



SOCIALIZATION

What Is Socialization?

Socialization is a developmental process where pups familiarize themselves with all the various elements in their constantly changing world. It's how they work out what is safe and good as opposed to what's scary and bad.

The most critical age to socialize your pup is from 8 weeks to 16 weeks of age while they are still very impressionable. After this time, socialization efforts are much more challenging. So anything you want your puppy to cheerfully accept as an adult—including a wide variety of people, animals, objects, environments, situations, etc.—must be introduced repeatedly and in a positive manner in the first four months of his or her life; then revisited regularly during in the following months.

But Puppies Love Everything!

Sure they do. Until their early stage of their development draws to a close. At that point, they become wary of other dogs if they have met too few; or shy and growly around children or strangers, unless they have enjoyed meeting dozens of them over and over; or fearful of walking on different surfaces, entering new buildings, or even riding in a new vehicle unless they've done it repeatedly.

Under-socialized dogs often develop all sorts of behavioral problems stemming from early fears and lack of confidence including aggression and reactivity towards people, animals, and objects. The key to successful socialization is variety and repetition. One or two encounters with a person, place, or thing are not enough to form a solid impression that will last well into adulthood. So it's your job to make sure your pup learns to be comfortable and remains that way as she matures.

How to Practice:

Think about the things your puppy will see every week as an adult. Visit those places, see those people, and experience those things over and over. Your goal is to help your pup become a confident dog and form positive associations with literally everything. Cheer and praise her when she encounters something new. Offer a treat whenever possible. Here are 3 easy steps to guide you:

1. When you notice something new, observe your pup's response. If she seems scared or even a bit nervous, move further away, give treats, then keep a safe distance from The Scary Thing.
2. As soon as your pup seems more relaxed, try again. When she sees or hears The Scary Thing that worried her before, start your cheerful praise and dole out the treats generously.
3. If your pup does not seem worried or nervous about The Scary Thing, or acts curious about it after a treat, go back and let her investigate a little more. Then once more, praise and treat so she thinks, "Hey, that new scary thing isn't so bad!"

Hot Tip: When you move away from new or scary things, stop your praise and the flow of treats. You want your pup to learn that it's the presence of those things that make the goodies happen. Once this association is strong, you'll see your pup looking at you expectantly around The Scary Thing. That's because she's anticipating the food—which is exactly what you want to happen.

Need More Help?

If your pup acts especially shy or fearful of anyone or anything, please contact us for private training help, either in person or via the BravoPup Hotline. We love helping sensitive, worried pups become confident, grown-up dogs who are ready to enjoy the world with you.