

SOCIALIZATION: NEVER TOO SOON & NEVER ENOUGH

New puppy? Then you've undoubtedly received advice – wanted or not – from lots of different people. Perhaps the piece of advice you hear most frequently is about socialization. Dog behavior professionals will recommend you start safely socializing your new puppy from the moment you bring it home. Your vet will caution you – and rightly so – about socializing your puppy in public until he is fully vaccinated.

Did you know that puppies are most accepting of new experiences between 3 and 12 weeks of age, and after that age, with each passing week it becomes harder to get a puppy to accept and enjoy something that he's initially spooked by or wary of? Three to 12 weeks!! Most of us don't even have our puppy until it's at least 8 weeks old, and even then, we're concerned about disease until puppy is fully vaccinated, which often isn't until he's 16 weeks. Therein lies the dilemma.

And a true dilemma it is. Considering most dogs end up in shelters and ultimately euthanized due to behavioral problems that stem from lack of socialization, the importance of it cannot be understated.

What exactly IS socialization when we're talking about our dogs? Obviously, we want to expose our dogs to other friendly dogs and new people. But that's just the beginning. What about people in wheelchairs? Or people in uniform? Or a guy with face piercings and a Mohawk? Yes! All those things. Even if you don't have anyone in your life with an alternative hairstyle, you must introduce your dog to the new and different, which helps puppy develop the confidence to assimilate new information and move on.

Print out the *Puppy Socialization Checklist* in CompliantK9's online training library and check out the more than 85 things your dog should be exposed to. You probably already have plans on your calendar where you could take puppy. Field trip!

What if puppy isn't fully vaccinated? Puppy can still go places with you; he just can't walk on grass or surfaces where dogs may have been. You can carry him from your car, put down a blanket next to your chair, and enjoy a cup of coffee, the soccer game, whatever the activity, while your puppy sits beside you. Heed the advice of your vet about interacting with other dogs, but most vets are comfortable with partially-vaccinated puppies socializing in play groups where care has been taken to sterilize the environment.

How do I know when my puppy has been socialized enough? Many people fall into the trap of thinking that their happy, friendly, social 5-month-old puppy is "done" and there's no need to continue the socialization efforts as persistently. Wrong! Dogs go through a "fear stage" in their development between the ages of 6-14 *months*. We typically classify this as the "adolescent" period where not only can your precious puppy begin acting like, well, an adolescent brat, but he can also start to show signs of fear to certain things. So the answer is to **keep on socializing!**

If your puppy or dog, regardless of age, shows signs of fear and you're not sure how to handle it (remember – they're not human so you don't use the same calming methods as you would with your child who's freaked out by a clown, for example) work with a dog behavior and training professional who will help you and your pup get through it.

The ASPCA has published a great article about [Socialization](http://www.aspc.org) that dives into greater detail.
<http://www.aspc.org>