

## *Socialization Tips for Puppy Owners*

Even though dogs have been domesticated for thousands of years, each new puppy that comes into our world must learn about humans. Socialization is the process during which puppies develop positive relationships with other living beings. The most sensitive period for successful socialization is during the first three to four months of life. The experiences your puppy has during this time will have a major influence on his developing personality and how well he gets along with people and other animals as he grows into adulthood. It is very important for puppies to have frequent, positive social experiences during these early months in order to prevent asocial behavior, fear, and biting. Puppies that are inadequately socialized may develop irreversible fears, leading to timidity or aggression. This is not to say that socialization is complete by four months of age, only that it should begin before that time. Continued exposure to a variety of people and other animals, as a puppy grows and develops, is an essential part of maintaining good social skills. It is also extremely important that your new puppy be exposed to new environments and stimuli at this time (ex. sounds, odors, locations) to reduce the fear of 'the unfamiliar' that might otherwise develop as the pet grows older.

Attending puppy classes during this primary socialization period is an excellent way to ensure multiple contacts with a variety of people and other dogs. This relatively new concept in training involves enrolling puppies early, before they pick up 'bad habits' and at an age when they learn very quickly. These classes can help get your puppy off to a great start with training, and offer an excellent opportunity for important social experiences with other puppies and with a wide variety of people. Good puppy classes are led by experienced trainers and involve only reward based training. Because many diseases may be spread by casual contact between puppies, care should be taken when introducing your puppy to other puppies. Twelve weeks of age is an ideal time to begin classes. Your puppy should have at least 1 set of routine vaccinations before being around other puppies, and 2 sets is even better.

You may begin working on socializing your puppy even before he attends puppy classes. It is important for your puppy to meet as many new people as possible, in a wide variety of situations. It may be beneficial to ask each person who meets your puppy to give him a treat. This will teach him to look forward to meeting people and discourage handshyness, since he will learn to associate new friends and an outstretched hand with something positive. Once your puppy has learned to sit on command, have each new friend ask him to sit before giving the treat. This teaches a proper greeting and will make him less likely to jump up on people. You should make certain that your puppy has the opportunity to meet and receive treats from a wide variety of people of all ages, appearances, and both sexes during the early formative months. Every effort must be made to see that the young pup has plenty of opportunities to learn about children. Kids can seem like a completely different species to dogs since they walk, act, and sound much differently than adults. Puppies that grow up without meeting children when they are young may never feel comfortable around them when they become adults.

And last, but not least, be careful to avoid physical punishment and any interactions with people that might make your puppy anxious. Harshly punishing a young pet will damage its bond with you and weaken its trust in people. Techniques such as swatting the pup, shaking it by the scruff, roughly forcing it onto its back, thumping it on the nose, and rubbing its face in a mess should never be used. Pets that are raised using these methods may grow up to fear the human hand, and are likely candidates to become fear biters. Furthermore, these techniques simply do not help the puppy become a well trained adult. In general, any interactions with people that might make a puppy anxious should particularly be avoided during the early months of its life. We will try in any way we can to make your puppy's visit with us a positive one. Obviously, vaccinations themselves are not fun for your puppy. We will try to distract him with petting and food rewards so that his visit to our clinic is a positive experience overall. Please help us by bringing a favorite reward or stopping by for a quick visit for nothing more than pets and treats.

