

## Puppy Socialization

### What is it?

Puppy socialization is the process by which a puppy is taught a lifelong set of skills to process novel experiences. Done properly, and in conjunction with a stable temperament, it becomes the foundation for a healthy, stable dog.

Socialization means getting your puppy used to the world in which he will live, which is mostly with people. Somehow people started to think socialization meant getting along with other dogs. Though that is important, it's not nearly as critical as exposing him to other things.

A puppy is most accepting of new experiences between 3 to 12 weeks old. After that age, he becomes more cautious around things he hasn't yet encountered. From about 12 to 18 weeks old the opportunity to easily socialize your puppy starts to close, and with each passing week it becomes harder to get the pup to accept and enjoy something of which he's initially wary. In an effort to "get your dog used to everything", it's easy to overdo socialization. Proceed thoughtfully.

Make sure that when you take your puppy out into the world, the people, places, sounds and objects he experiences are non-threatening and pleasant. If you go too quickly and traumatize him, that could stay with him for life. For example, if your puppy seems to be frightened of a new object while out, allow him to observe for a while and slowly approach it, then back away from it. Distance creates a safety zone for a young dog. It's very important that you proceed slowly and not FORCE your puppy into interactions.

### How do you begin?

#### ***Be Proactive:***

- Attend Marin Humane's ***Puppy's Social Scene*** and ***Beginning Puppy*** classes. These classes are designed especially for early socialization, handling and management.
- Carry your puppy to shopping centers, parks, school playgrounds, etc. Let him watch the world go by without being forced to engage with anyone or anything. Praise his observations in a calm manner and reinforce his efforts to reorient to you in these environments.
- Take your puppy for short, frequent car rides. He should ride in the crate ensuring that the crate is securely affixed. Stop, open the crate and sit in the car and let the pup watch the world. (Please review our ***Crate Training*** handout.)
- Introduce your puppy to novel items slowly (upturned umbrellas, chairs, bags, etc.) and provide a wide variety of items which he can explore at his own speed.
- Play sound effects like horns honking or brakes squeaking on a loop at a low level.
- Introduce stairs and uneven surfaces slowly.
- Massage your puppy all over and pair massages with yummy food rewards.
- Invite friends over who have adult or adolescent well-mannered dogs, who are fully vaccinated and tolerate puppies well for "play dates".
- If your puppy cowers or spooks, calmly move him away from whatever has frightened him. Let him know you will protect him and give him time to assimilate the new object.



**Use Caution:**

- Dog intensive areas like beaches and high traffic walking trails might get your puppy in over his head. One bad experience at a sensitive age can create lifelong problems.
- Young puppies should not go to dog parks due to aggressive dog and disease concerns.
- Puppies tire quickly and learn best in short (10 minute) sessions. Don't overstimulate your puppy in an effort to get everything done.

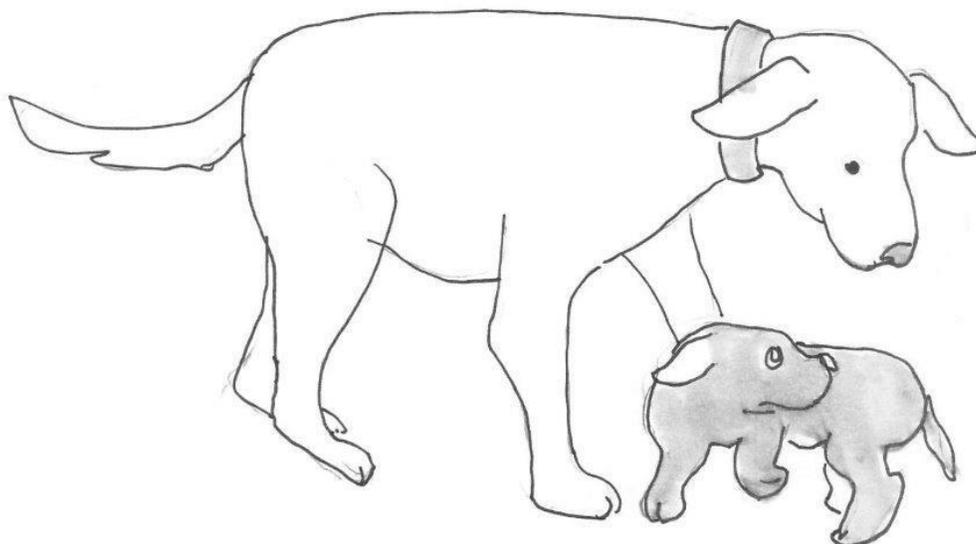
**How do you handle dog to dog Interactions?**

Teaching puppies to be socially appropriate with other dogs is a valuable process. Dogs who tolerate young puppies (not all adult dogs like puppies) can be helpful in teaching "manners" regarding greeting and play behaviors. Before getting your puppy together with an adult dog, ask yourself if the dog has behaviors you would like to see in your puppy.

Take your puppy and an appropriate adult dog for a short walk around your yard or safe location to provide a low stress introduction. A rich environment gives both dogs many interesting things to investigate without creating too much emphasis on each other. This technique minimizes *social pressure* for both dogs and creates good introduction habits if done on a regular basis.

It's not appropriate to take a puppy to a dog park. You risk having him learn inappropriate behaviors from other dogs or suffer a traumatic incident from an unpredictable or potentially aggressive dog. Dog parks also leave young puppies susceptible to diseases like Parvovirus, which is present in the soil where dogs congregate. (Please review our **Puppy Health** handout.)

Finally, it's important to realize that as a dog matures, his needs change. A puppy might be eager to meet strangers (dogs and people) but as he develops, the circle of friends becomes smaller. Many adult dogs see unknown dogs as threats and do not appreciate being greeted too enthusiastically. People are the same way.



### How do you handle setbacks?

If at any time during socialization your puppy is frightened (trying to run away, tail tucked, or attempts to bite) consider the following:

- Do not coddle your puppy. Unknowingly you are praising his uncertainty; he will feel as though there is something to be unsure about. This will worsen the situation.
- Jolly him up with a silly, happy voice, a treat, or a fun game.
- If a situation is overwhelming your puppy, back away from the site until he is relaxed again.
- Start from this new distance to build up your pup's confidence.
- Gradually get closer to the stimuli.
- Your ultimate goal is for your puppy to be comfortable and confident around stimuli that was previously scary.

### Training Tips:

The variety of items you can introduce your dog to will help him generalize to other situations. For instance, if your dog is comfortable with people in costumes, he will likely be comfortable with people in raincoats.

Following is a list of ideas (***Puppy Socialization Checklist***) that you might incorporate into your dog's learning. All of these introductions should be done slowly and safely. Create a pleasant experience for your dog. Sounds should be muted, strange objects should be at a distance and everything should be introduced slowly.

### Training Resources:

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** conducts various puppy training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or [OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org](mailto:OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org).

**Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)!** If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by the **Marin Humane**, visit us at [MarinHumane.org](http://MarinHumane.org) or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.



## Puppy Socialization Checklist

### Socializing Puppies with People

**People:**

- Babies, Kids, and Adults
- Different ethnicities & genders
- Dog trainer
- Elderly person
- Groomer
- Person wearing suit, hat, etc.

**People in Uniform:**

- Crossing guards
- Firefighters
- Food delivery person
- Meter readers
- Package delivery person
- Police

**People with:**

- Baby stroller or Wagon
- Canes or metal frame walkers
- Crutches or Cases
- Erratic body moves or limps
- Shopping Cart or Luggage
- Wheelchair / Guide dog

**People playing sports:**

- Cyclists
- Hikers/Walkers/Joggers
- Horses on Trails
- Martial arts
- Skateboarders/Roller bladers
- Snow Sports (Ski/Board/Tube)
- Swimmers/Surfers/Wind Surfers

**People wearing:**

- Beards
- Costumes
- Hats
- Helmets
- Sunglasses
- Umbrellas

**People at Outdoor Events:**

- Farmers market
- Fireworks
- Live music band
- Parade (floats, clowns, etc.)
- People dancing / singing
- Santa Claus /Easter Bunny
- Street fairs / vendors

### Socializing Puppies with Environmental Noises

**Nature:**

- Barometric Pressure/Storms
- Lightening
- Night-time/Day-time
- Ocean
- Rain
- River
- Thunder
- Waterfall
- Wind

**Household Items:**

- Dishwasher/Washer/Dryer
- Doorbell
- Fans (electric, ceiling, etc.)
- Garbage Disposal
- Hair dryer
- Nail trimmers
- Paper & Plastic bag
- Smoke Detectors
- Vacuum cleaner

**Motor Vehicles:**

- Airplanes and Helicopters
- Cars backfiring/braking
- Garbage trucks
- Ice cream truck
- Motorcycles
- Sirens
- Snow plows
- Street cleaners
- Trucks backing up

### Socializing Puppies with "Strange Things"

**Textures:**

- Dog kennel/crate (Metal, Plastic)
- Fountains
- Inside (Carpet, Wood, Vinyl, etc.)
- Moving from Sunlight to Shade
- Outside (Concrete, Asphalt)
- Outside (Gravel, Grass, Dirt)
- Stairs (wood, carpeted, floating)
- Statues (Stone, Metal, etc.)

**Animals:**

- Adult dog (small & large breed)
- Birds (chicks and adults)
- Horses (also on trails)
- Kittens & Cats
- Livestock (cows, goats, etc.)
- Puppy (0-16 weeks)
- Small pet (hamsters, etc.)
- Wildlife (avoidance!)

**Odd Things that People Use:**

- Camera (scary black "eye")
- Flags/banners
- Hula hoop and Kites
- Cardboard box
- Model airplanes
- Remote control toys
- Scooters
- Swings

### Socializing Puppies with Different Places

**Everyday Locations:**

- Drive-thru
- Elevator/escalator
- Friend's house
- Public Park
- School grounds

**Transportation:**

- Active railway
- Bridge & Tunnel
- Busy intersection
- Car & Boat rides
- Public transit

**Businesses:**

- Boarding kennel
- Groomer's place
- Home improvement store
- Pet supply store
- Veterinary clinic

