

Socialisation

Socialisation is the process of introducing your puppy to new **people, places, things,** and **experiences** *he will likely encounter* in his lifetime as part of your family. This may include exposure to:

- ✓ the veterinary practice without needing to be examined
- ✓ visiting nursing homes
- ✓ going to parks
- ✓ seeing children running, screaming, and playing
- ✓ hearing loud noises, such as trains, motorcycles, and gunshots.

You will also want to give your puppy opportunities to meet:

- ✓ children
- ✓ babies
- ✓ the elderly
- ✓ people in wheelchairs
- ✓ people using canes, big hats, sunglasses, and costumes
- ✓ people in uniforms, such as police officers, postal workers, and delivery truck drivers

Take your puppy for:

- ✓ rides in the car
- ✓ let him walk on different surfaces
- ✓ go for a ride on an elevator
- ✓ take a nice walk through a park
- ✓ go to a ball game.

These are wonderful experiences for your puppy and can be great fun. Allow your puppy to become comfortable with one socialisation opportunity at a time until he seems comfortable with each situation before moving on to new or different experiences. *You will not want to overload him with too much information too quickly.*

It is important that you introduce your puppy to **other animal species** (such as cats, rabbits, horses, or goats), **AS WELL AS OTHER DOGS**. Introduce him not just to other animal members of your family, or next-door neighbours, but to all types—**big, small, young, and old**. Before you introduce your puppy to other animals, make sure that the other animals (dogs) are **properly immunised** (i.e. vaccinated). It is important the other animals do not have a problem with puppies, though, or you will defeat the purpose of this interaction.

When introducing your puppy to other people, **NEVER HOLD HIM TO RECEIVE A PET**. Instead, let him meet the person **at his own pace**. If he does not want to greet the person, **do not force** the experience. Thank the person for his, or her, time and move on. Try introducing him to other people again and again until he is willing to go up to the person and receive a treat that you gave them to give to him. Once your puppy learns that other people are wonderful creatures, you have accomplished your socialisation mission with people.

If your puppy is a smaller breed, **MAKE SURE NOT TO CARRY HIM EVERYWHERE**. You are not protecting him; instead, you are telling him that he is too small to handle anything on his own. If you continue carrying him around, he may bark at other dogs, animals, and people for the rest of his life.

Pushing, pulling, or forcing your puppy in any way defeats the entire socialisation experience. It is important that you **build gradually on his successes**. Socializing your puppy can be a wonderful and fun time for both of you.

A collar, a leash, car rides, sporting events, loud music, trains, planes, automobiles, stairs, and parties to go to are all new and exciting experiences for a puppy.

One of the best things you can do for your puppy is to enrol him in a **puppy class** if there is one available. Make sure the trainer does not use any harsh corrections on your puppy, and if the trainer tells you to do anything harsh to your puppy, leave the class and do not go back. These early months set the foundation for his future, and young dogs (under 12 months old) go through two to three fear periods. Emotional or physical harm done during the first year can last a lifetime.

Textures

You will want your puppy to be comfortable walking on, over, and through anything you would want to walk through. So introduce him to those textures while he is young. Some examples of textures you can use include grass, sand, cement, gravel, plastic bags, rocks, plastic bags with water sprayed on them (makes them slick), water puddles, bridges, collapsed cardboard boxes, ice, snow, and carpets. Let your puppy approach every new texture at his own pace to build his confidence.

Building Confidence by Using a Confidence Course

A small, easy-to-assemble confidence course can do wonders to build your puppy's confidence. The confidence course should consist of things he can walk on, over, or through. Be creative and use items already in your home. You can use a big plastic garbage bag and place it on the floor for him to walk on. You can use a mop or broom handle for him to walk over. You can use a hula hoop for him to walk over or through. Styrofoam blocks give your puppy something to step over. An umbrella can be used to help your puppy get over a fear of new objects. Be creative and use your imagination. As he becomes used to one new item, add a second item. Always introduce one obstacle at a time until he is comfortable walking on, over, or through the item before introducing him to a new item.

You always want to move at your puppy's pace and build on his successes. When using a confidence course, put his collar and leash on the puppy and ask him to slowly walk through the course. Many puppies, especially in the 6 to 18 months age range, want to fly through the obstacles; however, this does not help anything. When you take your puppy through the course, take a few steps and stop. Pet him for a few seconds and take a few more steps. *It is important that he does this slowly.* You will want him to pay attention to what he is doing. Slow walking with frequent stops helps him to pay attention. Any item that offers a different experience will work, so use your imagination. In a few weeks, this can help many puppies be more confident, especially when left alone.

Socialisation with Children

Puppies and children should **NEVER BE LEFT UNSUPERVISED!** Although they often have an affinity for one another and form a very strong bond, it is still a good idea to **KEEP AN EYE ON THEM WHEN THEY ARE TOGETHER.** Left unsupervised, a puppy may bite a child in self-defence. Without proper supervision, it is difficult to identify the instigator and correct the problem. Children are often unknowingly unkind to animals, and the puppy is wrongly blamed for his response to the unkindness.

To some puppies, children are noisy, fast-moving objects with tempting flying hot dogs for fingers. Some puppies take it all in stride, but others become overwhelmed with too much stimuli happening too quickly for their comfort level.

When introductions are made, it is important to **SUPERVISE THE INTRODUCTIONS.** **CHILDREN MUST BE TAUGHT HOW TO INTERACT WITH ANIMALS SAFELY.** At first, instruct children to **wait until the puppy approaches them before petting.** They should be taught to respect when the puppy pulls away from them and **TO NEVER BOTHER THE PUPPY WHEN HE IS IN HIS CRATE.**

For the initial introductions, ask your child to approach the puppy *from the side*, **never straight toward the new puppy.** Ask your child to stop about three feet away from the puppy and extend one hand out to the puppy with **THE PALM DOWN.** Allow the puppy to come up to sniff the extended hand. Once your puppy stands next to your child, the child can begin to pet the puppy on his side. If the puppy backs away from the child, do not force the interaction. Giving your puppy the time he needs today will help build a strong relationship between your child and the new puppy. Proper introductions will ensure that your child and puppy develop a healthy bond and become friends for life!

When your child does get that opportunity to actually pet the new puppy, explain the importance of petting the puppy **gently** and **speaking softly.** During the early stages of developing a relationship between your child and the new puppy, it is important that the child be instructed to **avoid petting the puppy on the head**, as many puppies are head shy. Once the puppy becomes more comfortable with the child, pats on the head can be added if the puppy does not shy away from the hand reaching over his head. If the puppy pulls away, head pats should not be allowed for a bit longer.

Over time, with proper supervision, your child and puppy will have a very special relationship. If you have a few children, **INTRODUCE THE PUPPY TO ONE CHILD AT A TIME**, not all at the same time. They will be very excited, but this is not a relationship you want spoiled. Time, patience, understanding, and consistency are the recipe for a wonderful relationship between your children and their new puppy.

If your puppy is shy, timid, or fearful you will need to move very slowly in building this bond. If the puppy pulls away from your child, explain to your child that the puppy is a little shy right now and will need time to be comfortable. You can let the child offer the puppy a treat. If the puppy walks up for the treat, that is a great start. If the puppy is afraid to approach the child, let the child drop the treat on the floor and take a few steps back so the puppy can get the treat. After a few treat opportunities, the puppy will become conditioned to the idea that when the child is near, good things happen.

If the treats do not encourage the puppy to go to the child, explain to the child that the puppy is not brave enough right now and the puppy may feel a little braver next time. Most children are very understanding about such timid behaviour and are willing to wait.

As a safety precaution, tell your children they **SHOULD NEVER APPROACH A STRANGE DOG WITHOUT THE DOG OWNER'S PERMISSION!** ANY CONTACT WITH STRANGE DOGS SHOULD BE SUPERVISED BY YOU AS WELL AS THE DOG OWNER. The same approach outlined above should be made to strange dogs. Always ***approach a dog from the side*** and ***not head-on***. **Do not** *REACH OVER A STRANGE DOG'S HEAD* as this could be misinterpreted.



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us