

GOOD HUMAN



★ PUPPY MEETS WORLD ★

gentle exposure guide

A companion guide to Good Human Dog Training programs.



AVSAB Position Statement On Puppy Socialization

AVSAB

American Veterinary Society
of Animal Behavior

www.AVSABonline.org



THE PRIMARY AND MOST IMPORTANT

time for puppy socialization is the first three months of life.^{1,2} During this time puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing overstimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior. For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated.

Because the first three months are the period when sociability outweighs fear, this is the primary window of opportunity for puppies to adapt to new people,

animals, and experiences. Incomplete or improper socialization during this important time can increase the risk of behavioral problems later in life including fear, avoidance, and/or aggression. Behavioral problems are the greatest

threat to the owner-dog bond. In fact, behavioral problems are the number one cause of relinquishment to shelters.³ Behavioral issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age.

While puppies' immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vac-

cination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behavior problem.

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Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every safe opportunity to expose young puppies to the great variety of stimuli that they will experience in their lives. Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socializing puppies in an environment where risk of illness can be minimized.

In general, puppies can start puppy socialization classes as early as 7-8 weeks of age. Puppies should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days prior to the first class and a first deworming. They should be kept up-to-date on vaccines throughout the class.



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4. Duxbury MM, Jackson JA, Line SW, Anderson RK. Evaluation of association between retention in the home and attendance at puppy socialization classes. *JAVMA*, 223 (1), 2003, 61-66
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The Process of Socialization:

Puppies should be handled from birth, learning to accept manipulation of all body parts. Every effort should be made to expose them to as many different people, well-socialized animals, situations, places, etc. as possible. Puppies should be encouraged to explore, investigate, and manipulate their environments. Interactive toys and games, a variety of surfaces, tunnels, steps, chutes, and other stimuli can enrich the puppy's environment. Puppies should accompany their breeders/owners on as many car trips as possible. These exposures should continue into adulthood to maintain an outgoing and sociable dog.

Puppy socialization classes can offer a safe and organized means of socializing puppies and more quickly improve their responsiveness to commands.⁴ Each puppy should have up-to-date vaccinations and be disease and parasite free before entering the class. Where possible, classes should be held on surfaces that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. indoor environments). Visits to dog parks or other areas that are not sanitized and/or are highly trafficked by dogs of unknown vaccination or disease status should be avoided.

Classes and at-home training should be based on positive reinforcement with frequent rewards praise, petting, play and/or treats. Positive and consistent training is associated with fewer behavioral problems and greater obedience than methods that involve punishment and/or encourage human dominance.^{4,5,6}

Time must be scheduled for puppies to play alone with their favorite toys (such as stuffed food toys) or take naps in safe places such as crates or puppy pens. This teaches puppies to amuse themselves, and may help to prevent problems of over attachment to the owners. Continuing to offer dogs a wide variety of experiences during their first year of life is also helpful in preventing separation-related behavior.⁷

Proper confinement training using pens or crates helps to ensure that puppies have safe and secure places for rest and confinement. Puppies that are used to being crated will be less stressed if they must be hospitalized or be confined for travel by plane or car. Crates should serve as comfort or play areas.

Early and adequate socialization and programs of positive training can go a long way to preventing behavior problems and improving bonding between humans and dogs. While the first three months is the most important socialization period in a puppy's life, owners of puppies that have passed this milestone are strongly encouraged to continue to socialize their puppies to as many people, pets, and locations as is practical. However, owners of puppies displaying fear should seek veterinary guidance.



Puppy Socialization

Socialization is the process of getting your puppy accustomed to new things, people, and places while helping them learn that the world is not a scary place!

Critical Socialization Period

Puppies go through this important phase during the first 4 months of their lives. This is the time when they are MOST impressionable and your opportunity to start them off on the right foot! Every day during this period is a crucial time to teach your puppy that the world is fun and to help them develop the foundation for their future play skills with other dogs, greetings with people, and the ability to see, learn, and do new things without fear.

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 such as fear, aggression, and reactivity.

How to gently introduce your puppy to our big world.

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 them when they encounter something new. Offer a treat whenever possible.

If your puppy seems even a bit nervous, move away, give them treats, and then walk away. Anything your puppy is unsure about should be encountered in short bursts.

As soon as your puppy seems more relaxed, try again. As they see or hear the scary thing, start your cheerful praise and break out the treats.

If your puppy didn't seem nervous about the new thing or acts curious about it, go back and let them investigate a little more. Again, praise and treat.

Socialization vs. Gentle Exposure

You got a new puppy, and you want to do everything right. You've heard that you have to socialize your puppy so that they won't be afraid of the things in their world. So you take them with you everywhere and ask strangers to give them treats and pets all over town. You are checking every box. It's wonderful that you are taking this so seriously!

Let's consider what your puppy is learning during these outings.

1. Your puppy is learning that people can be overwhelming! And their person can not be relied upon to keep them safe.
2. If you have a worried dog, this can be traumatic. And if people are feeding them treats, they can feel conflicted about the whole situation.
3. Your puppy is learning to be attracted to strange people. Why would they pay attention to their person when there are petting and treat parties?

Socialization is for parties, not puppies!

It's your responsibility to teach your puppy to ignore people and dogs, greeting only those that are known. Greeting everyone will cause poor manners and frustration for your dog.

Fear is natural and will manifest in your puppy's responses to new things, sometimes when you least expect it. Lots of the things you want to introduce your puppy to will not be fun or reinforcing such as the vacuum cleaner, getting nails trimmed, and riding in the car. They will be weird to them, sometimes even scary. These are some of the things your pup will likely need more help with.

What to do instead

When exposing your puppy to the world, do it gently, gradually, and in a positive manner. Start with controlled interactions, ensuring your puppy's safety, and gradually increase the level of exposure as they become more comfortable. This may look something like sitting at a distance from an outdoor social event while playing with your dog or even sitting on a bench outside a grocery store and giving your dog a treat when someone walks past. In this way, you are teaching your puppy that you are the source of entertainment, affection, and food, especially in the presence of strangers.

Exposure is more than just meeting people.

You can build a resilient, well-rounded, and confident adult dog by exposing your puppy to something new while always ensuring a positive experience for your puppy. Floor textures, strange noises, different types of weather, and odd smells should all be a part of your exposure goals. Nearly anything can be turned into an excellent experience for a puppy! Show your puppy new things, and always let them win the challenge. Any time your puppy isn't enjoying the experience, there is potential for doing more harm than good.

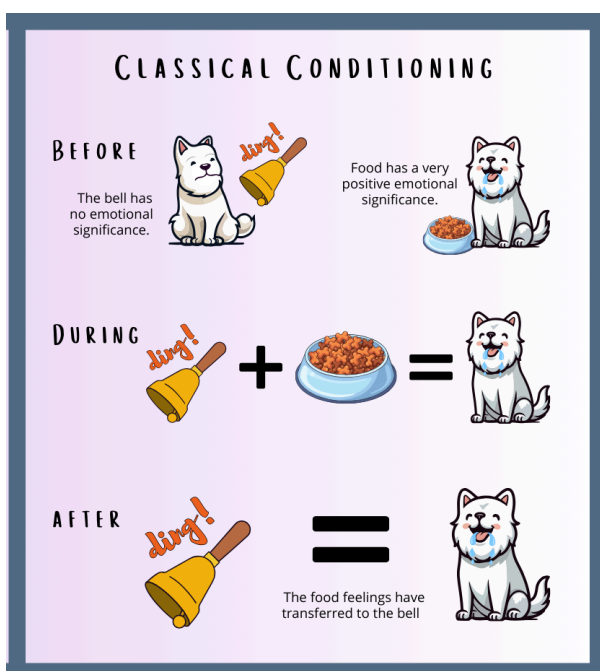
Science to the rescue!

You can transform novel, weird, or scary things into good things. And one of the best ways to do this is to make them predict something the puppy loves, like memorable food. If weird or startling things are followed by a bite of something yummy, those things will likely stop being weird or startling.

The pleasure of eating delicious treats will actually start to transfer to the weird things, and the weird things will come to evoke good feelings.

Ever hear of Pavlov and his salivating dogs?

Pavlov is always on your shoulder. Living beings are always learning, often unaware that learning is even taking place.



The order is pretty important.

Remember: new thing first, then yummy food. Be ready with really good food. Your puppy's tummy can't tolerate much rich food, so you'll also use their kibble. Pull out the good stuff when your puppy is afraid of something or you know it will be extra weird for them. You might wonder what that looks like.

[It looks like this: Kikopup Socializing a Puppy During the Pandemic](#)

PUPPY GENTLE EXPOSURE

This is the process of getting your puppy accustomed to new things, people, and places while helping them learn that the world is not a scary place! Getting conflicting information and don't know where to start? Read on to learn more!

MYTH

I can wait until my puppy is a little bit older to start socialization.

TRUTH

Puppies go through what's called a "Critical Socialization Period" during the first 4 months of their lives. This is the time when they are MOST impressionable and your opportunity to start them off on the right foot! Every day during this period is a crucial time to teach your puppy that the world is fun and to help develop the foundation for future play skills with other dogs, greetings with people, and the ability to see, learn, and do new things without fear.

MYTH

I can't let my puppy play with other dogs until they have had all of their vaccines.

TRUTH

This is a common myth. The truth is that you can let your puppy play as long as the following are true

- Your puppy has had at least one DHP vaccine and is on schedule for vaccines with the vet.
- All other dogs they are playing with are on schedule with their vaccines and appear to be healthy.
- The place your puppy is playing is clean and has not recently hosted any dogs with unknown health/vaccine status (i.e. NOT the dog park).

If you are concerned or confused about these guidelines, check out the attached [AVSAB statement on socialization](#) and talk to your vet!

MYTH

My puppy played with their littermates, so she already got socialization.

TRUTH

We wish it worked like that too! Unfortunately, playing with littermates is not enough to teach your pup great social skills with other dogs. If your puppy **ONLY** plays with littermates for their whole puppyhood, that's like if you **ONLY** talked to your sibling for your whole childhood. Your puppy needs to learn how to play with others to grow up into an adult who plays well.

MYTH

My puppy can play with any other dog, and that counts as socialization.

TRUTH

Whoa, slow down! While your puppy should definitely play with other dogs, they shouldn't play with just any dog. Why? Because we want your puppy to play with happy confidence, not fearfulness or bullying behavior. It's important to find playmates who are a good match (they should display a similar level of boisterousness and be an appropriate size and play style) so they can learn and play without developing bad habits! Consider a well-run puppy training class for play options.

MYTH

Puppy socializing just means meeting other dogs.

TRUTH

While socializing with other dogs is wonderful and **VERY** important, there is more to socialization than that! Your pup needs to learn about all kinds of things, like meeting people, cars, noises, and silly objects that humans use in everyday life. Not only is it important for her to learn that an umbrella (for example) is not scary, but the process of socialization also teaches her that new things in general are not necessarily scary and exploration is fun - two important skills for life!

MYTH

I don't need to go out of my way to introduce my pup to new things, they will learn as we go.

TRUTH

This one is partially true - your puppy will learn about all sorts of things as you go through puppyhood and your training journey together. However, it is important to make a plan for socialization to make sure your puppy is not learning the **WRONG** things while you're not looking (like learning to bark at strangers) and to make sure that you introduce them to as many things as possible while they are still at this most impressionable stage. You don't want to forget to introduce your pup to a male with a hat and have them be terrified of men wearing hats later in life! Check out our [Puppy Socialization Scavenger Hunt](#) to help you create a plan and have fun doing it.

MYTH

My puppy isn't a rescue so he isn't scared of things and doesn't need socialization

TRUTH

Even if your puppy is not scared of **ANYTHING** now, she can quickly develop a fear later in life. The work that you put into socialization now will pay off in the future. Trust us, it is much better to have a happy and confident dog from the start than having to re-train her not to be scared!

MYTH

I don't need to bring treats when we are out in public and I'm not working on training.

TRUTH

Your puppy is **CONSTANTLY** learning. This means that everything you do together is a training opportunity. It's a great idea to have treats on you anytime you take your puppy out, even if you aren't planning on training. You never know when you will encounter someone or something new and have the opportunity to cross something off your Socialization Scavenger Hunt list by making it a fun, positive learning experience for your puppy!

MYTH

If I force my puppy to go near things that really scare them, eventually they will get over it.

TRUTH

The NUMBER ONE goal of exposure is not to scare your puppy. This means that (for instance) if you are trying to introduce them to an umbrella, you could leave the umbrella open on the floor and let them go up to it on their own terms with lots of verbal encouragement and treats from you. You should not force them to walk up to the umbrella and ensure your puppy has an escape route if they are scared. Letting them make their own choices will build confidence far more than forcing them to do something! This should be fun for both you and your puppy, NOT scary.

MYTH

I should yell at my puppy when they jump on new people they meet.

TRUTH

Just in case we haven't said it enough, socialization should be fun! That means no yelling and lots of positive reinforcement. In order to avoid your puppy jumping on new people (as puppies tend to do), it's a great idea to have a plan and routine in place for greetings. See our [Greetings DOs and DON'Ts](#) for more ideas on how to set your puppy up for success! If they do make a mistake, don't yell. Just guide them away, regroup, and start over. Meeting new people works best when you have a plan. It won't go perfectly every time (that's normal!), but keep things fun and easy for your pup to help them succeed the next time you try.



Now you are ready to go socialize your puppy!
Good luck and have fun!
Questions? Go to goodhumandogtraining.com for more.

GREETING DOs AND DON'TS

MISSION To teach your puppy to greet new people calmly and happily with 4 feet on the floor. We want your puppy to know that meeting new people is no big deal at all, and that her focus should be on you the whole time.

METHOD ONE

Have your puppy sit, facing you. Make sure she is calm first, then have a friend come up and pet her gently on the back while you feed her treats the **WHOLE TIME** to keep her attention mostly on you. If you lose her attention, have your friend step away. Then regain her attention and start again. If your puppy flinches away from your friend's touch, try method two →

This method works great for puppies who are too scared or shy to have strangers pet them. Hold some high value treats and have your pup on a leash. Have a stranger stand still, and walk your puppy by the stranger first at a distance, getting gradually closer, giving treats the **WHOLE TIME**. If your puppy is ok with this, allow her to go over and sniff the stranger (who is standing still, not speaking about 4' away from you) and quickly call her back to you, giving lots of treats and praise for her bravery.

TROUBLESHOOTING If your pup is too excited to focus on you to try method one, start with practicing sits and paying attention for 1-3 seconds at a time.

DON'T

Wing it every time you meet someone new. Your pup will be confused and develop bad habits!

DO

Decide on a plan and stick with it. Try practicing at home with a close friend first, then "take it on the road". The more stimuli (distracting things) that are present while meeting someone new, the harder it will be to keep your pup's attention. Work up to harder circumstances once your pup is a pro at practicing your chosen greeting method at home. The more consistent you are with sticking to your greeting plan, the faster your pup will understand exactly what to do!

DON'T

Abandon your greeting methods at home when people come over.

DO

Be prepared for when visitors come - even unexpectedly - with a plan! If it is too much work to practice your greetings or the situation is too exciting, it is okay to keep your pup on leash with you and not have her meet other people, or to let her rest in her crate if she already loves her crate. Just give her lots of treats! Try to make it a habit of practicing your method with everyone who comes over - it will only take a few minutes and is so worth it!

DON'T

Abandon your puppy after the initial greeting goes well!

DO

Keep your eyes on your puppy the whole time you are around new people! Keep her on a leash if she is too excited and unpredictable. Give her treats for paying attention to you and keeping "4 on the floor". Reward all calm behavior. Your diligence will pay off with a calm adult dog!

DON'T

Give other people treats to give your pup when greeting.

DO

Keep the treats with you and reward your pup for all calm behavior. If you give treats to others, they might inadvertently reward jumping, licking, nipping, or all kinds of other behaviors we don't want to reinforce. Shy dogs sometimes put themselves in situations that make them more scared to get a treat - which will make the whole event backfire because they will be even more afraid the next time!

DON'T

Try using low value treats (like kibble) for greetings.

DO

Use something your dog loves (high-value treats like hot dogs or cheese) to keep their attention. Greetings are hard, and you will need something special to keep their focus!

DON'T

Let people convince you to abandon your greeting routine.

DO

Stick to your guns! People have all kinds of convincing arguments: "I'm a dog person", "It's ok, I like when she licks me!", "Don't be so structured, let her have some fun." Don't be fooled! Your puppy will have more fun, and be happy and more relaxed if you create routines and stick to them. This way, your puppy won't be confused as an adult.

DON'T

Try these methods when greeting people who have dogs with them.

DO

Greeting other dogs requires a whole other set of skills, and we have a lot to say on the matter to make sure that you know what to do to set your pup up for success. Check out the handout [Your Puppy and Other Dogs](#) for more details on preventing bad behaviors and training strategies. This is an important training topic, so make sure you have a plan for dog-dog greetings before attempting them!

DON'T

Keep going if your puppy is too excited, scared, or distracted.

DO

Keep calm. Learning to have calm greetings is a process, and it's difficult for both you and your pup. If your puppy is trying to run away, barking, whining, panting excessively, or crouching, they are probably not having fun. Move away from the person you are trying to greet, look for calm behavior (4 on the floor, sit, down, or looking at you - even for a second), and reward it. Wait until they are calm enough to try again, or abandon the training here on a good note if you need to and let them rest. We promise that working hard to reward calm behavior and avoid over-excitement will pay off! You've got this!

PUPPY EXPOSURE CHECKLIST

The following points are all areas that a developing puppy can experience as part of a positive exposure program. **Proper exposure is force-free and completely voluntary on the puppy's part. ALWAYS keep it positive and watch your puppy's comfort level.**

- **Experienced many different surfaces (with vaccinations in mind)**
wood, wood chips, carpet, tile, cement, linoleum, grass, wet grass, dirt, mud, puddles, deep pea gravel, grates, uneven surfaces, on a table, on a chair, etc.
- **Played with many different objects**
fuzzy toys, big & small balls, hard toys, funny-sounding toys, wooden items, paper or cardboard items, milk jugs, metal items, car keys, etc.
- **Experienced many different locations (with vaccinations in mind)**
front yard (daily), other people's homes, schoolyard, lake, pond, river, boat, basement, elevator, car, moving car, garage, laundry room, kennel, veterinary hospital (just to say hi, get lots of cookies, no vaccinations), grooming salon (just to say hi), etc.
- **Met and played with many new people (outside of family)**
include children; adults (mostly male-presenting); people of different ethnicities and sizes; senior adults; people using wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and crutches; people wearing hats, sunglasses, backpacks, etc.
- **Exposed to many different noises (These may be experienced in real-life and via desensitization media.)**
garage door opening, doorbell, children playing, babies screaming, big trucks, motorcycles, skateboards, washing machine, shopping carts rolling, power boat, clapping, loud singing, pan dropping, horses neighing, vacuums, lawnmowers, birthday party, etc.

- **Exposed to many fast moving objects (don't allow to chase)**
skateboards, roller-skates, bicycles, motorcycles, cars, people running, cats running, scooters, vacuums, children running, children playing soccer, squirrels, cats, horses running, cows running, etc.
- **Experienced many different challenges**
climb on, in, off and around a box, go through a cardboard tunnel, climb up and down steps, climb over obstacles, play hide-and-peek, go in and out a doorway with a step up or down, exposed to an electric sliding door, umbrella, balloons, walk on a wobbly table (plank of wood with a small rock underneath), jump over a broom, climb over a log, bathtub (and bath) etc.
- **Handled by owner and family many times each week**
hold under arm (like a football), hold to chest, hold on floor near owner, hold in-between owner's legs, hold head, look in ears, mouth, in-between toes, hold and take temperature (ask veterinarian), hold like a baby, trim toe nails, hold in lap, etc.
- **Eaten from many different shaped containers**
wobbly bowl, metal, cardboard box, paper, coffee cup, china, aluminum pie pan, plastic, frying pan, KONG™, Treatball, spoon-fed, paper bag, etc..
- **Eaten in many different locations**
back yard, front yard, crate, kitchen, basement, laundry room, bathroom, friend's house, car, school yard, bathtub, up high (on work bench), under an umbrella, etc.
- **Played with many different puppies and safe adult dogs as much as possible.**
- **Left alone safely, away from family and other animals (5-45 minutes) many times a week.**
- **Experienced wearing a collar, leash and harness many different times in lots of different locations.**



Congratulations!

Cheers to you and your pup for a job well done!

You and your puppy have completed your Good Human Dog Training program.

Keep practicing to maintain your skills.

If you enjoyed this course, you and your puppy might consider more advanced training. There is always more to learn!

