



Getting a new puppy is exciting! A critical part of puppyhood is socialization, but it is important to understand that socializing your puppy does not mean maximizing exposure. Appropriate socialization is ensuring your puppy has positive experiences when you introduce them to new people, animals, objects, and environments.

Here are some recommendations for socialization your puppy appropriately.

Socialization and Exposure

During a puppy's sensitive period (approximately the first three months of age) both good and bad experiences that your puppy encounters can have a lasting impact on their future behaviour. If a puppy is inadequately socialized, or has negative experiences during their sensitive period, it can cause them to develop fearful behaviour. During this time, it's essential that your puppy is introduced to different things, including:

- People (different heights, sizes, ages, wearing different clothing, etc.)
- Animals (who are physically healthy and behaviourally appropriate)
- Objects
- Environments
- Sensory stimuli (different noises, surfaces, smells, sights)

Always try to ensure that your puppy has positive experiences as you socialize them. To keep your puppy safe and healthy, it's a good idea to vaccinate them and only socialize your puppy with other healthy dogs.

Positive Experiences

Set your puppy up for success. Monitor all interactions and prepare to intervene. If your puppy shows signs of fear, always give them the choice to escape. Remove your puppy from the situation, if required. Forcing a puppy to be exposed to something they find scary only perpetuates fear.

For example, avoid restraining your puppy when people pet or interact with them. Forced petting is NOT socialization. Allow your puppy to approach people and encourage others to give your puppy a treat while they pet them. This will help ensure your puppy has positive experiences with strangers and physical handling.

When socializing your puppy with other dogs, ensure the other dog is behaviourally appropriate. For example, if you have a timid, small-sized puppy, then avoid having them interact with an impulsive or energetic large dog, who might frighten or hurt your puppy by accident during play. Consider taking your puppy to a puppy socialization class, where a certified dog trainer can monitor behaviour and facilitate appropriate interactions. Be cautious with dog parks, as you will not be able to control which dogs interact with your puppy.

Always provide positive reinforcement for desirable behaviour. Bring treats with you during outings, so you can have people offer your puppy treats. This helps your puppy create positive associations with unfamiliar people. The goal of socialization is to build your puppy's confidence and prevent the development of fearful behaviour.

Puppy Bingo

See the [Fear Free Puppy Socialization Bingo](#) handout. This handout provides fun ideas for ensuring your puppy is exposed to different experiences during their sensitive period.

What to AVOID

In summary, here are some things to avoid during socialization:

- Introducing too many new things at the same time. This can overwhelm your puppy. Alternatively, introduce new experiences gradually and let your puppy explore or approach at their own pace.
- Forcing your puppy to socialize. Always give them a choice to retreat from something they perceive to be fearful and remove them from a situation if needed.
- Not exposing your puppy to different experiences. Ensure your puppy is exposed to different people, objects, environments, animals, and sensory stimuli, in a positive manner.
- Lack of positive reinforcement. Be your puppy's cheerleader! Always have treats and/or toys ready to reward good behaviour, such as approaching an unfamiliar person or exploring a new surface.

Additional Resources:

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers several puppy training classes, including Puppy Basics, Puppy Power, and a socialization class, Puppy Pup-In. For more information, visit our website:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).