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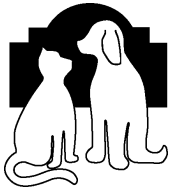
## Behavior: Socializing your puppy

Most dog owners want a dog that can go out with them into the world, to a sidewalk café, the park, or their friend's house. If a dog isn't well socialized as a puppy, these outings are traumatic for both the owners and the pet, as their dog is quite nervous and anxious about the whole experience. How many of us have gone to a friend's house only to have their dog growl, snap, or hide from any visitor? When dogs exhibit these behaviors, it is due to poor early socialization.

What does socialization mean? Socialization is a process where your puppy is introduced to different species that he or she will interact with, including dogs, cats, people, and other types of pets. Socialization should start when you first get your pet. This early socialization starts with you and your family. It then extends to your friends, neighbors, and people who come by your house. When your pet is young, you want to introduce them to as many different people as possible, including children, babies, older people, middle-aged people, people with glasses, with beards, with speech or physical impairments, and in uniforms. It is very important for all of these experiences to be positive. You should always be present for these introductions, especially with children. One bad experience can impair proper socialization.

What about meeting other pets. Meeting cats and other household pets isn't a problem. In an upcoming article, I'll discuss introducing another pet to your house. The big concern is meeting other dogs in the neighborhood. Puppies are not fully protected with vaccines until they are about sixteen weeks of age, and they should not go into public places where unknown dogs have been until this point. This includes parks, beaches, sidewalk cafes, and any place where strange dogs have been. This can include your front yard if you live on a heavily traffic street. Unfortunately, a puppy's personality is formed by sixteen weeks of age and socialization is much more difficult by this point. We have to play a balancing game between disease prevention and optimal socialization. What we recommend is having your puppy play with dogs that you know are healthy, vaccinated, and friendly to other dogs. Again, you don't want any bad encounters. These introductions should be in a controlled environment, such as in a house or backyard. Another very good place to socialize your pet is puppy classes. Most reputable classes require vaccinations to be current and are great places to meet people and pets. Most classes start as early as two to three months of age.

How do I socialize my puppy? First of all, teach your puppy how to sit and stay on command. This is done by telling your puppy to sit and then gently pushing down on their rear while gently pulling up on their necks with a leash and collar. Once sitting, they are praised and/or given a treat. Tell them to stay and reward them for staying at gradually increasing increments. If they get up when they are supposed to stay, repeat from the sit command. Once they have mastered sitting and staying, have them do this in front of other people at your home. Then in your front yard, then the neighbors, and finally in public. The same applies for other pets. If your puppy



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behaves inappropriately, tell them “no” in a deep firm voice and get them to sit and stay. Praise them lavishly when they sit and stay properly. Persistence and consistency of training are crucial. Once they are behaving properly, you can allow them to greet and play. If you have problems with this protocol, then I strongly advise professional training. Remember, the sooner you start, the better your pet will behave, and the happier your relationship will be.