



PUPPY SOCIALIZATION AND VACCINATIONS

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Puppy Socialization and Vaccinations Belong Together!

Pet parents are now aware of the necessity of providing dog/dog socialization opportunities for their puppies. Nevertheless, when and how to do it is still misunderstood largely because many veterinarians, as well as breeders and pet-store owners, advise new pet parents to avoid socializing their new puppy with other dogs until the age of four to six months in order to avoid exposure to illnesses that vaccines protect against.

Veterinarian experts in animal behavior, however, caution that the risk of developing behavioral problems—especially aggression—outweighs the risk of developing disease in otherwise healthy puppies. As early as 2004, renowned veterinarian, RK Anderson, proclaimed in an open letter to his veterinary colleagues titled Puppy Vaccination and Early Socialization Should Go Together.

Dr. Lynn Honeckman, DVM, tells us, "There is a very small window of opportunity during which it is our job to teach our puppies that the world is a safe place." So, exactly how do you plan for the "lifetime of happiness" approach to puppy-raising?

When Should You Socialize Your Puppy?

Dr. Ian Dunbar, veterinarian and Animal Behavior PhD, a pioneer in puppy training, tells us that safe socialization during the first few weeks at home is of "extreme urgency." Indeed, Dunbar has launched the Puppy Raising Initiative explaining socialization imperatives for puppies in the short "critical period" of social development—between four and twelve weeks of age. This applies to socialization with people too. "Puppies must be safely socialized to people; otherwise, during adolescence they will likely become wary and fearful and may be aggressive towards people."

How to Socialize and Protect Your Puppy

Dr. Lee Harris, a San Diegan veterinarian who studies canine behavior, wisely counsels, "Some common sense needs to be exerted about providing well-chosen socialization." The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior Position Statement on Puppy Socialization advises that socialization in the first three months of life, before puppies are fully vaccinated, should be the standard of care. The organization Operation Socialization: Just Add Puppy offers easy to follow socialization safety guidelines when socializing your puppy.

The American Veterinary Medical Association website provides guidance as well. It states that, "Puppies need socialization with other dogs, but those dogs must be well vaccinated and healthy." Socializing with litter-mates or in-house dogs is not sufficient.

What Happens To Dogs Who Are Not Socialized Early?

After the 4 to 12 week "critical period" window closes, the friendly socializing puppy that was open to accepting the wide and wonderful world, enters into a fear-acquiring developmental period. So... unless you and your dog plan to live in the woods and need to protect yourselves from other dogs, preparing your pup to live in a domesticated, dog-filled environment makes better sense!

Failure to properly socialize early often results in aggression that is resistant to treatment, dogfights, embarrassing and stressful barking/lunging walks, heartache and pet abandonment.

Education Is The Key

Dr. Karen Overall, Veterinarian, Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behavior (ACVB) PhD, CAAB, explains, "Worldwide, it's exceptional that veterinary specialists in behavior are on faculty at veterinary schools, and yet the single biggest killer of pet dogs is behavior problems. People need to realize that vets don't know that much about problematic behavior, or maybe even normal behavior. The single biggest reason people relinquish animals to a shelter is a behavioral problem."

Work closely with your veterinarian to keep your puppy current on her vaccinations or titer testing but be proactive about your puppy's socialization requirements. Discuss the current scientific literature and work out a medically safe but early socialization plan with your vet and a private trainer or puppy class instructor, or ask your positive reinforcement behavioral consultant for a veterinary referral.

SOCIALIZATION is the process of introducing a puppy to the world in a way that will help him be confident and unafraid of people, places and things that he will encounter throughout his life. The most critical socialization window occurs before the age of 12 weeks, and that window is considered to be closing by 5 months. Generally the younger the puppy is when he is socialized, the more quickly and easily he gains confidence. Waiting too long can result in a need for the more difficult process of rehabilitation instead of socialization. Most aggression issues are simply a result of inefficient socialization.

RULES OF SOCIALIZATION:

Each socialization exposure must be fun for your puppy. If he is forced to confront fears he's not ready to handle, the process can backfire and create a fearful/aggressive response. Go at his pace, and at a distance he feels safe. Your puppy should be the one to initiate each approach to something new and be allowed to retreat when needed to feel safe.

Socialization includes generalization. Though your puppy may be fine with the toddlers or dogs in your home, that does not mean he is fine with all children and dogs. Even if he is in a class, he will need to meet new and different dogs and people, and in different places, after his classmates and their owners become familiar to him. You need to continue to expose him to new things, places, and contexts to best generalize his confidence with new things.

Pair treats with exposures to make good associations. If your puppy is worried about those children he sees running across the street, it can help if the sight of the children makes cheese suddenly appear. Or if he doesn't like her paws touched, a brief touch followed by a lick of peanut butter from a spoon can make paw touches easier to handle. If he will not take food, that is a good indication that you need to back up and lower the intensity of the exposure with more distance or less pressure.

If your puppy seems to be fearful of certain things and doesn't gain confidence quickly, please see a force-free trainer to help you. Remember that socialization is a time-sensitive procedure.

Puppy Socialization Check List

Visual and Noises:

- Sirens
- Fireworks
- Car horns
- Traffic
- Thunderstorms
- Fairs and Festivals
- Shopping Malls
- Busy traffic
- Crowds of people
- Airplanes
- Helicopters
- Wheelchairs
- Crutches and canes
- Bicycles
- Skateboards
- Radios
- Loud cars
- Motorbikes
- Parking lots
- Doorbells
- Knocking on doors
- Trucks
- Trains

Places

- Veterinarians
- Boarding Kennels
- Daycare
- Pet stores

Maneuver and touch

- Stairs
- Escalators
- Tile
- Marble
- Asphalt
- Concrete
- Grass
- Sand
- Carpet
- Wood
- Smells

Meeting People

- Adults with
 - Beards
 - Hats
 - Sunglasses
 - Jewelry
 - Helmets
 - Crutches
 - Canes
 - Wheel chairs
 - and elderly people
- Children:
 - 0-2 years
 - in strollers
 - 2-4 years
 - 4-12 years
 - 13-19 years

People Sounds

- Talking loudly
- Laughing
- Crying
- Shouting
- Arguing
- Children playing
- Children yelling

Meeting Animals

- Puppies
- Male adult dogs
- Female adult dogs
- Kittens
- Cats
- Horses
- Cow
- Sheep
- Chickens
- Ducks