a 'doggie free for all'.

Your puppy needs to learn to enjoy being handled by all people, especially children and strangers. Well socialized puppies grow up to be wonderful companions, whereas anti-social dogs are difficult, time consuming and potentially dangerous.