

What is it?

Socialization is the developmental process whereby puppies and adolescent dogs familiarize themselves with their constantly changing surroundings. It is how they work out what is safe and good as opposed to what is dangerous and not-so-good.

Anything you want your puppy to cheerfully accept as an adult—people of all kinds, animals, things, and situations—you must introduce her to often and in a positive manner in the first 6 months of her life. Then you have to make sure she stays comfortable with all these new things.

But puppies love everything already!

Sure they do. Until the early stage of their development draws to a close. At that point, they become wary of other dogs if they have met too few. And down the road, puppies can become shy or growly around children or strangers, too, unless they have met and enjoyed meeting a bunch of them.

Under-socialized dogs are at much greater risk of developing all sorts of behavioral problems stemming from fear—aggression, agoraphobia, and reactivity towards certain people and animals, for example.

Teach your puppy that the world is safe and prevent behavior problems in the future.

How to socialize your puppy.

- Think about the things your puppy will see every week as an adult: Visit those places, see those people, or experience those things now.
- Help your puppy form positive associations: Cheer and praise her when she encounters something new. Offer a treat whenever possible.

Step 1. If your puppy seems even a bit nervous (freeze, move backwards, tail tucked), move a little distance away, give her treats, and then walk away—anything she is unsure about should be encountered in short bursts.

Step 2. As soon as your puppy seems more relaxed, try again. As she sees or hears the thing that scared her before, start your cheerful praise and break out the treats.

Step 3. If your puppy did not seem nervous with the new thing or acts curious about it after she has been treated, go back and let her investigate a little more. Again, praise and treat.

Training Tip: *When you move away from any new thing, go quiet and stop the treats. We want your puppy to learn that the presence of the thing is what makes you give her the food. That way, she begins to associate the food with the new experience and realizes that, "Hey, that new thing isn't so bad after all."*
