

How to Properly Socialize a Puppy

by Alice Fix

The best dog that you can have is a dog that is well socialized. What exactly does that mean? American Heritage Dictionary defines it as follows:

- 1.** To place under government or group ownership or control.
- 2.** To make fit for companionship with others; make sociable.
- 3.** To convert or adapt to the needs of society.

Most people want a dog that is under control, is a good companion, and can adapt to new situations easily. Some dogs naturally adapt to new situations and others not so much. But there are things that you can do to help puppies become well adjusted so that they can be great companions.

This training and socialization should start at the breeder's home. Anyone that has a litter of puppies should be having different people coming over to handle and play with the puppies. They should include men, women, and children. Puppies can sometimes be fearful to things that they have never seen before, and that is why it is to the puppy's advantage to see and meet all kinds of people and have good experiences with them. Each time that a puppy meets a new person, they register in their brain whether it was a good experience or not. The more positive experiences puppies have with people makes it easier for them to decide that most people are good and a lot of fun. New people can help puppies to have a good experience with them by offering the puppy a treat whenever the puppy comes to them or lets the person touch them.

Puppies also need to have experience being on a lot of different surfaces. As they are developing and growing, they should have had the experience of walking on carpet, concrete, grass, tile or whatever different flooring surfaces that are in and around the breeder's home. The pads on a puppy's foot are sensitive and they can easily recognize when their feet are touching a surface that feels different than anything that they have been on before. They soon learn that just because something feels different on their feet doesn't mean that it is something to worry about. This helps to build their confidence in having different experiences and knowing that everything is going to be okay regardless of the surface on the floor. Some people take this kind of training a step further, and lay out things on the floor for the puppies to walk on. The kinds of things they put on the floor can be as simple as a plastic garbage bag to a piece of plastic fencing. They then encourage the puppies to walk on whatever is put on the floor by offering treats etc to get them to walk on it. You can lead a puppy across the plastic fencing etc. by putting the treat in front of the puppy's mouth, but not letting him have the treat until he steps on the obstacle. This does two things at once. It helps build your trust with the puppy so that he knows he can trust what you ask him to do and nothing bad will happen. It also teaches them that just because something feels different or looks different doesn't mean that it is bad.

Puppies need to experience a lot of different noises as well. You can run the vacuum near the puppies. First time they hear it, they will most likely take off running, but over time they will realize that there is nothing to fear from that noise, and accept it as a part of daily activity.

It is also a good idea to take them outside so they can hear cars going by. This must be done in a safe environment, so that they puppy doesn't get startled and run into the traffic. You can do this by setting up a puppy pen in the front yard, or wait until the puppies are leash broken and take them on a leash.



Naomi, Fluffy and Griffin

My sons were on the football team, so I took the puppies one at a time several different times over to the school when the team was walking out for practice or coming back from the practice field. The cleats on their shoes made a distinctive noise on the pavement, and the puppies learned not to fear it. As a bonus, on occasion some of the players would even come over to pet the puppies.

I also take the puppies over to the elementary school when it was time for school to let out for the day. Kids make lots of noise when they are dismissed for the day. We start out at a distance, and work out way up closer to all the activity. You must use caution to be sure that your puppy doesn't get away from you, because that could be a disaster, but as long as your puppy is safely in tow, it is a great experience for them. There are cars starting up and moving, and kids running around everywhere. Plus many of the kids like puppies and will come to pet the puppy. The puppy soon learns that it is lots of fun and there is nothing to be worried or frightened about. This helps to build a history of good experiences in your puppy's mind, and can help them to readily accept new things and experiences.

It is also a good idea to put puppies up on a table. When dogs have to go to the vet's office, they have to get on the vet's table. It is a good idea to get them used to that early in life, and to build good experiences with being up on something like a vet's table. It will make vet visits easier on your dog and easier on the vet. Just as a side note, vet's tables are stainless steel and very slippery. Some vets have rubber mats over the stainless steel table and others do not. I also take a bath mat with me when I go to the vet's. I place it on the table before I put my dog up on the table. It gives my dog more traction on the table, and also is something that they are familiar with in unfamiliar surroundings.

Hopefully the breeder of your puppy has done at least some of these things. If not, once you have your new puppy, you can begin doing these things right away. The younger they are to have different experiences, the shorter the learning process is.

If your puppy is fearful, you can take them for trips to pet stores. I advise you to use caution when taking your puppy to a pet store. All dogs are allowed there, and there is no training requirement for dogs to enter the store. If there are other dogs there, cautiously let your puppy meet the new dogs, but be prepared to grab your puppy to protect it. One bad experience will take time to relearn with new good experiences.

Another good place to take your puppy is to a training class. You can just go with your puppy to visit, but an even better idea is to sign up for a puppy kindergarten class. These classes are especially designed to help train a new puppy to be a good companion. Usually they teach some basic commands like sit, stay, come, etc, but they are also a good way to socialize your puppy with other puppies of different breeds.

In my opinion, socializing your puppy is the best thing that you can do to help your puppy grow into a well rounded good companion. I have seen it happen all too often that a breeder just leaves their puppies in the kennel and hasn't done any work to socialize them. They sell a puppy that is six months old, and fearful of everything. It is terrified to be in your house and terrified of you and your family. Since this kind of dog doesn't have a history of good experiences, you must do a lot of work to try and correct this kind of problem. Sometimes you can correct this problem with lots of work and dedication, and other times it might be too late.

If you have any questions about whether or not the puppy that you are looking to buy has been properly socialized, ask the breeder the following questions:

1. Has this dog ever been inside a house?
2. Where was this puppy raised?
3. Has this dog ever been around kids?
4. How does this dog get along with men? Women?
5. How does this dog travel in the car?
6. How does this dog get along with other dogs?
7. What steps have you taken to socialize this puppy?

It has been my experience that you will pay the same amount of money for a dog that is properly socialized as you will for one that is not. It might be worth your money to invest in a dog from a breeder that has invested their time in helping to insure that you get a well adjusted dog by doing the proper socialization before it leaves to go to its new home. After meeting the puppy, if there is a question in your mind as to how well the puppy was socialized, you might want to try looking elsewhere for the new companion for your family.