

SOCIALISATION

Socialisation & Habituation – the secret of a friendly fido

What does socialisation mean?

Socialisation means letting your puppy get used to other dogs and to learn proper doggy communication skills so that he can get on happily with other dogs in the future. Habituation is teaching your puppy that people, other animals, strange experiences, objects and situations are nothing to be scared of. However, for convenience's sake, these two processes may be referred to as just socialisation.

If a puppy is not socialised properly from the time that you get him and throughout his first year, this can lead to serious fear and aggression problems in later life. It is therefore, **very important**. If you want a happy, friendly dog that you can take anywhere and meet anyone, then socialisation is the key!

- Please note that if you are taking on an older dog, it is still possible to socialise him but it may take more time and effort and you may need help from a professional behaviourist or trainer.
- You can extend the time that socialisation can take place by asking your vet for a DAP (Dog Appeasing Pheromone), which you plug into a socket in the room that your puppy uses during the day. The DAP releases a scent to your dog which mimics that released by a mother dog and makes him more able to cope with strange and new experiences. These can also be used to help adult dogs.

Socialisation should start the earlier the better

Socialisation should start even before you get your puppy. Ask your Rehoming Centre or breeder what experiences your puppy has had up till now.

- If you plan to get a puppy from a breeder, try to make sure that the puppy has been bred and brought up in the breeder's home, as those only kept in kennels will need extra help to cope with everyday human households and activities.
- Puppies can be vaccinated from 6 to 8 weeks old with a final injection at 10 weeks. Ask your breeder if they will have your puppy vaccinated early, so that you can safely start your socialisation as soon as possible after he has settled in with you.

Safety first – vaccinations and diseases

Although it is very important to start to socialise your puppy as soon as possible, you must also ensure that he isn't exposed to potentially fatal canine diseases.

- Have your puppy vaccinated as early as possible – please speak to your vet about this.
- After the first vaccination it may be possible to attend a local puppy party or class, so that your puppy can meet other puppies of a similar age in a safe environment. Your veterinary surgery may run these or know of a good trainer in your area. Make sure you visit without your puppy first, so that you are happy with their methods.
- Check with your vet to make sure that your local area is not a high-risk area for disease – there may have been a local outbreak that your vet may be aware of. If so, be especially careful.
- If your puppy is not fully vaccinated then carry him around to see people, experience traffic noise, public transport, or meet other dogs that you know have been vaccinated. Be careful not to let him touch the ground, especially in areas like the park, where unvaccinated dogs may have been.

How do you do it?

It's quite simple really – let your puppy experience something new and praise good, calm behaviour. Here are

some examples:

- Stand with your puppy beside the road and let him watch and listen as cars go by. If he sits with you calmly, tell him he's a good boy and give him a treat.
- Ask a friendly person to speak to and stroke your puppy under the chin gently. If your puppy is quite happy, doesn't nip at the stranger's fingers or bark then praise him and ask the stranger to give your puppy a treat.
- Let him meet a friend's vaccinated well behaved adult dog in your garden on a regular basis. Supervise them closely and watch how your puppy learns his doggy social skills. Praise your puppy for gentle play and friendliness towards the other dog – remember that it is okay for an older dog to tell a puppy off if he bites too hard or forgets his manners!
- Teach your puppy to be gentle, calm and obedient, even in exciting circumstances – especially around children.

What not to do!

You don't want to encourage your puppy to be scared - so if your puppy shows a nervous reaction to anything new, remove him from what is scaring him until he seems okay and then try again later.

- If your puppy shows a big scared reaction to anything, then ask your vet for advice. It is easier to deal with a possible fear problem at this young age than later.
- Supervise play with other dogs carefully. Don't let play get too boisterous as this can encourage your puppy to fight as he gets older.
- Never allow your puppy to jump up at or nip the hands of people that he meets. Teach him to sit calmly beside you or in your arms whilst he is being petted.
- Don't try to expose your puppy to too many new things in one day, or you could do more damage than good. Try to experience no more than 3 new things a day from the lists below with your puppy and repeat as often as possible once your puppy is happy with them.

Socialisation list

Here is a list of things that you will need to get your puppy used to. This is just to give you help with suggestions and you may find many more to add to it. Some of them may seem strange, but you need to prepare him, as you can't predict how your circumstances may change in the future. Some of them will even be important for if you take your dog on holiday, for example.

People

- of all ages from babies to elderly people
- of all races
- of all physical abilities / sizes
- with beards / wearing glasses / wearing hats / different styles of clothing
- running / jogging / skateboarding / cycling etc.
- carrying umbrellas

Other animals

- Dogs of all sizes / ages / breed and appearances
- Cats
- Rabbits / small pets
- Sheep / cattle
- Horses with and without riders

Your environment – home and outdoors

- Normal household appliances – the vacuum cleaner, washing machine etc.
- Traffic
- The postman / paperboy / dustbin men etc.
- Travelling in cars, buses and trains etc.
- The veterinary surgery / grooming parlour
- Loud noises – fireworks, babies crying etc. (try to obtain a tape of these and play quietly to your puppy during enjoyable times, such as feeding – slowly increasing the volume over time until he isn't bothered by even loud bangs).

We hope that this factsheet will help ensure that your puppy grows up to be a happy, confident and friendly fido. **If you have any socialisation problems then please do contact us for further advice or ask your vet to put you in touch with a behaviour specialist.**