



## **Safe socializing for puppies**

All puppies need to be socialized to different people, dogs and objects at a young age. And while it is said that puppies have a short socialization window between 8 and 16 weeks of age where most of this socialization should take place, this doesn't mean we should rush and force socialization and seek out every socialization opportunity possible, this not only puts pressure on us and our puppies but also can lead to the life long behaviour issues that you are trying to avoid.

Building a relationship and a bond of trust first before we over load the puppies with information overload and stimulus over load means if your puppy is uncomfortable they will look to you for guidance and know you will keep them safe, you will already know how to reassure them and no mistakes will be made, it will just be an experience.

If you are lucky enough to own a puppy in this age group, you have an amazing opportunity to shape their confidence and raise a well rounded adult dog, by putting in the time to carefully socialize them and create positive associations with all the things they will need to be exposed to be confident and care free adults but keep in mind you must go at the puppies pace, if a puppy shows hesitance or acts over excited, these are both red flags that there are uncomfortable and if we don't listen to them, and allow them the choice to say 'no thanks, not today' you will do more damage then socialization.



If your puppy has passed this time frame that's ok too, you can catch up on most of this socialization but first you must build trust and learn how to communicate with your puppy, learn how to be a good leader and role model so that your puppy can cope and be resilient in new situations.

If your dog has already formed a fearful association with say men wearing hats or people riding skate boards and has begun acting fearfully, this doesn't mean we should take to the streets and expose them everyday to the thing that scares them, this will only make the problem worse, your actually better off avoiding the scary thing for now and focus on having fun, building trust and confidence in other areas.

Unfortunately for some dogs who experience something traumatic in this window of time or during a fear period it can effect them for life, so it's important to take your time or seek help if your puppy shows fear to any of the things on the puppy socialization check list. (See other PDF files)

Your puppy only needs to spend a couple minutes at most with a stranger, a dog or an object as part of their socialization program, the important thing is they are having a positive experience and enjoying it, be very careful not to overwhelm the puppy, some puppies are sensitive and can't handle too much stimulation at once, this might mean only one new thing introduced to them every few days, the rest of the time is spent where they feel safe and comfortable and can be care free puppies, enjoying life!



There is a big misconception that to socialize your dog that people must touch your dog and this is wrong, for some puppies letting everyone and anyone rush up to and touch them is scary and can cause life long fear. Just being in the presence of people is enough, good socializing teaches the dog to be polite rather than get crazy excited when we see new people. Avoid giving people cookies to feed your dog, this can create over excitement in meeting people and may lead to puppy biting in excitement and in the future will make your dog super distracted around people.

Instead you could feed cookies to your dog for polite behaviour, I don't mean give them cues or commands! This is not socialization, it's not fun for puppies and puts so much pressure on them!

Instead you could smile at them and tell them how amazing they are for being attentive to you, "wow aren't you super adorable and so well behaved, would you like a cookie for being so darn cute?" This takes the emphasis away from any behaviour requirement and just allows you to be in that moment with your puppy with no expectations, which is so much more enjoyable and will provide a positive socialization experience.

If your puppy is scared stand further back and chat to the person and see if your puppy relaxes but don't coddle them and ask if they are ok, we don't want to make a big deal out of it. If distance doesn't help, this means your puppy is still too scared. Better end



this conversation and keep moving, 'its ok buddy I see your uncomfortable, lets continue our walk shall we' after this stick to quiet areas on your walk, don't try to meet anyone else new that day, your puppy needs a relaxing day to recover, doing this shows your puppy, you are listening, you can be trusted!

See dog body language charts pdf to understand the subtle signs that puppies use to show when they are scared, if you remove the puppy from this situation or create more space before they feel the need to bark or lunge at a person or dog, you can save them from a potentially bad experience or negative association forming.

Here's some safe Socialization ideas for before (and after) your puppy is vaccinated and ready to hit the streets :

- go to a quiet cafe that allows pups on their street patio at a quiet time ( eg La baguette, Dose, The Modern) and have the puppy on your lap or beside you on a comfortable blanket and feed them treats intermittently as the world goes by while you enjoy each other's company, focus on your pup, not the distractions. Your bound to have someone ask to say hi and this is ok but your puppy needs to be comfortable and given the choice not to interact if they aren't. Forcing a puppy to deal with their



- fears wont help them to overcome them. See podcast on socialization mistakes to avoid and the law of attraction fear. Linked on my website.
- take a large picnic blanket and sit at a park, in the parking lot of the green belt, somewhere not too busy and sit down with your pup and relax as the world goes by, praising for calm behaviour, tell them how amazing they are as people or dogs pass by, and you can feed your dog a treat every now and then when they are calm and focusing on you and choosing you over the distractions. But don't focus on training any cues, this will put too much pressure on your puppy and isn't necessary.

(It's not a good idea to let young unvaccinated puppies meet dogs with unknown vaccination history and frolick around on the ground where sick puppies or dogs may have been)

- other stores that allow dogs but always be polite and make sure it's ok to bring your pup in: big mountain kitchen, the Ford Dealership, Birch and Lace, CIBC, Valhalla



- take your puppy to the pet store and the vet and let them sniff and explore. The vet I aim for every now and then to weigh the puppy and feed a few treats my self. This is to get puppy used to visiting the vet so they don't just associate it with jabs and pain. **However** I do not recommend letting your puppy walk from the car to the vets office or anywhere other then the scale before they are vaccinated (make sure that it has been cleaned first) until you have determined they have reached immunity, as this is the most likely place to catch a virus for your puppy. (Immunity does not mean 3 sets of puppy shots, please ask for links on developing a natural immunity)
- take your puppy to one of the many benches around town and watch the world go by while you feed an extra delicious treat every now and then as you enjoy these moments together as loud noises, scary children, bicycles, motorbikes or loud trucks go by. This gets your dog used to the sounds but only if the puppy isn't showing signs of fear or stress and enjoying the noise and busyness. But again careful not to overdo it, if the pup looks scared move further away from the noise and bustle to a place where the dog isn't scared and work from there.
- Once you learn some of the fun new Foundation games in your lessons , you can practice these as part of your dogs socialization in new places and around new distractions.