

The Puppy Socialization Handbook

Setting Your Puppy Up for Success



Types of Socialization

People	Gender, age, height, size, clothing, facial hair
Dogs	Breed, size, energy level, play style, colour
Body Handling	Face, mouth, ears, feet, tail, genitals, and anus
Surfaces, Sounds, Moving Objects	Concrete, grass, slippery surfaces, fireworks, vacuums, thunder, bikes, cars, skateboards

Socialization

You've probably heard that you should be socializing your puppy, but what exactly is socialization, and why is it important?

Socialization is the process of introducing your puppy to a wide range of things when they're very young (the younger the better!). At this age, their brains are wired for accepting new experiences easily, so focus on socialization over obedience while you can!

As they get older, they become less open to new experiences and are more likely to be fearful of things they haven't encountered before, which can quickly turn into a complex behaviour problem that is much more difficult to fix.

Socializing your puppy is the most important thing you can do for them. Read on for information on how to introduce your puppy to all the world has to offer.

Children are the most likely demographic to be bitten – and because of their size, it's usually on the face. It's important to introduce your puppy to polite children of all ages. If you have children, make sure that you supervise them with your puppy and teach everyone how to interact politely. Help your puppy grow into a dog who loves kids!





The Nuts and Bolts of Socialization

The Golden Rule of Socialization: Let your puppy set the pace!

After hearing how important socialization is for your puppy's wellbeing, it's tempting to dive right in. However, it's important that these experiences are positive for your puppy. A single scary experience can stay with them for a long time, so take the time to make sure they're not in over their head.

Let them try new things at their own pace – they are the best judges of how scary something

is, and if they want to be in the middle of the action, they'll put themselves there! If they're frightened or overwhelmed, it's okay to pick them up or shoo away a group of dogs – you can't make their fear worse by protecting them!

Make a habit of providing positive consequences for bravery, especially with new things – this can be yummy treats, a happy voice, or play.

Make an effort to introduce your puppy to a couple of new things every day. For a shyer puppy, that may mean introductions at a distance as you build their confidence.

Take them for a walk in a new location, introduce some new sounds in your home, or ask someone to meet your puppy (always get parental consent for children). And remember – let your puppy set the pace!

Surfaces, Sounds, & Moving Objects

The world is full of unexpected surfaces, sounds, and moving objects. Imagine if you didn't know what they were or if they could hurt you!

The biggest culprits are thunder storms and fireworks, although the vacuum cleaner runs a close third. Whenever you know one of these things is

likely to occur, stash some yummy treats in a few rooms around your home in advance. As soon as the noise starts, get very excited, rush over to your stash, and begin feeding your puppy one piece after another. Soon they will come to learn that fireworks mean wonderful things will happen!



Surfaces and moving objects are generally easy to work on. Take your puppy to progressively higher-traffic areas, giving them plenty of space from the road. Walk your puppy over varying surfaces daily.



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From your home to the street to the veterinarian's office, your puppy is likely to encounter hundreds of people throughout their lifetime. Some of these people will ignore them completely, but others will need to be able to fully examine them from nose to tail (including you!).

The first step to socializing your puppy with people is to acknowledge how high of a bar we've set for them. We often expect behaviour of our dogs that we would never expect of ourselves – imagine if you were expected to shake hands with every person you encountered on your daily walk, or if it was never okay for you to be grumpy with people! Empathizing with your dog will help you to follow the Golden Rule of Socialization: let your puppy set the pace! If they don't seem keen on climbing into the arms of a tall man, let them observe from a distance, and give the man a few treats

to toss to your puppy. Let them say, "Not now, thank you," and they will be less likely to develop fearful behaviour toward people. Take the time to teach the people in your life (children especially) to respect your puppy's decision to walk away and be left alone.

When you're introducing your puppy to people, look for people from different demographics. It can be helpful to make a list so that you don't accidentally forget to introduce them to seniors! Give people a few little treats to give to your puppy for free (no sits or shake-a-paws necessary!).

We strongly recommend taking your puppy on social visits to veterinarian's offices. Bring some tiny pieces of real meat with you (hot dogs or cooked chicken are easiest). Let the staff say hello to your puppy, and ask them if they can give a quick full body handle to

your puppy. They may even be willing to let you into an exam room! Do this once a week until they're six months old, and you will quickly have a puppy who loves the vet!



You should also practice body handling on your own at home. Make sure you handle the mouth (including opening it), the face, ears (including looking/touching inside), the body, all four feet, the tail, and their genitals. Throughout their lives they will be examined repeatedly, often in high stress situations and by strangers, so teach them now that this is a good thing! Keep some yummy treats on hand while you work.

People

Nothing is more important for your puppy's long-term wellbeing than teaching them that people and all the unpredictable, invasive, and downright weird things they do are awesome. Let's get started!

Why is grooming important?

Did you know that grooming your dog is about much more than cosmetics? While a nice shiny coat, good breath, and unscratched floors are great bonuses, your pet's health and behaviour are both major things that can be affected by a lack of grooming.

Poor dental hygiene is a major source of pain and infection, which can become deadly. It can also impact a dog's ability to eat and even groom themselves properly, leading to further issues.

Matted fur is also extremely painful – it pulls tightly on the skin, and can cause sores.

Long nails impact your dog's posture and gait, making it uncomfortable for them to run, climb stairs, or even walk. They can cause a significant amount of foot pain as well (it would be similar to walking around with

your toenails jamming into the ends of your shoes all the time).

While the physical effects are more obvious, the behavioural effects can sneak up on us. Pain is a major factor in the development of behaviour issues. Just like us, when they're in pain dogs are more prone to grumpy and even aggressive behaviour. Sometimes dogs develop problems that are seemingly unrelated, like house soiling or aggression to other dogs. This can happen slowly over time or abruptly after a major pain incident.

Eventually, as the dog's pain worsens, they become more and more difficult to handle. It becomes difficult to take them to the vet, meaning that late detection of lumps, bumps, and illnesses becomes likely.

We recommend giving a few minutes of grooming attention

daily at home. If you take your puppy to a groomer, commit to a regular six week schedule, and do maintenance at home between appointments. If you keep on top of it, it becomes less of a daunting project.

Start brushing your puppy's teeth while they're young to teach them how fun it is, even if there's nothing on the brush. Developing this skill now means you won't have to do it for the first time when they're a senior!

Inspect your dog for mats daily. They're common behind the ears, under armpits, on tails, and between their back legs (although they can occur anywhere on many breeds). If you have a curly-coated dog, make sure you inspect down to the skin – many of these dogs look fine on the surface, but a closer look reveals severe matting at the skin. Consult a groomer about removing mats.

Making Nail Clipping Painless and Easy

Nail trims rank high on the list of things that dog owners and dogs themselves hate equally. Thankfully, you can actually make this an easy process!

Firstly, commit to a weekly nail trim. Book it in your calendar if you need to. Letting it slide too long makes it a more painful process for both of you in the end.

Take the time to create a positive association with the nail clippers.

Show your puppy the clippers, and then feed them something delicious. Also, keep up on your foot handling practice!

Make sure you pick up a pair of sharp nail clippers. We recommend the kind that look like wire-cutters, and not the guillotine style, which can crush the nail.

When it comes time to actually clip the nails, use the clippers to shave off small pieces of the nail at a time.

Treat it like whittling – a little here, a little there, until you can start to see the pink quick in the centre of the nail more clearly. You will need to be careful if your puppy has black nails. Shaving off small pieces rather than taking off large chunks makes you less likely to hit the quick, and it feels better for your puppy!

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Playing With Other Puppies

Watching your puppy play with other puppies can be a joyful and rewarding experience. However, just like with children, it's important that they learn what appropriate play is and when to leave others alone.

It's important to give your puppy experience with a wide variety of dogs. However, make sure you're choosing playmates wisely – a large dog can easily injure a small breed puppy just through play. Also do your best to match your puppy up with puppies that have a similar play style. A wrestler and a chaser are unlikely to have the same idea of what's fun! Supervise play closely to make sure that everyone is enjoying themselves.

Another thing you can do to set your puppy up for success is to give them frequent breaks to relax or focus on you. Interrupt them when their excitement

levels start to increase. You can play with them to get them focused on you, or take a minute to relax.

Lastly, make a conscious effort to reward exuberant puppies every time they voluntarily walk away from play. This will teach them that leaving play is a great thing, making them more likely to do it on their own in the future.

What do I do when things go wrong?

First, breathe! Puppies will occasionally have spats, and it doesn't mean they're being bad. In fact, that they've survived as a social species for so long actually indicates a lot of skill at navigating conflict!

If you're at all unsure or the situation is escalating quickly, calmly interrupt the play right away. Otherwise, ask yourself the following two questions before

intervening:

1. Are both puppies happy (loose/wiggly bodies, fully engaged in play, not hiding, snapping, or growling)?
2. Is the unhappy puppy successful at getting the other puppy to go away (through polite communication such as snapping, growling, baring teeth, showing belly, or walking away)?

If the answer to these questions is no, then you can give the overly-persistent puppy a time out. However, if the answer to the second question is yes, then you don't have to do anything – the puppies communicated with each other appropriately and got their message across!

Ouch! Those teeth are sharp.

Puppies have incredibly sharp little teeth, but weak jaws. However, that will quickly change! Now is the time to teach your puppy how to soften their bite.

It's generally a good idea to teach your puppy to bite softly before you teach them not to bite at all. This means that if they do feel the need to use their teeth in the future, it's

more likely to be a soft warning.

For the first week, decide how much pressure is too much. When you're playing with your puppy, give them a warning when they get close to that pressure ("careful..."). If they escalate their pressure, calmly say "Ouch" and end the play. Get up and ignore them completely.

In the following weeks, change the amount of pressure that's acceptable (your "warning pressure" from the first week will become your "ouch pressure" for the second week, and so on). Once your puppy only mouths softly, you can give time outs for any mouthing at all.

Also ensure your puppy has regular access to chew toys!

Boredom Busting: Puzzles, Games, and Sports

As a species, dogs are curious, energetic, and are natural problem-solvers. Unfortunately, without appropriate outlets, they'll often problem-solve their way through your baseboards and chair legs! Bored, under-stimulated puppies find things to do, and these behaviours can develop into long-term adult behaviours.

Physical and mental enrichment are both key components in the physical and psychological health of your dog. A lack of enrichment is often a major factor in the development of destructive and nuisance behaviours. You can help your dog live more comfortably in your home by providing them with deliberate opportunities to challenge their mind & body.

The Basics

While most people know that walks are beneficial for their pet, regular walks should be combined with other forms of

activity to provide the most benefit to your dog. Allow your dog plenty of opportunity to sniff and explore while on your walks. Sniffing is an extremely stimulating and tiring activity for dogs; your dog will get much more out of their walks if they can satisfy this need.

Chewing and digging are also normal things for dogs to do and require appropriate outlets. A sand box is an easy way to satisfy your dog's urge to dig without sacrificing your garden. Bury some toys in the sand box to encourage your dog to use it, and cover it when not in use to keep out cats and other critters.

Dogs have an inherent need to chew and will direct this onto undesirable items if not given an outlet. Stuffed food toys are a great way to satisfy this need. They can be frozen to make them more of a challenge for your dog.

There are many toys available specifically for chewing and problem solving. Make sure to

always supervise your pet with these to make sure they're not eating pieces of the toys, as no toy is entirely indestructible.

Dog Sports

Some dogs benefit from more complex forms of enrichment. Dog sports are a fantastic way for you to engage your dog's body and mind.

One of the most popular dog sports is agility, which involves directing your dog over a series of obstacles. Disc sports are a popular low-equipment option. Each sport provides both mental and physical stimulation as well as a great bonding opportunity.

There are many other growing dog sports that may be suitable for your dog. Dock diving, scent detection, lure coursing, rally obedience, barn hunts, flyball, & others all offer different forms of enrichment for varying types of dogs.



DOG JOGS

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House Training

Constant supervision is a critical part of training your puppy to eliminate outside. You can tether your puppy to you or use gates and pens to limit their access to the rest of the house. This will also help reduce unwanted chewing!

Whenever you're home but unable to supervise, put your puppy in their kennel to prevent accidents. The kennel should be small enough that they can't eliminate on one end and sleep on the other.

If you will be away from home for a short time, you can use the kennel. If you'll be away from home for longer than a couple of hours, you are better off setting up an exercise pen for your puppy, or having somebody come by to let them out. Keep their bed, toys, and water at one end, and pads or turf at the other, with little to no floor exposed. This gives them a "legal" place to go while you're gone, as their bodies are not yet capable of holding it for long periods. There is a risk with pad training that your dog will go on other surfaces in the future when they can't hold it (such as carpets and mats) – however, this is unlikely to be a problem for you unless you are regularly leaving them for longer than they can hold it.

The final thing you will need to do is stick to a regular schedule for going outside. At the beginning, every hour is recommended. Bring treats outside with you so you can reward your puppy for getting it right! Also take them out when they first wake up, after every meal, whenever you let them out of their kennel/pen, and whenever they wake up from a nap.

Each week, increase the length of time between each outing by 30 minutes. As they get older, you can increase by an hour at a time.

If they do have an accident inside, don't lose your cool! Mistakes will be seldom but will likely occur. Clean it up with an odor-neutralizing cleaner and vow to supervise more closely next time. Punishing your puppy is futile and will often make the elimination problem worse.

As your puppy gets older, you can give them more freedom in the home, but still make a point of supervising. If you're finding that they're starting to have accidents, tighten up supervision again so you can watch for signs they need to go outside.



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