

# MAKING YOUR PUPPY A SOLID CITIZEN

## The Name of the Game is Socialization

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Well socialized, confident dogs that can be truly comfortable in most situations, becoming wonderful companions, are made not born. While genetics plays a large part, as does the attitude presented by the puppies' mother (this is why it is SO IMPORTANT to see the puppies with their mother) the bulk of the work must be done by the puppy-parents - that's YOU!

A key point to remember is that your window is a small one, beginning to close at around 4 months of age. Try to get those first exposures early on; if you do, then maintaining them for the dog's lifetime will be much easier. Remember to have good treats to reward your puppy for its cooperation and bravery. If they associate new experiences with great treats, they will develop the attitude that "NEW THINGS ARE GOOD THINGS".

One cautionary note, puppies playing with other puppies is wonderful and there is nothing cuter, but it is only a small - very small - part of the socialization picture. Poorly run, inadequately supervised puppy play can be fraught with danger for some puppies. For instance, a puppy that is a bit shy might be targeted by bolder puppies, becoming overwhelmed or physically pounded and end up being more afraid. Make sure the play supervisor has an understanding of what constitutes appropriate puppy play and understands the play styles of the different breeds as well as the physical needs of the different breeds (Pugs and English Bulldogs can't play as long as or as hard as Labrador puppies because of their head shape!).

A well-run puppy play group should match puppies of similar age and size: for instance, a 14 week old Boxer, Golden or Labrador probably should not play with a 14 week old Maltese, Chihuahua, mini Dachshund or Yorkie. A well-run puppy playgroup should also have the supervision, if possible, of a temperamentally sound adult dog that has lots of experience with puppies and will tolerate the silliness that is a part of every puppy. An experienced adult dog can size up and react to a situation much more quickly than humans, and in addition will act as a role model.

Puppy play times should be limited to no more than 2 to 3 minutes before giving the puppies time to regroup and collect themselves. It might even be a shorter time if the puppies involved become quickly over-stimulated. One final note, dogs parks are a bad idea for most dogs (mainly because they lack any supervision at all), but are a definite "NO-NO" for puppies because they can quickly become victimized by dogs who recognize their inexperience or can be bitten if the pup runs up to a dog that is not puppy tolerant.

**Here is a list of suggestions for socializing your puppy.**

1. **Different surfaces:** gravel, wood, carpet, tile, grass, wood chips, snow, mud puddles.
2. **Different toys:** fleece, knotted ropes, kongs, food-stuffed toys, balls, milk jugs, toys that make noise or move.

3. **Many different places:** vet hospital and groomer (first visits should be treat dispensing visits - no vaccines or ear plucking or other ugly stuff), stores, post office, schools, water (whether river, lake, swimming pool - I must say that the local plant nursery was a little sticky about my Lab puppy jumping into the water feature!), car, different rooms in your home, plant nursery, walks in the park, outdoor shopping centers (remember, no dog parks).
4. **Lots of different people:** adults, children, people wearing hats and sunglasses, carrying backpacks, babies in strollers, roller blades, bikes.
5. **Noises** (from a distance at first and let the puppy dictate how quickly to get close): lawn mowers, leaf blowers, power tools, vacuum cleaner, can opener, hair dryer, crutches, wheelchairs.
6. **Physical challenges:** climbing on and off stuff like boxes, tunnels, stairs, ramps, exposure to an electric sliding door, an elevator, balloons, umbrellas, bathtub (and bath), being dried with a towel, playing with a water hose.
7. **Handling body parts:** being carried, being helped into and out of a car, held between owners' legs, having their head, ears, feet, mouth held; hold in lap.
8. **Eating** from different containers (you'd be surprised how many dogs might not eat because it's not "their" bowl). And while you're at it, how about feeding in different locations, too: out of your hand, in the car or van, outside, laundry room, garage, in the crate, beside the crate, on a grooming table, in the bathtub (be creative).
9. **Playing** with many different breeds of puppies (keeping in mind the cautionary notes at the beginning of this article) and adult dogs that are safe and will put up with puppy silliness. **ASK FIRST, FROM A SAFE DISTANCE, IF THEIR DOG TOLERATES PUPPIES AND IF THE OTHER OWNER IS NOT SURE ("Gee, I don't know, he doesn't see many puppies!)", GIVE THEM A WIDE BERTH AND MOVE ON.** Don't let your puppy be the other dog's first experience with a puppy.

REMEMBER, NEVER FORCE OR DRAG YOUR PUPPY TO GO TO ANY OBJECT THAT HE THINKS IS SCARY (OR ANYWHERE, FOR THAT MATTER).

LET YOUR PUPPY DICTATE THE SPEED AT WHICH HE WILL ATTEMPT NEW THINGS. GIVE HIM ALL THE TIME HE NEEDS TO ASSESS THE SITUATION AND REWARD ALL SIGNS OF ACCEPTANCE OR BRAVERY.

A dog that will accept new situations as just another part of life will make a delightful home and traveling companion - a joy to take along who will be welcome anywhere he goes.