

Socialization

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Socialization. It is one of the most important things an owner should focus on with their new dog. Lack of socialization is THE #1 reason why dogs are put down in the United States. A socialized dog means your dog is comfortable in various public settings and can have fun out of his own comfort zone (your home). And it all begins with setting up



positive associations to meeting new strangers, new dogs and new surroundings. As Lore Haug, DVM and a well-known veterinary behaviorist, explains, the socialization period first begins at the young age of 8 weeks and extends until about 12-14 weeks. That means if you have a little one in this age group, now is the time to provide your puppy with very *positive* experiences out in public and with other nice dogs.

Whether you are the proud owner of a young pup or an older dog – perhaps one you rescued and don't have full history on - here are some great tips to consider to help your dog learn social skills and even enjoy your outings together:

1. #1 Rule. Start slow. Don't start off taking your new puppy or dog to a very crowded place. Begin with meeting a few dogs and people each week. One way I personally socialized my shy puppy (I found him under the interstate so suffice to say he didn't have huge trust in people) was to ask strangers to simply talk nicely to him and give him a small food reward.
2. Use your friends and neighbor's well-behaved dogs to show your dog how nice doggy socializing can be! Use a fenced area to let them explore and have fun together. Doggie dates allow you to specifically choose who your dog plays with. It keeps the play & the experience safe and pleasant.

3. Vet offices are a great place to stop by, sniff a few nice dogs, get a treat and leave! Yes, leave without having gotten poked, prodded or stuck! This allows your dog to experience vet visits as a GOOD thing.
4. Visit dog stores! When I am training a dog, I always recommend that the owner take the new dog with them to Pookie's to pick out my suggested toys and rewards. This is a low risk/high gain environment for your dog to get a few pats and affection from strangers and to meet a few canine friends!
5. Enjoy the spacious outdoors together while also meeting strangers and new dogs. Take advantage of nature walks and parks that have lots of room and not huge numbers of dogs. That keeps it very safe and controlled for you and your dog.
6. Off leash dog parks are a great and fun place to hang out – provided that the owners are paying attention to their respective dogs and that your dog is displaying solid enjoyment. Good, safe dog play is fluid. It looks like a dance of the dogs with lots of movement. Body posturing and rigid stances and stares mean things aren't ideal. Learn to know the language of dogs and read yours!
7. If you are having challenges with socialization, call a positive trainer. We work with the humans as well as the dogs to safely teach how to enjoy life outside of the home! Visit APDT.com to find a great trainer in your area.

Finally, socialization isn't a forced behavior. Just as we can't force someone who is shy to become someone they aren't, you must take it slow and keep it positive. Dogs learn through repeated experiences. So go out today and have some great ones!

