



The Importance Of Early Socialization For Your Puppy

Sociable (so'she bel) 1. Friendly in company. 2. Filled with pleasant companionship.

Puppies begin learning at birth. The most impressionable period is up to around 16 weeks of age, as their brains are still developing and they are learning faster than ever. Proper early socialization is probably the single most important thing an owner can do to guard against serious behavior problems in the future.

Teaching proper behavior to puppies is much easier than trying to retrain a puppy (or a dog) after learning bad habits and behaviors. Puppies learn very quickly what is acceptable behavior & what is not. They are generally very eager to please their people.

Your pup should be exposed lots of positive stimulation during this developmental period without overwhelming or forcing her. Forcing her into a new experience can cause her to have a negative association, causing fear or aggression to that particular experience.

Without proper or positive exposure to the things your pup will experience throughout life, he can become fearful of many things. Many dog bites occur because the dog is afraid and doesn't know how else to react. If they grow up with positive experiences to a variety of adults & children they learn to be confident & friendly around people.

Positive motivational training is probably the most widely accepted method of training for puppies & dogs alike. This type of training will teach your dog to accept you as a benevolent leader through positive reward methods. Your dog will learn to listen to you with a wagging tail. Training or "choke" collars can injure & even collapse a puppy's trachea. Improperly administered corrections with certain training collars can be counterproductive and even lead to aggression. These types of collars should never be used on any age dog unless you are working with a certified professional trainer. When looking for a trainer you should discuss your dog's individual needs and ask what methods they would use and if they are certified.

A puppy kindergarten class is a great way to help socialize a young puppy. They will begin to learn good manners and be introduced to some basic obedience in many classes. While the puppies are playing, they teach each other things like bite inhibition & social skills. They will learn to interact properly with people & other dogs.

There are many different opinions on vaccinations & exposure to other puppies. In the past many training programs did not begin until the pups were at least 6 months of age & fully vaccinated. It is becoming more & more widely accepted that the benefits of early socialization outweigh the risks. Of course don't expose your puppy to dogs you don't know anything about. A puppy class should require all the puppies be checked by a veterinarian & be up-to-date with vaccinations. Ask your veterinarian, there can be reasons to delay a puppy class. If this happens, you should still socialize your puppy with people & children outside your family.

More dogs die due to bad behavior than from disease. This is because people give up on their ill-mannered dogs & surrender them to a shelter. Many are eventually euthanized due to inadoptability. Starting your puppy off on the right paw will lay the foundation for many happy years together.

Andrea Jones
ABC Certified Dog Trainer