



SOUTHERN PINES ANIMAL SHELTER

Puppy Socialization

You've probably heard time and again how important it is to socialize puppies, but what does that socialization entail? Perhaps a more apt term is "exposure". The idea of socialization in regards to raising a puppy encompasses not only those new human and canine friends, but introducing your puppy to all the novelties of the world. Just don't do it all at once. If you overwhelm your new, young pup with too much too soon, they may find the world a little too daunting to explore. Here are some key pieces of information and tips to successfully socialize your young pup.

Quality Over Quantity

When puppy parents hear the word "socialization", they tend to recognize the need for introducing their pup to other dogs and people. However, while we definitely do want to give puppies a variety, it's important we choose appropriately. Puppies, especially the very young, would do best to interact with other young puppies and well-socialized adult dogs. Dog parks are NOT an appropriate setting for puppy socialization as there are unknown factors and far too much unpredictability. One bad incident could do significant damage to a puppy's social development. Likewise, we want to be careful about the people we introduce to our young puppy (or those who introduce themselves without asking). Make sure you pay attention to how the person is interacting with your dog AND the signals your dog is giving. For example, a puppy who is overwhelmed or nervous should not be introduced to a young child at that moment, but rather at a time when they are more confident and comfortable.

Exposure

"Socialization" encompasses the idea of exposing puppies to a variety—of dogs, people, places, and things. Make sure your puppy knows what it's like to walk on grass, carpet, wood, tile, gravel, concrete, mud. Show them what sound the vacuum makes, the garbage disposal, the printer, the doorbell. Brush them, clip their nails, check their ears, wipe their eyes and nose, pick up their paws, lift their tail, look at their teeth. Safely and positively expose them to all manner of things so there's less (scary) novelty in the future.

Location

Where you are exposing your pup to new things is as important as the who or what. If you bring your pup to the Hike and Bike Trail to meet some new friends, and your pup hasn't gone anywhere but home and the vet, they are going to be fast in over their head. When you start exploring the big world with your puppy, start when it's quiet. Go to a restaurant patio or food truck during the slow part of the day. Explore the pet store on your lunch break. Take a half day



SOUTHERN PINES ANIMAL SHELTER

and check out the lake before the regular workday is over. **Please note, for puppies UNDER 4 months**, even if your pup is up to date on all their vaccinations, their immune systems are still developing and so they are still at risk for contracting potentially life-threatening diseases like parvovirus and distemper. But you can still start the socialization process! You want to avoid high traffic areas like parks and pet stores, but neighbors' and friends' homes and yards are perfectly safe **as long as all resident dogs are up to date on their vaccinations**. We simply want to avoid areas where there are a.) a lot of dogs coming and going, and b.) areas where there may be loose/stray animals that are less likely to be vaccinated.

Encouragement

If your pup encounters a novelty and their initial response is wariness, throw a party when they overcome it. If your pup is terrified of walking on sand, make a big happy deal of it when they do. Not only will they realize there's nothing so scary about sand after all, but mom/dad LOVES it when they walk on this stuff! If the brush is something to be wary of, praise and treat for even the tiniest of cautious sniffs until their confidence begins to grow. You can also treat and praise for bigger objects like vacuums or doors. Toss treats around the object and let your puppy go at their own pace. Every time they get to a treat, that's an automatic reward. And you can always add to this reward with praise and affection! Don't force them, as this will likely increase their fear of the thing. It could take multiple mini training sessions over several days, but slow and steady is best to ensure your pup gains confidence!

Slow and Steady

Of course we want to give our pup the best start to a happy, confident life. However, we need to be careful that our enthusiasm and our best interests don't turn against us. What's most important is to make every new exposure count. It's better to have three good doggy playmates than five good doggy playmates but one really bad encounter.

A Word About Dog Parks

Everyone wants (or believes) their dog to be a "dog park dog". The truth is, there are many dogs out there who, while not aggressive toward other dogs, are not socialized well enough to be in a large, unpredictable mix of strange dogs. Poor socialization can result in poor communication, and from there it can escalate into anything from a few warning snaps or growls to a serious fight. An adult dog who has been socialized appropriately through their puppyhood has the foundation and confidence that will generally prevent one bad experience from ruining their sociability. (Though, in the event your dog is involved in an altercation, you should always give them some R&R from dog parks and some one-on-one play time with their best buddies for a few days.) However, in terms of raising puppies, dog parks are too



SOUTHERN PINES ANIMAL SHELTER

unpredictable and too unmonitored to ensure safe, successful socialization. While a slip on wet linoleum is relatively easy to bounce back from, the same cannot always be said of a negative experience with a dog or person. Opt for backyard playdates and daycare. Play it safe so they can play safe!

Congratulations on your new puppy, and thank you for adopting!