

Socialization:

the most important thing you will do with your puppy

Your puppy's temperament is determined by a combination of genetic and environmental influences. Once you have your puppy, there is nothing you can do to alter your puppy's genetics. The only way you can influence your puppy's approach to the world is through controlling and manipulating your puppy's environment. We call this socialization, and training.

From the time your puppy is first able to understand that there is a world out there until your puppy is 3 months old, your puppy is in the critical developmental stage. During this time your puppy is learning what is normal in the world. The greater the number of positive experiences your puppy has with different people, places, surfaces, visual stimuli, **safe**¹ dogs, and other critters, the more comfortable your puppy will be in the world.

From the age of 3 months - 5 months your puppy's socialization window is closing. After the age of 5 months, you should continue with "maintenance" socialization, but this is not the same as the initial socialization window.

Dogs who are not adequately socialized will be scared of new things, will not handle changes in their environments well, and depending on the degree of the socialization deprivation they experienced, may never be entirely normal.

Dogs who are improperly socialized – flooded and overwhelmed with new experiences – learn quickly that the world is a scary place and they will be scared of new things, quickly overwhelmed, and prone to shutting down.

How do you know if you're doing it right? We recommend that you sign up for a good group training class with your pup so that someone can help guide you through the process. Also, pay attention to your puppy's body language. Keep outings short, and fun, and enjoy the time with your puppy.

¹ Safe means that you know that the dog is healthy, vaccinated, and good with puppies. Not all dogs who are good with adult dogs are good with puppies. Also, avoid dogs who have recently been to "higher risk" places and who might be carrying a disease.



By the time your puppy is 3 months old your puppy should have:

- Gotten a treat, been patted by, and/or been held by at least 100 different people.
- Walked on at least 20 different surfaces.
- Should have heard hundreds of different noises
- Should have seen hundreds of different sights.
- Should have been to at least 20 different places.
- Should have met many, many dogs.
- Should have had positive encounters with any critters that you hope your puppy will be kind to later in life.
- Should be used to being touched, tugged, poked, prodded, and generally looked over.

If your puppy is older than 3 months old, and you haven't begun socializing, start NOW.

The socialization numbers can sound quite overwhelming. I have found, however, that many folks don't realize just how well they are doing with the numbers. It really helps to keep track of the various experiences your puppy is having/has had. This will allow you to see if you need to get your puppy out more, if there are holes in your socialization program. Use the included chart to track your puppy's socialization.

Socialization Chart

PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • babies • toddlers • elderly • using adaptive equipment • wearing hats • wearing backpacks • loud • quiet • making gestures • moving quickly
SURFACES	
NOISES	
VISUAL STIMULI	
PLACES	
(SAFE) DOGS	
CRITTERS	
HANDLING	