

Puppy Socialization

Bringing a new puppy into your home can be such an exciting time. Puppies are full of energy, joy, and mischievousness. If your goal is to have a well socialized, well-behaved adult dog, it is up to you to make sure that your dog grows up to be the kind of dog that you want in your family. To do that you must begin training and socializing your puppy as soon as possible. The following guide will help you understand how important each developmental stage is for your growing puppy.

0 - 2 Weeks: Neonatal Development

At this point, puppies are completely dependent on their mothers.

2 - 4 Weeks: Exploration Within the Litter

The puppy's eyes and ears are open and their senses begin to develop. The puppy starts moving around.

3 - 16 Weeks: Critical Socialization Period

Puppies will be most influenced by things that they are or aren't exposed to in this period of their life. Puppies should be allowed to stay with their mother until 6-8 weeks and should be allowed to socialize with their litter mates no less than 8-10 weeks. During this time, puppies will begin learning important communication skills including appropriate play styles and bite inhibition. You will need to puppy proof your home by removing all items out of the puppy's reach that you don't want to end up in their mouth including shoes, cords, remotes, children's toys, etc.

During this time it is important to create predictable schedules for sleep, eating, play, and potty. By creating a schedule that your dog can depend on as early as possible you can set your dog up for success now and later in life. Your puppy will also need gentle and positive exposure to all types of things that he will experience throughout their life.

Puppies that have had an appropriate number of vaccinations can attend puppy training classes. Puppy classes should be indoor and should be held in a clean environment and with other puppies of a similar age. Puppy classes can be a great place to introduce your puppy to new people and dogs in a safe, structured way.

4 - 6 Months

Puppy will begin teething/chewing. Provide your puppy with lots of toys and appropriate chews. If you catch your puppy chewing on something that they shouldn't redirect his chewing to one of his appropriate chews or toys.

Your puppy may experience what is referred to as a "fear period" where he becomes very impressionable and can become fearful of things that he was formerly not fearful of. If you notice that your puppy begins to behave fearfully of things during this time period you should seek the help of a professional to avoid any further development of behaviors that can become even more serious.

Puppies will begin to enter into their adolescent period during this time which will increase their curiosity. Increased curiosity often means increased mischievousness. Young puppies are often very active and needs lots of positive instructions in this time. If you haven't already enrolled your puppy in obedience courses, this is a perfect time to do that so you can learn how to harness your dog's rapidly developing behavior.

6 - 18 Months

Puppies will continue into their adolescence up to 18 months, and sometimes up to 24 months depending on your individual dog's personality. Your dog may experience another "fear period" during this period of adolescence.

Behaviors and habits that your dog learns are rewarding in this period of time they will likely carry on into adulthood. When we think about what is rewarding to our dogs we need to get inside the mind of our dog. If a dog jumps up on a counter and grabs your half-eaten sandwich, he is going to be rewarded by this behavior and will therefore be likely to repeat the behavior of jumping on the counter to investigate. Likewise, if your dog is afraid of something which causes them to bark, growl, or snap these behaviors could also be reinforced in your dog's mind. Contact a skilled trainer or behavior specialist if your dog develops problematic behaviors because you will have the most chance of success the younger the dog is able to learn a more appropriate alternative behavior.