

Puppy/Dog Socialization

Socialization is most critical for young dogs from 4 weeks to 4 months. However, maintaining your dog's socialization is a life-long process. To socialize your dog is to help them have **positive** exposure experiences with all sorts of people, environments, different looking dogs, other animals, etc. Socialization is accomplished by gradually allowing your dog to investigate these new stimuli and associate them with something the dog likes, like treats or play. It is critical that the dog is exposed to new stimuli on a voluntary basis and not forced to interact with beings or objects with which she/he is afraid. An under-socialized dog is more likely to bite and/or become stressed in unfamiliar environments and situations. Though genetics also plays a role in a dog's behavior, you can have a great impact on your dog's future behavior by appropriately socializing him/her.

The Primary Socialization Period Four-Sixteen Weeks of Age

Here's a schedule of how a puppy learns during this time:

- Between three to five weeks of age, puppies are just becoming aware of their surroundings, companions (dogs and people) and relationships, and beginning to learn how to play.
- Between four and six weeks of age, puppies are learning about being a dog through socializing with their littermates.
- From four to 12 weeks of age, puppies are most influenced by their littermates *and* people. They're also refining their play, social skills, inhibited bite, social structure/ranking and physical coordination.
- By five to seven weeks they're developing curiosity and exploring new places. They need positive experiences with people during this time.
- Between seven to nine weeks of age, they're further refining they're physical skills/coordination (including housetraining) and full use of senses.
- By eight to ten weeks of age, they experience real fear -- puppies can be alarmed by normal objects and experiences; they need positive training and socialization at this time.
- Between nine and 12 weeks they're refining reactions, social skills (appropriate interactions) with other dogs and are exploring the environment, spaces and objects. At this time they begin to focus on people. This is a good time to begin training.
- Around four months of age, they experience another fear stage.

Now, Here's How You Can Help Socialize Your Pup!

The Puppy's Rules of Twelve

Written by Margaret Hughes-Positive Paws Dog Training ©2002

Adapted with permission from Pat Schaap's "RULE OF 7's" for 7 week old puppies

Make sure all experiences are safe and positive for the puppy. Each encounter should include treats and lots of praise. Slow down and increase the distance from a new object/stimuli if your puppy is scared of it. By the time a puppy is 12 weeks old, it should have: (If your puppy is older than 12 weeks start right away with this socialization guide.)

1. **Experienced many daily different surfaces:** wood, woodchips, carpet, tile, cement, linoleum, grass, wet grass, dirt, mud, puddles, deep pea gravel, grates, uneven surfaces, on a table, on a chair, etc.....
2. **Played with many different objects:** fuzzy toys, big & small balls, hard toys, funny sounding toys, wooden items, paper or cardboard items, milk jugs, metal items, car keys, etc.....
3. **Experienced many different locations:** front yard (daily), other people's homes, school yard, lake, pond, river, boat, basement, elevator, car, moving car, garage, laundry room, kennel, veterinarian hospital (just to say hi & visit, lots of cookies, no vaccinations), grooming salon (just to say hi), etc....
4. **Met and played with many new people** (outside of family): include children, adults (mostly men), elderly adults, people in wheelchairs, walkers, people with canes, crutches, hats, sunglasses, etc....
5. **Exposed to many different noises** (ALWAYS keep positive and watch puppy's comfort level – we don't want the puppy scared): garage door opening, doorbell, children playing, babies screaming, big trucks, Harley motorcycles, skateboards, washing machine, shopping carts rolling, power boat, clapping, loud singing, pan dropping, horses neighing, vacuums, lawnmowers, birthday party, etc...
6. **Exposed to many fast moving objects** (don't allow to chase): skateboards, roller-skates, bicycles, motorcycles, cars, people running, cats running, scooters, vacuums, children running, children playing soccer, squirrels, cats, horses running, cows running, etc...
7. **Experienced many different challenges:** climb on, in, off and around a box, go through a cardboard tunnel, climb up and down steps, climb over obstacles, play hide & seek, go in and out a doorway with a step up or down, exposed to an electric sliding door, umbrella, balloons, walk on a wobbly table (plank of wood with a small rock underneath), jump over a broom, climb over a log, bathtub (and bath) etc....
8. **Handled by owner (& family) many times a week:** hold under arm (like a football), hold to chest, hold on floor near owner, hold in-between owner's legs, hold head, look in ears, mouth, in-between toes, hold and take temperature (ask veterinarian), hold like a baby, trim toe nails, hold in lap, etc...
9. **Eaten from many different shaped containers:** wobbly bowl, metal, cardboard box, paper, coffee cup, china, pie plate, plastic, frying pan, © Kong, Treatball, ©Bustercube, spoon fed, paper bag, etc.....
10. **Eaten in many different locations:** back yard, front yard, crate, kitchen, basement, laundry room, bathroom, friend's house, car, school yard, bathtub, up high (on work bench), under umbrella, etc....
11. **Played** with many different puppies (or safe adult dogs) as much as possible.
12. **Left alone safely**, away from family & other animals (5-45 minutes) many times a week.
13. **Experienced a leash and collar** many different times in lots different locations.

For any questions on socializing your pet or on pet behavior in general, please contact the UVHS Training Center at (603) 448-6888 ext. 123 or training@uvhs.org