

# PUPPY SOCIALIZATION



**Aurora  
Animal  
Shelter**

The first three months of a puppy's life are the most important in their entire lifetime. Their experiences and exposure during this crucial time will affect them for the rest of their lives, whether it is good or bad. Due to the weight of this time, it is important to socialize and expose your puppy to as much as possible properly before they reach 4-months of age. Puppies will not be fully vaccinated until 8-weeks of age, however, it is vital to socialize and expose the puppy even before they are fully vaccinated, as stated by the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior. Doing so properly can help to assure that they are set up for success behaviorally and kept healthy!

## **HOW DO I PROPERLY SOCIALIZE MY PUPPY?**

It's important to expose your puppy to a wide variety of new environments, stimuli, people, other animals, etc. before they reach 4-months of age. Critical to socialization is that each one of these new experiences is as positive as possible. Avoid overwhelming your puppy, as they can quickly create a negative association to that situation or stimuli. For example, say your puppy exhibits fear behaviors when another dog approaches. If you disregard this, and force your puppy to meet the dog, it's likely your puppy will develop some level of fear when meeting new dogs in the future. These kinds of situations can also unintentionally spark aggressive behaviors with other dogs during greetings.

Incorporating high value treats, toys, praise, and other rewards into socialization experiences will ensure each experience is positive. Fun and positive experiences with new people, in new environments, around new stimuli, and other situations will help to shape your puppy into the friendly, adult dog your family wants!



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*continued*



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## NEW ENVIRONMENTS

What are good places to bring my puppy? How can I keep my puppy safe while in these environments? Below are examples of places that we do and do not recommend bringing your young puppy.

### RECOMMENDED (WITH PRECAUTIONS)

- Places with minimal dog traffic.
- Veterinary clinics

*Safety tip: Ensure the veterinarian sanitizes floors frequently. Also, it is a good idea to carry your puppy while entering and exiting the lobby until they are fully vaccinated.*

- Puppy socialization classes
- Friends' homes with one or two friends present
- Local parks

*Safety tip: bring bedding to prevent possible paw-transmission of diseases from other dogs.*

- Restaurant patios where dogs are allowed
- Safety tip: bring a piece of bedding for the ground. Be prepared to leave the area if your puppy is feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Ideally, this will be during non-peak hours to ensure it is not too much stimuli for your puppy.*

- Dog friendly retail stores such as Home Depot, Bass Pro, Cabela's, Lowe's, etc.

- Car rides! No matter how long or short.

*Safety tip: Puppies should always be appropriately secured in the vehicle. We recommend a crash tested harness/seat belt or a correctly sized, crash tested dog kennel for transport.*

### NOT RECOMMENDED

- Dog parks of any kind
- High traffic dog areas such as boarding places, pet stores, etc.
- Events with lots of people (parades, outdoor concerts/gatherings, etc.)
- Extremely noisy places

### NEW PEOPLE

Everyone loves a puppy. That being said, it does not mean your puppy is ready to, or should be expected to meet every person who sees it. Just like exposure to new situations, we want to be purposeful about who, when and how they meet new people. Below are some basic tips of what to do and what not to do when socializing your puppy with people.

#### DO

- Introduce your puppy to new people in moderation.
- Expose your puppy to people of different race, gender, height, weight, age, etc.
- Expose your puppy to children as often as possible.
- It's imperative that dogs are exposed to children at this young age. Interactions between puppy and children should be monitored to ensure that they are not overwhelming. Ensure kids know how to safely interact with the puppy (without pulling, grabbing, forcing hugs, picking up, etc.) Hurtful or stressful experiences with kids could create a negative association.

#### DO NOT

- Introduce your puppy to more than 10 people in a day.
- Expose your puppy to large crowds of people.
- Allow people to pass your puppy around to several different individuals right after one another
- Force your puppy to meet a person they do not want to. Tip: Try having the stranger toss your puppy treats to gain their trust. If they refuse to approach, respect their decision and end the meeting.





# PUPPY SOCIALIZATION *continued*



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## **OTHER DOGS**

Exposure and proper socialization are very important with other dogs during this young age. However, there are things that will help to set your puppy up for positive experiences with other dogs, and others that may cause a negative experience. Outlined below are suggestions for how to expose your puppy to other dogs safely.

### **DO**

- Bring your puppy to structured puppy socialization classes. This is strongly recommended.
- Introduce your puppy to new dogs in moderation.
- Introduce your puppy to dogs that are known to be dog-friendly, somewhat mellow, and up to date on vaccinations.
- Frequently expose your puppy to other dogs on walks without greeting nose to nose.
- Keep interactions with dogs while on walks short.

### **DO NOT**

- Introduce your puppy to more than 10 dogs in a day.
- Bring your puppy to dog parks.
- Force your dog to interact with dogs.
- Expose your puppy to several adult dogs at once.
- Facilitate interactions with every dog you pass by
- Allow your puppy to meet a dog you do not have any background on.

Keep in mind, not all other dogs are dog friendly. Do not ever assume another dog will like or tolerate your puppy. Also, keep in mind that a dog that approaches your puppy with exuberant, excessive energy behavior may lead to a negative experience for your puppy. Controlled situations are the best way to ensure your puppy has a wealth of positive experiences with other dogs to build up its' confidence and positive association with other dogs!

## **SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS & TASTE**

Regularly expose your puppy to all different kinds of sights, sounds, smells and tastes. Refer to our 'Socialization Checklist' for specific ideas!

Remember, they are babies! Everything is a new, learning experience. We want them to be excited and happy about these new situations, so keeping things

positive and full of things like attention, treats, and toys is best! Equally important to adding positive elements to new experiences is mitigating the negative things. This means not forcing interactions and ending a situation that is creating stress or anxiety. They need to learn that in a situation where they feel uncertain you will keep them safe and help their boundaries to be respected. Keep in mind also that if they are tired or overwhelmed, they may not be ready for new stimuli (think about trying to introduce a new vegetable to a toddler who had missed their nap).

The first three months of a puppy's life are the most important in their entire lifetime. Everything they experience and are exposed to during this volatile time will affect them for the rest of their life, whether it is good or bad. It's important to socialize your puppy properly and expose them to as much as possible before they reach 4-months of age. Though puppies are not fully vaccinated by 8-weeks of age, proper socialization is vastly more important than the possibility of succumbing to a contagious disease, as stated by the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior.

