

SOCIALISATION

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO TEACH A NEW PUPPY !



What is Socialisation?

Socialisation is creating purposeful, positive experiences for your puppy, to prepare them for life in the human world. For the first few months of their lives, puppies go through a developmental phase known as the critical socialisation window. During this period, puppies are learning about the world around them, and are usually curious and resilient.

What happens to your puppy during this most important stage of development will have a direct and long lasting impact on their behavioural wellness as an adult. Under-socialised puppies will almost always develop some kind of behavioural problem, like poor impulse control, resource guarding, anxiety, or even aggression.

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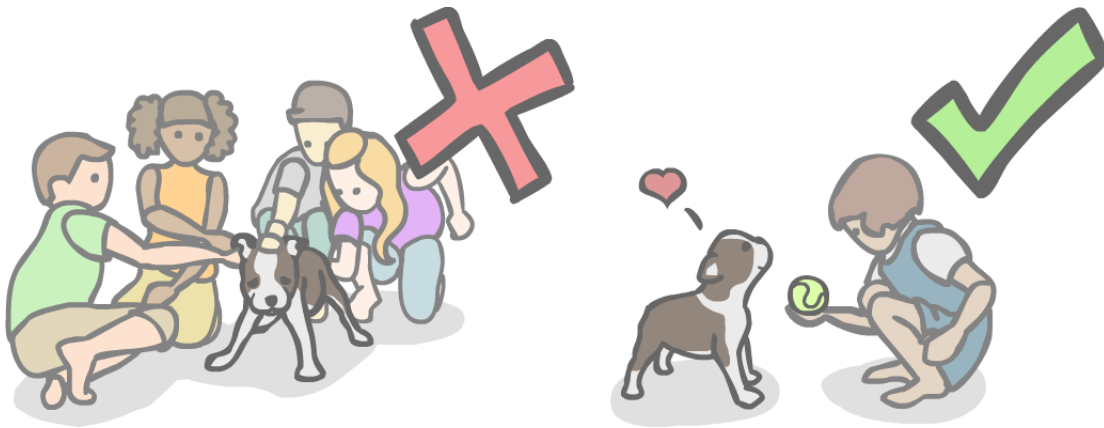
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When is the Critical Socialisation Window?

Depending on the individual puppy, the critical socialisation window closes somewhere between 12 and 16 weeks of age. Because there is such a limited window of opportunity for socialisation, it should always take priority over obedience training at this young age. You should start socialising your puppy as soon as you bring them home, when they're usually around 8 weeks old.

Socialisation is Not the Same Thing as Exposure

Socialisation does not just mean exposing your puppy to lots of things; you must ensure they are having a positive experience. For example, taking your puppy to the school gate at bell time is not a safe way to socialise your puppy to children. You're likely to end up with a crowd of admiring kids, all wanting to pat or hold your puppy at once. For many young dogs this is an overwhelming, frightening experience.



It would be much safer to set yourself up a small distance down the street from the school, so that your puppy can meet the children in small groups as they walk past. Be sure to bring treats and toys with you to help ensure that your puppy has a good time.

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Let Your Puppy Go At Their Own Pace

Forcing your puppy into situations before they are ready will negatively impact their experiences. Let your puppy explore the world at their own pace; you can encourage them and reward them, but don't rush them.

In particular, avoid dragging your puppy up to things by their leash, carrying them and putting them down in the new situation, or even luring them in with food.

For example, to socialise your puppy to swimming, you shouldn't pick them up and place them in the water, or try to get them to jump in for a treat. Instead, find a place where there is a gradual incline, like a riverbank or ramp, and let them explore in their own time. Play fun games around the water and don't stress if they don't want to go all the way in at first. Wading pools are another good way to ease your puppy into swimming, and also a good way to help them cool off in the summer.

If In Doubt, Add Some Space

Your puppy doesn't have to be right in the middle of something to have a positive socialisation experience. If you're ever worried that a situation may be too much for your puppy, move further away and give them a chance to acclimatise.

A good example of this is socialising puppies to traffic. For many dogs, standing right next to a busy road with all the large, noisy cars can be very frightening. Avoid busy roads at first, starting somewhere like a park where you can walk along away from the road. As your puppy's confidence improves, you can try coming closer and closer.



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How Much Socialising?

Your puppy needs to have as many high quality socialisation experiences as you can fit in before their critical socialisation window ends.

Let's say you took your puppy to the vet once for a socialisation visit - no needles, and lots of fun, and once for their vaccinations and to check a sore leg. That puppy might think that there is a 50% chance that going to the vet is unpleasant.

If you took that same puppy on plenty of fun vet visits, they're much more likely to think of the vet as a good place.



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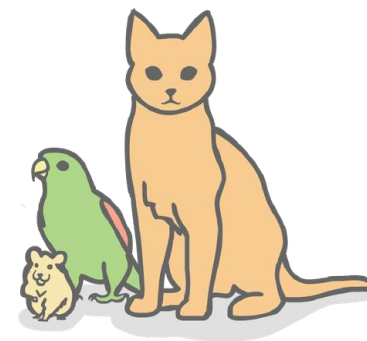
What Should I Socialise To?

There are six main categories of things that you should socialise your puppy to:

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Animals

Depending on their personality and breed, your puppy should be socialised to anywhere between 50 and 150 dogs before they reach 16 weeks of age. Shy puppies or over-confident puppies need higher numbers, whilst easy going dogs can get away with less.



Not every encounter should be a nose to nose greeting. 50% or more of the dogs you socialise to should be seen at a distance. If you allow your puppy to greet every dog they see, they will expect to be able to do so in the future, and will struggle to pay attention to you.

The dogs that your puppy does meet nose to nose should be fully vaccinated and dog friendly. Introductions should be done off leash so that the dogs' body language isn't hindered by a leash.

Try to socialise to the biggest variety of dogs you can find; different ages, sizes, play styles, colours and breeds. Other animals, like cats or livestock, should also be a part of your socialisation checklist, especially if you would like your puppy to have close contact with them later in their life.

People

As with other animals, you should socialise your puppy to a wide variety of people. Try to introduce your puppy to people of different ages, ethnicities and sizes. In particular, dogs often have trouble with anything that changes a person's silhouette. Common examples include facial hair, sunglasses, bulky clothes, hats and helmets, walking aids, or people carrying bulky items.

The way people move can also upset dogs if they haven't been socialised to different examples; walking sticks, crutches, wheelchairs, skateboards, bicycles and prams should also be on your list.



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Handling

Throughout their lives dogs are expected to put up with a lot of handling from humans. It's very important that they learn to love being touched and restrained by humans, for their safety and happiness, and for the safety of the humans handling them as well.

Your puppy should be socialised to grooming activities like, brushing, clipping, nail trimming and baths, and veterinary activities like checking ears, eyes and teeth. Go very slowly so your puppy isn't overwhelmed. Practicing your sit restraints will also help to socialise your puppy to being held still.

Noises

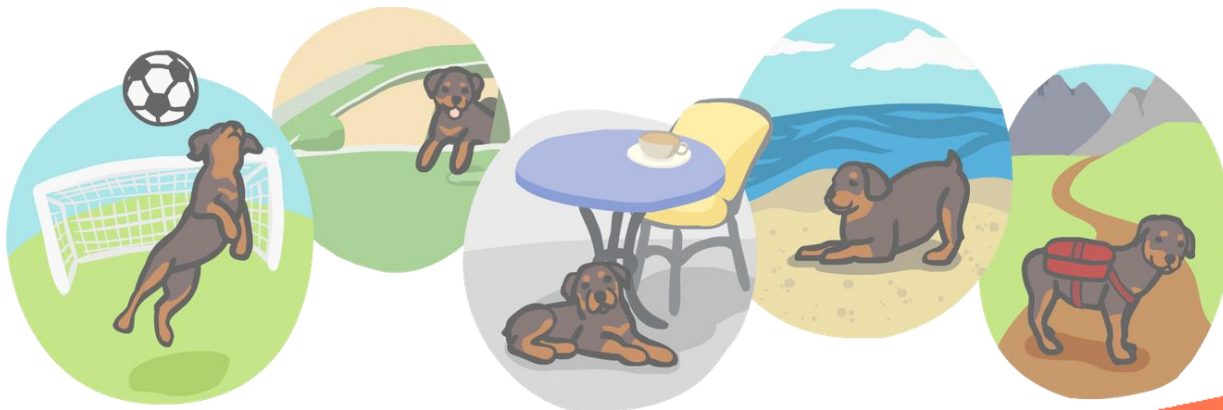
Remember that puppies have far more sensitive hearing than we do. Socialise them to a variety of noises, ensuring they make positive associations by pairing with fun things like food or play.

Thunder, construction noises, traffic noises, music, lawn mowers, vacuum cleaners and sirens should all be included in your puppy's socialisation.



Locations & Experiences

This category covers taking your puppy out and about to experience the world. Common examples are sporting events, picnics, cafes, camping trips, the beach, markets, the vet and groomer, social gatherings and anything else you'd like your dog to cope well with.



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Surfaces

Your puppy needs to gain the confidence to walk on a variety of surfaces; often new puppies are carried a lot and miss out on socialising to the feel of different things under their paws. This includes different textures like grass, wet grass, sand, pebbles and metal grates, and also balancing on surfaces that aren't flat or shift under-paw.



But What About Contagious Diseases?

As the research into puppies' critical socialisation window is only relatively recent in the history of veterinary science, many vets and breeders are still advising new puppy parents to lock their puppies away until they have finished their vaccinations.

Unfortunately, by the time a puppy is completely vaccinated, their critical socialisation window has usually closed. While it is important to be careful in regards to contagious diseases like Parvovirus, avoiding socialisation completely is actually a greater risk.

This is an excerpt from an article by the internationally renowned organisation AVSAB (American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior).

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“Behavioural issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age. While puppies’ immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behaviour problem.”

Here are some tips for balancing socialisation with disease prevention:

- Don’t let your dog meet any dogs that may not be vaccinated
- Avoid pet stores, dog parks and dog beaches until your puppy is fully vaccinated
- Carry your puppy in and out of the vet, or check with the staff if it is safe for them to touch the floor
- Do a lot of your socialisation at home, like grooming, noises, wading pools etc.
- Take picnic rug out with you for your puppy to sit on
- Take your puppy places in the car and let them watch out of the windows
- Use a stroller or pet carrier so that you can take your puppy everywhere
- Take advantages of group training classes and socialisation services with Ruff - Training & Welfare

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