

Puppy Socialisation



DOGGEDLY TRAINING
helping your dog to be it's best

Most people have heard how important it is to socialise puppies, but what is it?

Your puppy breeder should have started the socialisation process, so talk to them about what they have done and how you can carry on your puppy's education. They need to get used to things in their environment including people, other dogs, sounds, scents and sights that they will experience throughout their life.

There is a period from about 3 weeks up until 14 weeks of age when this learning can take place most effectively. During this time puppies learn that things they are exposed to at a manageable level are normal and do not pose a threat to them.

Good breeders will ensure that puppies have a range of experiences from an early age, and this needs to be continued in their new homes. Puppies who only have contact with people and pets in their own household during their first few months can become fearful of unfamiliar people and dogs that they encounter later in life. Similarly, they are likely to be fearful of other stimuli that they have not been exposed to such as traffic, pushchairs, park benches etc.

But of course, every puppy is different and their tendency to fearfulness is not all determined by their experiences in their new home. It can also be in their genes or the stresses their mother was exposed to when she was pregnant. All these things contribute to a puppy's level of confidence.

If your puppy seems timid or shy then it is even more important to properly socialise them.

Important: All new experiences should be at a level that your puppy can cope with, otherwise they may become 'sensitised' to things, so that they are scared of them in future, rather than accepting them as a normal part of their life.


Assessing body language

Monitor your puppy's reaction to any new experiences. If they show signs of fear (hiding behind you, crouching down with a lowered head, ears pulled back and tail tucked under), remove them from the situation, or remove the new 'thing', and next time make it easier for him.

For example, if you are introducing them to traffic, stand at a greater distance from the road, or on a quieter road where there are no heavy lorries etc.

(Have a look at the article on body language to help you understand your dog better)


So, what experiences should my puppy receive?

 **A range of people**, of different ages, genders and ethnicities, including children, people with beards, wearing hats or rucksacks, carrying bags, sticks or umbrellas etc.

If a visitor comes to the house and your puppy is timid, make sure they have the chance to withdraw to somewhere they feel secure and can choose to come closer to the visitor or remain at a distance.

Help them to accept the visitor as a 'good' thing by feeding them a treat every time they look towards the visitor.

Take your puppy to public areas and allow them to observe people from a suitable distance. If there are no children in your family, stand outside a playground so they can get used to children playing, but do not allow children to get too close and overwhelm him.

 **Your puppy does not need to meet a large number of different dogs while growing up.** The emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity! Interactions with tolerant adult dogs can be as valuable as play sessions with other puppies.

Introduce your puppy to friendly dogs to encourage social interactions in a controlled way.

In public places, check with other owners that their dog will be happy to greet your puppy before allowing them to approach.

Watch out for yellow warning accessories that owners of reactive dogs use as they won't necessarily welcome an interaction with your puppy.

Attaching a trailing long-line to your puppy's harness is a good way of maintaining some control when they are playing as they are less likely to come back when they are having fun.

If your puppy is timid, ensure that they are not overwhelmed by larger or more boisterous puppies. Give them the opportunity to go back to the other dog after temporarily stopping the game.

🐾 **Getting them used to travelling in the car** is an important step to taking them to new places to experience a range of environments and places to walk.

If they are reluctant to get in the car, or experience travel sickness, take it slowly. Get them used to sitting in the car attached to a seatbelt or in a travelling crate with you close by, without shutting the door at first.

Feed them treats in the car to make this a pleasant experience.

When they are happy to get into the car and receive treats or relax there, you can progress to shutting the door, starting the engine and immediately switching it off, then to driving a short distance up the road and back, always ensuring that he shows no sign of fear or anxiety.

🐾 **When you start taking your puppy to new places**, it is best to take them somewhere safe where you can allow them to wander around on a loose lead or long line to take in all the new sensations in their own time. Road walking can be too overwhelming for many puppies because of the noise of traffic and the scents of many other dogs that have walked in the same area.

🐾 **Produce a novel item for your puppy to investigate each day to help them get used to household items.**

Encourage the puppy to approach and check out new items at their own pace. With appliances that make a noise such as the vacuum cleaner, allow them to investigate it when it is switched off first.

Engage them in a fun game while someone else switches it on in another room so that you can observe your puppy's reaction and get them to stop if they show any sign of fear. If this happens, increase the distance between the item and the puppy. If they remain calm, gradually operate the vacuum cleaner closer to them.

🐾 **Introduce your puppy to various sounds** using recordings if you want. Play the sounds at a low volume while engaging your puppy in something enjoyable such as searching for scattered treats or playing a game with you. As long as they show no signs of fear, gradually increase the volume of the sounds.

🐾 **Handle your puppy** to get them used to being gently handled over their whole body so that they cope with having a harness put on, being groomed, and with being examined at the vets. Some puppies are more tolerant of handling than others. As with all puppy training, look for signs that they are becoming anxious so you can stop, and next time start more slowly.

Signs that your puppy is not happy with your approach

➤ Flinching or ducking their head as you reach towards them, turning their head quickly towards your hand, pulling away or mouthing or biting at your hands.

Start by gently stroking a part of your puppy's body that they are most comfortable having touched, then stop and reward with a small treat. It can help to say a 'marker' word as you stop stroking, just before you produce the treat.

As long as your puppy is relaxed, continue to stroke different parts of their body, gradually increasing the firmness of the strokes.

Frequent short sessions are best.

Always give your puppy the option of moving away if they don't want to engage in any more training that day.

When they are relaxed about being stroked over their whole body, progress to touching and then lifting paws, gently feeling over their pads and between the toes.

Also lift their ear flaps and lips, always working at a pace that they can cope with and rewarding each action with a treat.

When your puppy is happy about being handled all over by you, get another family member or friend to do so too. It is also beneficial to do some handling sessions with your puppy on a table to prepare them for vet examinations and grooming sessions.

