

Disclaimer:

This socialization guide is not a guarantee of any particular outcomes of socialization or training. It is not tailored to any individual puppy's temperament or personality. It is designed to give people general guidelines that are based on best practices and current scientific evidence about socialization in puppies, and is not intended to replace or substitute for the recommendations of your veterinarian. You should consult with your veterinarian before beginning any socialization or training program.

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SOCIALIZATION

RULES OF THE ROAD



RULE #1



Protect your puppy from infectious diseases by putting him in a stroller or carrier when in public spaces where dogs frequent, such as pet supply stores, public parks, common areas of apartment complexes, and veterinary clinics.

Until puppies have received the full series of puppy vaccinations, they are susceptible to diseases such as Canine parvovirus or Canine distemper that are serious and often fatal.

Many veterinarians caution their clients not to take their puppies to puppy class or to public places at all until they are fully vaccinated, which is at 14 - 16 weeks. The problem with that is that the primary socialization period in dogs runs from around 3 weeks of age to around 12 weeks of age. If we wait to introduce our puppies to places and experiences outside of their home until they are fully vaccinated, they are more likely to develop fear based behavioral problems.

Many veterinarians and veterinary associations are starting to realize that with proper precautions, the benefits of socialization far outweigh the risks of disease, and are actively promoting safe socialization.

Per the American Animal Hospital Association, "There is no medical reason to delay puppy and kitten classes or social exposure until the vaccination series is completed as long as exposure to sick animals is prohibited, basic hygiene is practiced, and diets are high quality. The risks attendant with missing social exposure far exceed any disease risk."

[2015 AAHA Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines](#)

RULE #2



Allow 3 - 5 days for your puppy to settle in to her new home and new family members before beginning a socialization program outside the home.

Although it's tempting to start taking your new addition out and about, puppies need a few days to adjust to their new home environment.

Remember, they are used to being with their mother and littermates, so being abruptly removed from that world and placed in a totally new one is often stressful. It's best to limit new people and things for the first few days. There are plenty of new experiences to be had at home.

RULE #3



Effective and safe socialization cannot be accomplished without a good understanding of canine body language. Educate yourself on the finer points of how dogs communicate what they are feeling with their bodies.

The signs of anxiety, reluctance, frustration and even fear are often missed or ignored by people, even those with plenty of experience with dogs. This is due to the fact that it is non-verbal communication.

It is critical that socialization experiences are not just not frightening to your puppy, but that they are enjoyable. In order to ensure that your puppy is enjoying experiencing new things, you must be able to read her body language.

Check out this fantastic [poster](#) of the body language of fear in dogs, created by the late Dr. Sophia Yin, a veterinary behaviorist.

Here is a good [video](#) by thefamilydog illustrating dog body language.

RULE #4



Use your knowledge of dog body language to determine what kind of temperament your puppy has. After your puppy has had a couple of days at home, you should start getting an idea of whether your puppy is generally shy or outgoing, bold and confident, or cautious and sensitive.

After the initial settling in period, make a point to quietly observe your puppy when he is experiencing something new at a distance.

When your puppy hears a dog barking at a distance, does he tilt his head and look curious, maybe going towards the sound? Or does he look nervous and move away from the sound or toward you for comfort? All very young puppies can be fearful of new things in the first few days of being in a new home, but after they have settled in, if you notice that your puppy tends to be shy, anxious, retreating, or fearful of anything new, that is a sign that he may have a shy or fearful temperament.

Puppies with shy, retreating, and/or fearful temperaments will need extra time, distance, and lower intensity exposures to new things, than puppies with more outgoing and bold temperaments.

RULE #5



Reserve a portion of your puppy's daily meals to use in socialization experiences.

Offer kibble and/or treats whenever puppy is seeing, hearing, smelling, or touching anything unfamiliar.

Depending on your puppy's temperament and motivation for food, food may or may not be appealing to him when he is experiencing something new. But if your puppy is normally a chow hound and will not take any food and is displaying signs of stress, that means you should increase your distance from the new thing. Do not attempt to use food to lure or coerce a puppy to interact with something new. If your puppy is reluctant to interact, you should respect that. But if your puppy acts curious or bold, reward that bravery with food if he will take it.

RULE #6



When introducing your puppy to something new, begin at a greater distance from it if possible, and/or a lower intensity version of it, and over days and weeks gradually decrease distance and increase intensity.

It's easier to go slow and prevent incidents that overwhelm your puppy and cause fear than it is to go back and counter condition your adolescent or adult dog to an experience that frightened them. For example, start introductions with people with just one person in your home on one day, and then two people inside your home, and gradually work up to meeting a small group of people.

When you begin cooperative care, start with handling parts of the body that your puppy will accept more easily, such as the chest and back. Over days and weeks, you can work your way to handling the paws, ears, mouth, etc., always pairing with food, praise, and stopping if your puppy is uncomfortable.

RULE #7



Your puppy should always have a choice about whether to interact with something new.

If his body language says he would rather move away or not engage with something, be his advocate by increasing your distance or saying "not right now" to a greeting.

When introducing your puppy to new people or animals, allow your puppy to approach at his own pace and in his own way, rather than simply placing him right next to the new thing. If he wants to move away or not engage, allow him to do so, rather than forcing him to interact. And finally, be prepared to be an advocate for your puppy and stop people or animals from pursuing him if he moves away. If you have your puppy in a carrier or stroller when in public, you will need to pay close attention to his body language when approaching something or someone new, and if you see signs of stress or fear, increase your distance.

RULE #8



Remember that puppies are babies, and socialization is tiring! Plan your socialization experiences to last no more than 30 minutes to an hour, with plenty of time between sessions for naps!

It can be daunting trying to get so much socialization in during the roughly four weeks between when puppies come home to when they reach the end of the primary socialization period around 12 - 13 weeks.

Just make sure you try to provide periods of play, periods of rest, and periods of socialization into each day. If you can try to keep the periods of activity around the same time each day, and rest periods around the same times, your puppy will appreciate the consistency and predictability. This will increase her calmness and confidence when encountering new things.