



Early Puppy Socialization, Exposure, and Confidence Building

Socialization is one of the most crucial and time-sensitive aspects of raising a puppy. A puppy's magical sweet spot, otherwise known as the critical socialization period, is from 3 weeks to 4 months of age.

The benefits of *confidence* built through providing your puppy with a myriad of positive experiences during their first 4 months cannot be emphasized enough. Appropriate early socialization can mean the difference between a happy, well-balanced dog that can accompany you anywhere, and a dog that may be skittish and nervous almost everywhere outside their own bubble of safety.

Many puppy owners assume that socialization is all about playing with other dogs. While learning appropriate play is important, it is only a tiny piece of the pie. The goal is to help puppies ***carefully and safely form positive associations*** with as many things as possible that will be a part of their world.

- Objects
- People
- New Environments
- Sounds
- Handling
- Other Dogs
- Alone Time
- Other Animals

The best and fastest way to make sure your puppy has great experiences is to associate the new things (novel stimuli) with things they love (food or play). Be careful not to overwhelm your puppy. We want to help them learn that the world may be loud or unpredictable sometimes, but it's always safe and can be super fun! Go at your puppy's speed and never force them to do anything. Give your puppy the choice to say no, add distance, or leave the situation altogether. Be patient and take it easy as it's just as easy to imprint a negative association as it is a positive one. You must become an expert at reading your dog's body language and if they seem worried, or stop taking treats, you are either too close, or the new thing is too intense. Always be ready

and willing to increase the distance between the stimuli and your puppy, and/or decrease the intensity of the stimulus.

Early Socialization DOs:

- Introduce Puppy to all kinds of household items like vacuums, brooms, hair dryers, balloons, umbrellas, toys that move and make sounds, etc.
- Create a huggable puppy by hand feeding them dinner while gently touching all body parts from head to toe.
- Sit out in front of your house when it's busy on your street (or take a slow car ride with the windows down) and help Puppy enjoy passing trucks, bikes, strollers, children playing, other dogs etc.
- Create unusual surfaces for the puppy to walk on: bubble wrap, aluminum foil, wobbly surface, cardboard box, etc.
- Have everybody in your household play dress up and act like a silly willy! Put on "strange" things: hats, masks, glasses, clumpy boots, helmets. etc.
- Play audio of babies crying, children playing, thunder, sirens, etc.
- Feed every meal in a food puzzle or unusual item: a box, rolled up towel, muffin tin, plastic easter eggs, etc.
- Find a puppy class/school that practices strict safety protocols and the trainers have verified certifications.
- Seek out appropriate, one -on-one visits and appropriate playdates with other known vaccinated dogs.

Early Socialization DON'Ts:

- Go to Dog Parks, Dog Daycares or Big Box Stores
- Walk or sniff anywhere other dogs of unknown vaccination status have eliminated.
- Use any tools or methods that cause pain, intimidation, or fear.
- Keep your puppy home until vaccinations are complete.