

If your puppy is under 14 weeks old, it is extremely important that they receive positive experiences around a variety of sights, sounds, and environments, as they are going through a sensitive developmental stage. Lack of socialization during this time is one of the leading causes of fearful and aggressive behavior.

But what do you do when you can't take your puppy out until they are fully vaccinated? Here are some Do's and Don'ts for puppy socialization.

DO

- Carry your puppy into dog-friendly stores.
- Be generous with rewards. Cheese. Hot dogs. Small, tasty bits of goodness that accompany all new and potentially scary experiences.
- Watch people and dogs from a distance - overly-exuberant puppies can learn that they don't always get to greet everyone and shy puppies can learn that the appearance of strangers does not mean a scary encounter.
- Carry your puppy into the vet for non-vaccination visits and the groomer (if your dog will require grooming) for a quick treat without the shampoo.
- Expose your puppy to other dogs...from your car: Sit in the parking lot of the dog park and let your puppy watch the dogs come and go. Contact is not necessary for safe socialization!
- Fill a kiddie pool with water bottles, boxes, and other strange objects and let your puppy explore all the strange sounds and textures.
- Buy a kids' playset with tunnels and tents from your local toy store. Fill with toys and treats to encourage your puppy to explore.



Safe socialization - watching dogs and people from the car

DON'T

- DON'T Force your puppy to approach, enter, or interact with anything that they aren't willingly approaching, entering, or interacting with. EVER. Shy puppies sometimes need multiple approaches to work up the courage to interact. Don't force it.
- DON'T Place your puppy on dirt or grass in public areas or in back yards where friends/family have lived for less than two years. That's because some viruses can live in the soil for that long.
- DON'T Take your puppy to the dog park until they are at least 5-6 months old and have already been socialized to a variety of other dogs. **Dog parks are for socialized dogs, not for**

socialization. Being charged, swarmed, knocked over, mounted, and generally terrorized is not a positive experience.

If you don't ever plan to visit the dog park, that's okay, too! Plenty of dogs prefer to spend time with people and dogs they know rather than interact with unknown dogs at the dog park.

- DON'T Let well-meaning strangers overwhelm your puppy with enthusiastic greetings, invasive handling (hugging, kissing, etc.). And if they want to practice training techniques they saw on television, just say NO.
- DON'T Let your puppy meet strange dogs you encounter in public unless you are prepared to embark on a significant behavior modification program. Relying on a complete stranger to be honest and objective about their dog's behavior is gambling with your puppy's safety.
- DON'T Let your friendly puppy get away with murder in the name of socialization. Part of socialization is learning how to interact with the world. For confident, friendly puppies, that also means learning good manners around strangers and strange dogs. Allowing a friendly puppy to treat the world like his mosh pit when he is little is going to make life super fun when he's 60 lbs.

IT'S A LOT OF WORK...BUT YOU GET ONE CHANCE TO DO IT RIGHT

Waiting until a puppy has received all their vaccinations is too little, too late! Socialization needs to begin on Day One. The first 4-6 weeks in your home should be devoted to safe socialization. There's plenty of time to focus on training later, but you only get one chance for early socialization.

By doing this work, you minimize the risk that your puppy will develop a problem behavior in the future.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- ***Puppy Start Right***, Kenneth and Debbie Martin
- ***Social, Civil, and Savvy: Training & Socializing Puppies***, Laura VanArendonk Baugh

*Start your new puppy on the right paw!
Enroll in Puppy Kindergarten class
Visit sspca.org/behavior for more information.*