



Top 10 socialisation tips

1. What should I consider when I'm setting up socialisation environments for my puppy?

They should be done in slow and steady increments. The experiences should be short so they're not overwhelming but regular so the puppy has seen them many times. If you are watching something new such as loud children playing then this should be done from a safe distance as there is a lot of information your puppy will be seeing such as different jagged movements, different noises and different clothing. If your dog is meeting other dogs for the first time then watch out for body language signs that suggest they're uncomfortable such as moving away, hiding behind you and tail wagging low and fast, mini freezing and ignoring treats. It's absolutely fine to step in and move away from the situation and come back another time. We want as many experiences as possible to be positive, non - intrusive and not overwhelming.

2. What shouldn't I do and what shouldn't I let others who are caring for my dog's do, such as dog walkers and day care operators?

It's imperative that the puppy's size, temperament are considered. A dog shouldn't be placed in a situation with other dogs that are larger and stronger than them and left to 'get on with it'. The dog's should be mirroring each others body language and taking it in turns to chase each other and roll around with each other - one dog shouldn't just be pinning the other down continuously. With socialisation you don't need to lure your puppy's into situations with treats. It's about giving them choice and control and allowing them to check things out in their own time - it's a good idea to pop them on a long lead if you're concerned about their recall and as the lead is long it won't cause any tension down it.

3. Handling how to's

It's so important to get dog's used to being handled. They will be handled by lots of different people such as vets and groomers. A way to do this is by handling your dog and feeling all over their body. Then consider body parts such as the tail, ears and paws. Hold the body part applying slight pressure then give them a treat while you're handling them. When you stop handling - stop the treats. Have a notebook handy/excel sheet to note down any body parts that your dog is not happy with being touched - you will need to work on these gradually. It's important to note if your dog has had any existing injuries in these body parts of course and it's important to get a vet check if you're concerned.



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4. Seeing is believing

Humans come in different shapes, sizes, ethnicities and wear hats, glasses and sometimes have moustaches! It's important that dog's see a range of different people. They need to experience things later on that they may see in the world so they're not a surprise. If this is more difficult to do then you can play dress up - get your wig's, sunglasses, summer time hats and layers of clothing on and allow your puppy to check you out. If they are extremely nervous then it's fine to take an item of clothing off and let them know it's you. In the case of walking sticks if you don't have one you could turn a broom up side down to mimic it.

5. Shiny, sandy and all kinds of surfaces

As humans we wear shoes and socks on our feet so we may not appreciate all the different surfaces our dog's walk on. In the summer it's really important to be mindful that metal surfaces especially can get very hot and burn our dog's paws. Dog's should experience different surfaces such as sand, lino, tiles, laminate, wood, gravel and stony surfaces. If you don't have access to/it's not safe to use certain surfaces then you can create some of your own with cardboard and foil. The dog should be able to approach them in their own time and when their paws are on them give them a treat. To get your dog used to any rocking motions (such as bridges in National Trust parks), then you could purchase a balance ball and let your dog pop both of their paws on top and you can feed them once they do.

6. Sounds

Dogs have incredible hearing that's far superior to our own. They're also (mainly!) shorter than us so things such as the sound of pushchairs, wheelchairs, and shopping trolleys will be intensified. You can type in common sounds into you tube such as traffic, children playing, and fireworks and play them quietly to your puppy, feeding them treats. As soon as the sound stops the treat stops. Gradually increase the sound at a level that's comfortable for your puppy.



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7. Body language

With body language it's important to notice the context that it's given, we know that sometimes we smile at people out of politeness rather than a genuine smile. Things to look out for in your puppy in terms of body language is:

Ears - are their ears positioned in a forward motion this can mean that they are alert.

Eyes - are they mainly showing the whites of their eyes? Look up the term whale eye for an example. If they are displaying this they may feel uncomfortable with the situation.

Mouth - are they yawning to increase air flow? Are they licking their lip very quickly?

Tail - is it tucked over their anus? Dogs sniff each other and find out vital information about each other in this area. If a dog is tucking their tail they may feel insecure about a situation and are trying to conceal information about themselves.

8. Cats

Cats feel safe on high vantage points so wherever possible having cat friendly shelving (that holds their weight and has been put up correctly) and cat trees are all great items to have in your home so your cat can escape any attention from your new puppy. Having an area of your home where your cat's food, litter tray, water and hiding places and resting spots are important to keep your cat comfortable and less stressed. It's an idea to have a micro-chip activated cat flap to one door in your house so your cat can go in and out of the room as they please. In the book *the Trainable Cat* (Sarah Ellis & John Bradshaw), I read about the good tip of putting your sofa up against the wall and popping a side table at the other end, this way (depending on the size of your puppy!) your cat can go through the gap between the sofa and wall and jump up on the side table for safety.

9. Hands predict good things!

Dogs value resources such as toys, things to chew and their food very highly. Prevention is better than cure so we want them to think that hands are safe. When your dog is eating their food then go past their bowl and drop in some tasty treats - this way they will get used to hands going near the bowl and think that hands are often predictors of good things - not things that take away. Another way to do this is to hold on to your dog's chew while they're eating it so they also get used to your hand being near items of value. If you have to take something away from your dog then do your best to swap it for something more valuable such as an item of food or a squeaky toy.



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10. What games should we play?

Catch me if you can is a fun game to play with your dog you run and then as soon as your dog catches up with you, you give them a treat. Short bursts of the game tug is another good game to play and you can teach core skills such as give and take with this too. When you're thinking about toys to purchase and games to play it's a good idea to think about what your dog was originally bred to do and incorporate games that allow them to fulfil that need.