

Puppy socialisation



➡ What is socialisation?

The first few months of a puppy's life are the most important for social development. Socialisation offers young animals a chance to form social relationships with animals and people other than their siblings or mum. It is important to ensure that a puppy has been socialised properly – that is being introduced to different people, situations and experiences in an appropriate, positive manner – so that they are able to better cope in later life, rather than being fearful or shy.

➡ When should socialisation begin?

The socialisation period begins at 3 weeks of age and is a period of rapid brain development. At this age, the puppy becomes fully aware of, and able to respond to, its environment. That is why it is so important to get your puppy from a responsible breeder or rescue organization that will begin socialising your puppy appropriately. The **Puppy Contract** is a useful tool to help you get all the information you need before deciding to buy a puppy.

Once you have bought your puppy home at 8 weeks of age, you can then continue to socialise your them. You should ensure that you don't take your puppy out to areas that may have been soiled by other animals until they have received their initial course of vaccinations, though there is plenty that you can start doing at home until then.

➡ How can I socialise my puppy at home?

There are lots of different things that you can work on at home to prepare your puppy for situations they may face in later life. For example, you can work on grooming and handling your puppy at home to help prepare for trips to the vets or the groomers. You can also allow your puppy access to different objects, smells and surfaces to explore and walk on. Make sure that any objects or items that you use are safe for your puppy, and that any activity is supervised.

You can also begin some of your basic training at this age, for example, teaching your puppy to sit and to come when called. Similarly, you should begin teaching your puppy to be left alone for short periods of time to prevent separation-related issues in the future.

➡ How can I socialise my puppy out and about?

Once your puppy has completed their initial course of vaccinations and your vet has told you it is safe to take them out, you can take your socialisation outside. It is important that your puppy has a wide range of experiences in different situations and with different people. Circumstances can change, and therefore puppies should be socialised in everything that they may possibly encounter during their lives. For example, people that live in rural areas should take their puppies into the city, and similarly people that live in the city should take their puppies to rural areas.

You should also consider attending puppy clinics/parties at your local veterinary practice from the time your dog is vaccinated through to at least six months of age. This will provide you with an opportunity to ask questions of the veterinary team and to share experiences with other owners, all whilst your puppy has the chance to meet and play with other puppies.

➡ Any top tips?

Socialisation should be a positive experience for your puppy. You should let them explore a new environment or greet new people at their own pace. If your dog shows any signs of being nervous or lacking confidence in a situation, you shouldn't force it.

Given the importance of socialisation, it can be tempting to introduce them to lots of new situations and experiences in one go. However, to avoid overwhelming your puppy, you should ensure that you do not introduce too many new experiences in one day and build up new experiences gradually. For example, in much the same way that you would gradually build up the length of time you leave your animals at home alone, you should gradually build up to taking them to busy or noisy places.

If you have any concerns about your puppy's behaviour, you should contact your vet for a health check to rule out any pain or underlying issues, and then seek advice from a qualified behaviourist. To find a qualified behaviourist, visit the Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians (**FABC**), Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (**APBC**) or The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (**ASAB**).

➡ Further information

- **PetSavers Puppy Guide**
- **BSAVA and BVBA behavioural advice for pet owners [PDF]**