



SOCIALIZING YOUR NEW PUPPY

Socializing your puppy is one of the best things you can do to set her up for success later in life. Dogs experience a critical window of development from during the first 16 weeks of life. During this stage, puppies need to experience a wide variety of sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations so they do not become fearful of everyday occurrences as adults. Dogs that do not have these experiences may grow up to be fearful or aggressive toward things that are new to them, so it is imperative that puppies get out and experience the world early on. Here are a few tips on how to properly socialize your pup.

Expose your puppy to a variety of experiences. Socialization is more than just meeting new people and dogs. Your puppy should get experience with anything she can expect to come into contact with on a regular basis as an adult, including noises your dog will hear around the house and outside like vacuums and fire trucks, surfaces your dog will walk on like gravel and pavement, and things that move like cars and wheelchairs. See the checklist on the back for a general list of experiences to provide for your puppy.

Keep experiences positive. It's not enough to just expose your puppy to new things. You must be sure your dog is comfortable and having a positive experience. One way to keep these experiences positive is to use treats. Give her a treat when seeing something new, particularly when she has a calm reaction or looks at you. This helps her form a positive association with the new thing while also rewarding her for keeping her composure and paying attention to you. Keep these interactions short and sweet so she doesn't become overwhelmed.

Don't force a scared puppy. If your puppy is turning away or hiding, clinging to you, or showing other signs of stress or fear as described in the box on the back of this handout, don't force her to get closer to the thing causing this reaction. By ignoring these signals and forcing your puppy to just "deal with it", you can actually cause long-term harm to your dog. If she wants to move away, let her, or pick her up and move away, giving a few treats to help her recover. Try again at a later time in a less threatening way. For instance, if the puppy is scared of a man in a hat, don't just put the puppy in the man's arms. Ask him to sit and remove his hat so the puppy can approach on her own if she chooses, using treats to help the process.

Keep it under control. Avoid taking your puppy to dog parks and any place he will encounter unfamiliar dogs, or any place he may become overwhelmed or scared (ballgames, firework displays, etc.). You have little control in these situations, and having a bad experience can cause life-long fear in your puppy.

Talk to your vet about immunizations and socialization. Check with your veterinarian about his or her recommendations on socializing puppies around their immunization schedules. There are several options for socializing your puppy before she's fully immunized. You can invite friends over to your house, take your puppy on 'air walks' by carrying her or putting her in a sling, wagon, or stroller, take her to the park and let her watch the world from the safety of a large blanket, and take her for car rides.

Sign up for puppy classes. Training classes are about more than teaching your puppy basic obedience cues. These classes provide great opportunities to socialize your puppy under controlled circumstances. Just be sure the class is structured and teaches the puppies self-control and boundaries.

Keep socializing your dog beyond puppyhood. Even though the prime window of socialization ends around 4 months of age, it doesn't just shut off like a light switch. Continue socializing you puppy for the rest of her first year to help her become a well-adjusted adult.

Animal behavior questions?

Contact our FREE Behavior Helpline!

402-905-3421 | bhelp@nehumanesociety.org | www.nehumanesociety.org/behaviorhelp

PUPPY SOCIALIZATION CHECKLIST

People

- Men and women
- Babies and children of all ages
- Elderly people
- People of different ethnicities and races
- Tall and short people
- Big and small people
- Men with beards
- People wearing sunglasses
- People wearing hats and hoods
- People wearing face masks and coverings
- People with backpacks and umbrellas
- People in uniforms
- People with canes, crutches, and wheelchairs
- People carrying bags and boxes

Movement/things that move

- Running
- Throwing balls
- Cars
- Trucks and buses
- Bikes
- Skateboards and scooters
- Motorcycles
- Emergency vehicles

Animals

- Dogs of all shapes and sizes (fluffy, short-nosed, tiny, huge, black, cropped ears, no tails, etc.)
- Cats
- Birds, squirrels, rabbits and other wildlife
- Any other animals your dog might come into contact with

New places and situations

- Car rides
- Other people's houses
- Vet office
- Pet stores
- Shopping areas
- Restaurant patios
- Parks
- Lakes/beaches

- Hiking trails
- Busy streets

Noises

- Household appliances (vacuums, blenders, blow dryers, etc.)
- Doorbells/knocking
- Kids yelling
- Babies crying
- Fireworks
- Wind/rain/thunder
- Garbage trucks
- Trucks backing up
- Alarms
- Loud music
- Sirens
- Traffic

Different surfaces

- Grass
- Water/wet surfaces
- Pavement/asphalt
- Sand
- Mulch
- Gravel
- Carpet
- Hard floors
- Shiny/slick floors or surfaces
- Stairs

Handling and grooming

- Petting different parts of body
- Handling different parts of body
- Picking up
- Holding by collar/harness
- Lifting ears/tail/paws
- Handling for vet examinations
- Hugging/restraint
- Bathing/toweling
- Brushing
- Scissors/clippers if professional grooming will be needed

Signs of Stress and Fear

Dogs communicate when they're feeling stressed or scared through their body language. Look out for these signals when socializing your puppy. If she's showing that she's scared, don't push her to interact with what's scaring her. Discontinue and try again later with a version that is a little less scary (further away, smaller, slower).

- **Eyes:** avoiding eye contact, prolonged staring, dilated pupils, big/wide eyes
- **Ears:** pulled out to the side or back flat against the head
- **Mouth:** yawning, panting, licking lips, closed mouth, lips pulled tight or puckered, showing teeth, mouthing
- **Tail:** low or tucked under, very high, may still be wagging
- **Body:** tense/stiff body, sweaty paws, lifting paw, self-grooming, shaking off, trembling, cowering, avoiding, freezing
- **Vocalizations:** whining, barking, howling, growling, snarling