

What is Socialization?

- Socialization is the process of introducing and adjusting a dog or puppy to its surroundings in a safe and gentle manner.
- Low-stress, short, gradual exposures is the recommended way to socialize a dog or puppy. When socializing, the experience must be positive – neutral is not good enough!
- Some things that dogs need to be socialized to are noises, textures, animals including dogs, objects, experiences, and people.
- The optimal time to socialize a dog is as a puppy. During this sensitive period their brain is primed and ready to learn what is safe and what is unsafe rapidly and with long lasting effects.

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Early Development (3-12 weeks)

The time period of 3-12 weeks of age for a dog is known as the socialization phase. Primary socialization takes place between 3-5 weeks and it is the most influential stage in a puppy's life relative to social behavior patterns and learning. At this age, puppies show a willingness to approach and interact with people, which should be rewarded, to help prevent fearfulness of humans as the puppy grows up. At this stage puppies also learn many important behaviors from littermates and the dam, such as:

- social cues
- fearlearning
- bite inhibition
- social hierarchies
- urination/defecation preferences

Puppies that are removed from their litters before 8 weeks of age may show deficits in these important areas.

Socialization is not just important for puppies!

Continued adult dog socialization is especially important because:

- If a dog has not been properly socialized, he or she may exhibit fearfulness in response to different factors in the environment (e.g., people, objects, sounds, dogs and other animals)
- This fearfulness may manifest in various forms, including aggression

Such behaviors threaten the success of these dogs



4 Easy Ways to Socialize your Dogs

1. Make sure to handle neonates

- Very brief bouts (a few seconds) of gentle handling, such as picking up, stroking the puppy and immediately returning them to the whelping nest are a good start.
- This quick examination also improves physical health by increasing early recognition of and interventions for pups that are sick, injured or underweight.
- Exposing the puppies to human contact and handling from a young age will help to socialize them to their caretakers and other people.

2. Add items to the whelping pen, and create puppy playpens

- Safe items that provide new sights, sounds, smells, and textures can easily be included
- Add items that are likely to be encountered in a new home, such as carpet. Household items and toys that move and may make some sound can help set pups up for success.
- Young pups also learn behaviors from mothers and littermates.

3. Create outdoor playpens

- Outdoor playpens can expose the dogs to more of the sights, sounds, surfaces, and animals around them and their kennel area, further benefiting the socialization effort.
- Consider including items such as steps, grass and larger toys in these areas.

4. Expose the puppies to new faces and people

- This is a good way to combat stranger-based fear and aggression when they grow up. While not strangers to the breeder, extended family or close friends can serve as “strangers” because they are new to the dogs.
- Have visitors hand out small treats to dogs as they pass through the kennel.
- Even if a visitor is not available, breeders can appear to be “strangers” by quickly changing their appearance. Breeders can simply carry an umbrella, wear a large heavy coat, different hats and shoes, or walk with a pair of crutches to create new experiences for puppies and dogs.

Monitor each pup’s progress to identify those that need more efforts to ensure proper socialization. Puppies and older dogs can be evaluated using a red-yellow-green scoring system. Scores of yellow or red help breeders recognize and help fearful puppies. Early interventions are easier to implement, take less time, and are more effective. Good socialization practices set pups up for success by ensuring that they can adapt well to their environment as adults. For more information on how to monitor dog body language and behaviors and use the FIDO red/yellow/green scoring system see *CANINE WELFARE SCIENCE - BH - 02 and BH - 03*.

GREEN

Friendly approach or undisturbed



YELLOW

Ambivalent posture/response



RED

Unfriendly/fearful

