



Socializing your dog involves teaching him the appropriate way to respond to the variety of things he may encounter during his day to day life. He needs to get used to people, other animals, cars and the many other sights, sounds and shapes in his neighbourhood. If a dog is well socialised he will be calm, confident and relaxed no matter what situation he finds himself in.

How a dog responds to his environment is a result of how he is raised. It's best to start socialising your dog while he is a puppy but if you have rescued an adult dog that won't be possible. Even if your new dog is well out of the puppy stage you can still help him learn to adapt to changes in the world around him by exposing him to a variety of people and places.

## **SOCIALISING YOUR PUPPY**

One of the most important parts of socialising a pup is leaving him with his mother and litter mates until he is eight weeks old. If you take him away too early he misses out on learning about dog communication and behaviour from his doggy family and is more likely to have difficulties interacting with other dogs later in life.

There is a specific period between the ages of four and twelve weeks of age when socialisation is particularly important and effective for your pup. If you can expose him to as many pleasant experiences with other people and animals as you can during this period he will grow up to be friendlier and less afraid of new experiences.

We highly recommend taking your puppy to a 'puppy school'. A good puppy school teaches you and your puppy positive methods of training, provides information about the basic care of your pup and is done in a safe, hygienic environment for pups who haven't yet received their final vaccinations. The most important time for socialising a puppy is before their final vaccination. Puppy school classes allow for safer socialisation for your pup at this time.

Even if your pup is outgoing and relaxed continue to work on socialization. Adolescent dogs can become cautious and nervous in new situations even if their owners have done everything right when they were young. Take him to obedience classes and introduce him to lots of people and other dogs while making it a positive experience for him.

## **SOCIALISING YOUR ADULT DOG**

If you have rescued an adult dog you may not know what his experiences have been as a puppy. It is therefore even more important that you start socialising him as soon as he's settled into your home.

You may find that he is particularly fearful of one group of people, such as children. If that's the case invite a few sensible children to your home on a regular basis.

Keep your dog on the lead and ask the children to throw a favourite treat to your dog. If he is comfortable with that then ask the children to offer a treat on an open hand. Take it slowly and it won't be long before your dog is looking for children to say hello to because they may give him a treat.

If your dog is nervous around other dogs it is important to help him get used to them in a controlled way. You'll need help with this so ask a friend with a friendly dog to come and visit. Have your dog on a lead and reward him with treats for staying calm when the other dog is nearby. Over a period of weeks gradually bring the other dog closer while giving your dog treats. Over time he will learn to be relaxed when another dog comes close to him.

## Meeting New People with Your Dog

When your dog is meeting people, whether for the first time or a regular visitor/family member, it's important to allow the dog space to become comfortable with the change in environment.

We suggest avoid approaching the dog which may cause a reaction (excitement, lunging etc) and strictly following the "no look, no touch, no talk" rule when first entering a dog's environment. This ensures that excitable dogs remain more calm and do not assume the role as official "welcomer".

Once the dog is calm and has lost interest in the person (this can easily take up to 5 minutes or more) the person may call the dog to them for patting.

## Steps to Socialising Your Dog

1. Take your dog to a dog obedience class that uses positive training methods such as food rewards or clicker training. He will meet other dogs and their owners and it will also strengthen his relationship with you. If he has confidence in you as his leader he will feel less stressed in new situations.
2. Grab a bag of treats or a favourite toy and go walking with your dog in a variety of environments. Keep him on leash so he stays safe and walk past noisy schools and alongside busy roads. Reward him with treats for staying calm and ignore any anxious behaviour such as barking or pulling on the leash. Use the treats to keep his attention on you and distract him from anything he is nervous about.
3. Introduce him to other dogs and when he's comfortable with them allow him to play with them off leash. This may mean starting out by having play dates in your backyard with dogs belonging to friends and family. You may, if he's comfortable, graduate to meeting unfamiliar dogs in off leash dog parks but don't do this until he has met a lot of friendly dogs and hasn't shown any sign of fear or anxiety. You have no control over the dogs that run loose at a dog park and an interaction with an aggressive dog can undo all your good work.
4. Invite your friends to visit and ask them to bring their children. Make sure that the children are sensible around dogs; children who shriek and run are only going to startle him. By taking the time to introduce your dog to children you'll reduce the risk of him becoming frightened by them when he bumps into them during his walks.
5. Take your dog with you as often as you can. Some cafes allow you to sit outside with your dog while you have a coffee. This is a great way to expose him to people as many of them will stop to say hello to him.

If at any time you're concerned about your dog's socialisation, seek professional help. In most cases your dog can be helped by a specific training program and perhaps medication to help with any anxiety.

Although it sounds like a lot of work, socialisation isn't that difficult. It is a vital part of being a responsible dog owner, and something that can make the world of difference to your dog's enjoyment of life.

