



### ***What Is The Best Way To Socialize Your Dog or Puppy?***

To avoid fear based aggression and anxiety issues owners need to socialize their dog to people of all descriptions, other dogs and things in the environment. Socialization is not something that should just be done with puppies. The social behavior of the dog does not plateau until 3 years of age and even after that behavior can change. Dogs require continued healthy exposure to friendly people, dogs and environments throughout their lives. Socialization is only for dogs that do not already have fear or anxiety issues. If your dog already has these issues it will need a desensitization program instead.

Because social problems directed towards people presents owners with the highest liability and puts the dog's life at a greater risk it is imperative that socialization to people is each owners highest priority.

When Dr. Ian Dunbar first popularized puppy socialization classes he had 3 main goals. Dr. Dunbar's first goal was to socialize puppies with a vast number of people. Dr. Dunbar's second goal was to teach bite inhibition so when

dogs did bite they did less damage and lastly, Dr. Dunbar wanted to socialize puppies with other dogs. It is a combination of happy friendly exposure to strangers and learning bite inhibition that minimizes an owner's liability due to fear and anxiety issues directed towards people.

Most people do not consider the vast category of people their dog needs exposure to in order to not have fear and anxiety issues. To avoid fear and anxiety issues around people dogs need to be happy or relaxed around babies, toddlers, children of all ages, male and female adults, people with facial hair, elderly people, people who look, smell and act "different". Because the social behavior of the dog does not plateau until 3 years of age, owners need to continue to introduce their dog to brand new people on a regular basis. Making sure all types of people are experienced.

Being "OK" around people is not good enough; we need dogs to be happy or relaxed. The dog that is "OK" can have its emotions swung in the wrong direction too easily. To facilitate socialization with people, owners should be armed with treats and when a stranger wants to interact, they should be given treats to feed the dog. If the dog is already relaxed or happy around people it will easily take treats from the stranger's hand, but if the dog is not happy or relaxed the person will need to toss the treats to the dog.

In addition to being sociable with people, we also need our dogs to be sociable with other dogs. By introducing puppy play sessions into puppy socialization classes Dr. Dunbar killed two birds with one stone. Through play and biting other dogs, puppies learn bite inhibition. A dog that learns to inhibit its bite will do less damage when it does aggress. It also gave puppies socialization with other dogs. But to be successful, socialization with other dogs must take play styles and confidence of each dog into consideration. If they are not a good match, one or both of the dogs will become afraid or upset resulting in social issues for either of the dogs.

The mistake owners make in socializing their dog with other dogs is they let their dog play with any dog that comes along. Our dogs should have opportunities to play with a lot of other dogs, but it cannot be just any dog that comes along. Some dogs really enjoy rough and tumble play, but for other dogs that type of play will crush all confidence the dog has and cause the dog to be fearful and then aggressive. To get a good play match for your dog, ask questions. Find out when another dog is introduced on leash to other dogs what it does behaviorally. Does it stand stiffly, sniff, or play immediately. When it does play, does it prefer chase games or wrestling games? If it likes to wrestle is it gentle or rough and tumble? Only if the play and confidence style of both dogs match up should a play session take place.

Not all dog-to-dog interactions should result in play. As a matter of fact you don't want your dog to think, every dog on earth is here to be played with. As you walk down the street and you are passing another dog, stop with your dog off to the side and let the other dog pass. You might need to give your dog a lot of treats as they pass to get your dog to sit beside you. If the other owner stops and wants the dogs to interact, first find out whether the dogs play and confidence style is a match and then only if your dog is calm and sitting beside you should you let the dogs interact.

Although socializing a dog to other dogs and people is a high priority dogs also need to be socialized with a vast number of sights and sounds within the environment. To be behaviorally healthy, dogs need to experience normal environmental stimuli without becoming fearful. Dogs need exposure to all types of vehicles, different floor or ground type surfaces, a vast array of sounds and simply all the weird looking things to be found out in the world. A lack of exposure to environmental stimuli can cause dogs to panic and try to escape. This is one of the reasons why the Jan 2 and July 5 are the busiest days of the year for animal shelters.

So, how do you go about the process of safely socializing your dog or puppy to other dogs, people and new environments? The easiest way to do

this is to take your dog out with you. Take your dog on walks making sure you include routes that have schools and parks, go on hikes, you're your dog while your run errands, go to training classes and arrange for play dates with other well suited dogs. In addition you can go sit outside a school or at the park, When you are out with your dog have treats on hand. If a person wants to pet your dog, hand the person treats and let them feed your dog. If your dog is afraid then have them toss food to your dog instead of trying to hand the food to your dog. When you are out walking, stop every once in a while and just let your dog check out things in the environment. And when you come across dogs, check to see if their confidence and play style matches your dog's before they interact. If under any of these circumstances your dog is hesitant or fearful, increase the distance between your dog and what it is afraid of, be happy and give your dog treats. If the problem continues, then check with a trainer for some specialized training.

changing and to socialize their dogs through out their lives instead of just as puppies.

Having a socially well adjusted dog that can relax in different environments, around all kinds of people and dogs gives owners a lot more options with their dog and makes owning a dog a lot more fun. As owners we just need to remember to take our dogs with us, to be aware of what is going on in the environment and how our dogs are reacting so we help them when they need it. Above all dog owners need to remember that behavior is always