



WHAT IS SOCIALISATION; WHY IS IT IMPORTANT AND HOW DO WE DO IT?



WHAT IS SOCIALISATION?

In a nutshell, socialisation is about giving our dogs the best possible start in life, which will prepare them for living happily in a human world. We want our dogs to get on well with other animals and to be able to cope with a wide variety of different everyday experiences and situations.

The first 12 -16 weeks of a puppy's life are the most important weeks of their entire lives. This period is also known as the critical socialisation period and for good reason. It is critical to socialise our dogs if we want them to grow into well-rounded adults. During this period we need them to learn as much as possible about their new world and how to interact with it and at the same time, we want them to learn that these things, are in the most part, not only safe, but can wonderful too.

During this critical period, it is so important to expose our puppies in a safe and systematic way, to as wide a range of people, including children, dogs, other animals, environments and objects, as we possibly can.

After this period passes, anything unfamiliar will be treated with caution, which ultimately could lead to fear and aggression.

Why Socialise?

Puppies that are well socialised grow up to be friendly, happy and enjoy being around people, and other animals and will take new experiences in their stride.

Unfortunately, a dog that has had inadequate or incomplete socialisation as a puppy, can often go on to develop a range of behavioural problems centred around avoidance, fear and aggression.

These problems may manifest as aggressiveness towards other dogs and animals, fear of people, not liking being touched or handled and other fear related behaviour. A natural response of a dog that is frightened is to be aggressive and even bite if it feels it has no option or other way of getting out of the situation.

Dogs that have had inadequate socialisation are often difficult for many owners to live with and this may result in the dog being relinquished to a rescue organisation, rehomed or in extreme cases, euthanasia.

More young dogs die because of behavioural problems than ever die from the infectious diseases that we vaccinate against.

How do I Socialise?

Well the good news is that socialisation is easy to do; you just need to do it.

From the moment the puppy is born, the clock is ticking and so ideally the puppy socialisation should have started with the breeder. If your puppy was born into a quiet house or worse still, a shed or a kennel, you will need to do your best to catch up on lost time. With all puppies though, the sooner you start, the better.

Basically, you will need to carefully and systematically expose your puppy to as many new experiences as possible in these critical first few weeks of life. First experiences have the biggest impact on puppies, so the first time your puppy sees a strange person, ask them to give puppy a really tasty treat - imagine the puppy thinking "wow, that was interesting and I got some tasty snack too."

Take them to as many places as you can and give them a good time. Try to think ahead and do all you can to ensure that your puppy does not have an unpleasant or scary experience. Don't let puppy become overwhelmed with too much all at once, if they appear frightened or overwhelmed,



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give them some more distance by moving away and let them come back when they are ready. Finally, when you are done, take them home for a well-earned rest.

A good way to plan socialisation is to write down all the people, places and objects you are likely to come across and start ticking them off as your puppy experiences them.

If your puppy has not completed its course of vaccinations, it does not mean you cannot take it out - by following some simple rules you can still benefit from the opportunity to socialise and at the same time reduce the risk of infectious diseases: -

- You should not let your puppy mix with unvaccinated dogs.
- You should avoid walking your dog in areas where there is a high amount of dog activity.
- Ask visitors to remove their outdoor shoes before coming into the puppy area.
- Do carry your puppy to avoid contact with areas that other dogs may have soiled.

Socialisation and Vaccination

While puppies' immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small when compared to the chance of death from a behaviour problem in later life.

Veterinarians specialising in behaviour recommend that owners take advantage of every safe opportunity to expose young puppies to the great variety of things that they will experience in their lives.

Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socialising puppies in an environment where risk of illness can be minimised.

In general, puppies can start puppy socialisation classes as early as 7-8 weeks of age. Puppies should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days prior to the 1st class. (AVSAB)

Classes

Contact your local veterinary practice to see if they run puppy parties, these are a great way to kick-start the socialisation process.

It is always difficult choosing a puppy class, look for classes that emphasise socialisation for very young puppies and use reward based training methods - you are always welcome to come and view our classes.

For more information on classes that specialise in socialisation of puppies and young dogs visit www.puppystars.co.uk or call 07542 131400.



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