



Paw Prints

Resource sheet: Socialization of your puppy is critical

The clock is ticking. By the time your puppy is 16 weeks old, he or she has completed her first critical socialization period. Puppies are curious about their environment, and puppyhood is the time when your dog will be most adaptive and open to new experiences. The breeder is responsible for part of this early socialization period; by the time you get your puppy (age 8 weeks is typical), you have only a few weeks left to help your puppy learn to be confident and calm.

Fearful puppies can become nervous adult dogs, and anxiety can lead to aggressive behavior. Socialization teaches your puppy that change is a normal part of life, and that new experiences are fun, not scary or threatening.

People often misunderstand socialization. Many people think a dog who has met a few other dogs and 20-30 people is socialized. Socialization is a lifelong process with some important first steps. *Socialization* means to expose dogs to as many and varied experiences as possible in a positive manner, throughout life but especially before 14-16 weeks of age, e.g. meeting and playing with other dogs in a safe and controlled environment. (Note: dogs who live with another dog will not automatically be relaxed around all other dogs.)

Your dog needs many and varied experiences

Although you should be careful about where you take your puppy for health reasons, all dogs, regardless of breed need early socialization to ensure normal development and behavior. It is definitely not acceptable to keep your puppy isolated until he or she is 12 to 15 weeks old.

A well-structured socialization program will integrate your dog into society in a safe and responsible manner.

Below is a list of common experiences for most dogs living in Wisconsin towns and cities. Your dog should be exposed to most or all of the following before 14-16 weeks of age:

- Traffic movement and noise, e.g. motorbikes, trains, trucks
- Trips in the car
- People of all ages, young children, old people, people in hats, sunglasses
- Skateboards, roller blades, bicycles
- Dogs, cats, farm animals
- Large crowds, shopping centers, busy streets
- Shopping carts, wheelchairs, strollers
- Lawnmowers, snow blowers, weed-eaters and other garden/household machinery
- Vacuum cleaners and other household noises
- Water – lakes, creeks, hoses.

To socialize your puppy, take him/her into the environment (e.g. shopping center, lakeshore) and let him/her investigate. Reward calm, confident behavior with pats and talking to your puppy.

If your puppy is initially shy about the situation, don't pat or cuddle him in an attempt to soothe his fears – you may accidentally reinforce the fear. Look around you and try to see things through your dog's eyes. Don't assume your dog will automatically cope with new experiences, because until he has been socialized to unusual objects and environments he will probably overreact. Instead, make sure he is safe (take him a little distance from whatever has startled him if necessary) and continue to reward calm, confident behavior.

Socialization checklist

For a well adjusted, well-socialized dog, try to complete this list by the time your dog is one year old, or within the next four months. Take care to avoid overwhelming your dog with too much all at once!

GENTLE HANDLING	
Head	
Ears	
Mouth	
Neck area	
Tail	
Paws and legs	
One minute groom with soft brush	
Gentle restraint until accepted	
Collar	
Leash	
Muzzle/Head halter	
By family and friends	
By people in the street	
OBJECT TO PLAY WITH (supervised)	
Cardboard box	
Bucket	
Treat ball/Kong	
Empty plastic bottle	
OTHER ANIMALS	
Friendly adult dogs (no aggressive dogs)	
Cats	
Guinea pigs	
Horses/Cattle	
Fish in tanks	
Chickens	
CHILDREN SEEN (boys and girls)	
Babies (0-2 years)	
Toddlers (2-6 years)	
School (6-13 years)	
Teenagers (13-17 years)	
SURFACES TO WALK ON	
Clean grass	
Linoleum/tiles/slippery surface	
Steps/stairs	
Gravel/stones/sand	
Snow/wet surfaces	
Pavement	
PREPARATION FOR VET/GROOMER	
Being lifted onto table	
Gentle restraint on table/examination	
Veterinary product smells	
Flea treatment/Pill giving	
Hair dryer	
Bath or Hydrobath	
LEARNING TO BE ALONE	
Five minutes isolation from family, followed by friendly human contact	

TYPES OF PEOPLE SEEN (men and women)	
Young adults	
Middle-aged youths	
Elderly people	
Disabled people	
People in wheelchairs	
Loud, confident people	
Shy, timid people	
People wearing hats/helmets	
People wearing glasses	
Men with beards/facial hair	
People in clothing other than uniform	
Postal employees	
OBJECTS TO CHEW	
Nylabone/Gumabone toys	
Rawhide chew (supervised)	
Strong toys (i.e., Kongs)	
Raw bones/Pigs' ears	
SOUNDS (use tapes to help)	
Household noises (including kitchen sounds)	
Washing machines	
Vacuum cleaner	
Music	
Children playing	
Doorbell/knocker/telephone	
Lawn mower and weed-eater	
Thunderstorm	
Gunshot and fireworks	
Car and traffic noises	
ENVIRONMENTAL SMELLS - bits of cloth wiped on:	
Other vaccinated dogs	
A cat	
A baby	
EXPERIENCES	
Garden hoses	
Car/van rides	
Watching passing traffic	
Playing with toys with people	
Parks	
Streets	
Bicycles/Motorbikes/Skateboards	
Trains/Buses	
Training - recall for food	
Tasting a variety of foods	
HOUSING/TRAINING/TOILET TRAINING	
Taken onto grass upon waking up or after a meal	
Given praise and treat for going to toilet outside	