

## **Having a sociable dog**

Socialisation is one of the most important parts of raising a well-behaved and happy dog. Socialisation means providing your dog with positive experiences in situations where they might meet people or other animals. They must also learn how to behave acceptably in these situations. The best and most effective time to socialise a dog is between the ages of 3 - 14 weeks. Lack of socialisation is one of the biggest causes of fear and aggression in adult dogs.

Many people are worried about socialising their puppy before they have completed their full course of vaccinations. Unfortunately, in many cases, that may be too late. Our practice policy is to start the vaccination course at 8 weeks of age and recommend you carry your puppy when outside your house or garden until 2 weeks after the 2<sup>nd</sup> vaccination. You can take your puppy out with you as long as they are being carried; sometimes a baby sling or satchel can make it easier if you have a large breed puppy. Do be careful where you take your puppy even when being carried; avoid areas which may be visited by unhealthy or unvaccinated dogs.

Older puppies and adult dogs need socialisation too. It is important never to stop socialising your dog so that he will always be happy to meet new people. If you have taken on an older dog, unsocialised dog or puppy, do not despair. It is possible to socialise some older dogs; it just takes much more time and patience.

This information sheet will give you guidance on the best way to socialise your puppy or dog and help you ensure that you have done everything possible to have a happy and safe dog who will be a pleasure to take with you wherever you go.

### **When should socialisation begin?**

Socialisation should begin while your puppy is with the breeder or rescue centre. Make sure to ask what sort of socialisation your puppy has received. Kennelled puppies require a great deal more effort than puppies reared in a busy household as they have not had chance to learn about normal human activities. If you do take on a puppy over 12 weeks who had not been socialised, you will need to work very hard on making up for this to ensure the dog does not develop behaviour problems later in life. It would be useful for owners to get professional advice from a trainer or behaviourist when taking on an unsocialised older puppy or adult dog.

### **What should I do to socialise my puppy?**

From the day you get your puppy, you should expose them to as many different situations as possible. This can be as simple as carrying them with you to the local pub to meet a variety of adults to sitting outside the local primary school to get them used to the sound of playing children.

Puppies also need the guidance of sensible older dogs to help them learn doggy manners. This is very important if they are going to be able to get along with dogs when they are older. If you allow your dog to have free, rough play with older dogs, they could soon learn to be a fighter.

Dogs can be very specific about what they find frightening. For example, many dogs are fearful of people who wear a hat. This is because they probably had no positive experiences with hat-wearing people when they were young or they had a bad experience. One bad experience can stay with a dog for life.

### **How should I teach my puppy to behave when meeting new people and dogs?**

Although it is delightful to see puppies playing with children or other dogs, you need to carefully consider what will be safe and acceptable when the puppy has become an adult dog. Puppies should learn manners and control when in new situations. You will never be welcome anywhere with an over excitable, boisterous adult dog.

Teach your puppy to be gentle, calm and obedient even in the most exciting of circumstances. Be very aware that you can be prosecuted if your puppy or dog injures someone. This can be just by knocking them over or scratching them in play.

Try to avoid situations in which your puppy could be frightened. If they do become frightened, protect them so they see you as a source of safety but do not pet them, reassure them or pick them up. The last thing you want is a puppy who thinks they can get attention by acting fearfully.

Where can I safely socialise my puppy?

During the early days, before your puppy is fully vaccinated, you should avoid allowing them to have access to unvaccinated dogs or areas in which they may be exercised. You can still take your puppy to the park, but carry them.

### **Socialisation Checklist**

The following checklist is designed to give you some idea of the sort of things your puppy needs to experience safely. You will want to add things which are specific to your own lifestyle. You may feel that certain things are not relevant, but if you ever move or take your dog on holiday, or if you ever needs to leave them with someone else, you must be prepared for all eventualities. Interestingly, dogs from the city often get into trouble for chasing sheep in the country when their owners go on holiday. This can be avoided if they are properly socialised with livestock.

## **People**

Your puppy should meet as wide a variety of people as possible. Never allow them to jump up or nip at people's hands and always ask strangers to behave in a non-threatening way.

- People of all ages from infants to elderly people
- People of all races
- People of all physical abilities
- People with beards / glasses / hats etc
- People running / jogging / skateboarding / cycling etc.
- People of different sizes
- People wearing different styles of clothing
- People with umbrellas
- People in uniform

## **Other Animals**

It is important that your dog does not become a threat to other people's pets or livestock. Dogs can learn to live happily with other animals but only if they have been taught how to behave.

- Dogs of all sizes
- Dogs of all ages
- Dogs of all appearances from Yorkshire Terriers to Great Danes
- Cats and Rabbits
- Sheep, horses (with riders and without) and cattle

## **Your Environment**

There are many things in your day to day environment, which could surprise, frighten or over-excite your puppy. For example, many adult dogs attack the vacuum cleaner and hate the postman. By teaching your puppy that these things are safe and positive, you will have fewer problems.

- Normal household appliances
- Traffic
- The postman / paperboy / dustbin men etc.
- Travelling in cars, on buses and on train
- The Veterinary Surgery
- Loud noises