

# Do's and Don'ts in Puppy Socialization

Congratulations on your new pup!

By now you've probably already thought about the fact that you need to do some obedience training with your new pup.

And, you've probably thought about your puppies need for socialization as well.

But, did you know, that not all socialization is good socialization?

That oftentimes, we are unknowingly doing our puppies more harm than good in our social habits?

We want to share with you some of the most common mistakes in socialization we see dog owners unknowingly making, and share with you why it's an issue.

## 3 Types of Socialization

\*Environmental Socialization

\*Coexisting

\*Direct Interaction

\*Environmental Socialization is when you take your puppy or dog to any environment other than their immediate comfort zone (home / yard). It is the first type of socialization I mention because it is one of the most important types of socialization that so often gets overlooked accidentally, or done in a way that does not set your puppy up for success.

Environmental socialization can go a few different ways. You can take your pup to any new environment, whether it's down the street for a walk, to a park, or to Heisler's for some ice cream, and let them explore, check stuff out, do their thing. That's super typical for pups. And no one thinks anything of it. It sounds normal enough, right? Heck yeah! It is! It's what most people do!

But here's the thing. Let's look at things from the dog's perspective for a moment.

"When we go new places, I get to sniff everything. There's so many smells. Some are good, some are not so good. When I pull on the leash, my owner comes with me to smell new stuff! It's great! I saw a little furry creature that had a tail the size of its body...definitely NOT a dog like me, but I barked at it and it ran UP A TREE. I've got to learn to do that! Then, I barked at a person and they came over to pet me! So cool. I didn't know I could tell people to do that - but I learned that great new trick today and I'm going to do it all the time now when I want to get pet! Then this other person came over and reach down and I really didn't want to get picked up by them but they picked me up anyway. They kept kissing my face and telling me how cute I was. I mean, I know I'm cute, mom tells me all the time, so duh. But I was really tired and just wasn't interested. Despite the fact that I tried to hide under mom when she first came towards me, and turned my head away as she kissed me, and squirmed to get away, the lady kissed me and kissed me anyway. It wasn't too bad, but, I hope it doesn't happen again. All in all though, going out is really great!"

So what did we get out of that?

- 1) Puppy learns that pulling on leash is rewarding
- 2) Puppy learns that everything in their environment is relevant EXCEPT for YOU
- 3) Barking at squirrels makes them run away (this quickly becomes a generalized behavior)
- 4) Barking at people for attention gets you attention
- 5) Avoiding people does not get people to leave you alone and more importantly you have NO ONE to advocate for you

OR

When practicing environmental socialization with your dog... you can make it ALL ABOUT YOU. Take your dogs places and play games with them. Do it everywhere. Inside your house. Outside your house in your yard. In your driveway. On the sidewalk. At the park. At Heisler's. Literally, anywhere you go with your dog, be the center of their universe. The most fun, the most exciting thing to your pup. This does a few things.

- 1) You will have your dogs attention if they like being with you and playing with you.
- 2) This will allow your to more easily redirect your dog as they grow up off distractions. Again, the more valuable you are to your dog if you are the source of fun and food the more easily you will convince them to ignore the challenges of the world (barking dogs,

strangers, squirrels, bunnies, birds, etc)

3) Your dog is less likely to develop bad habits (like leash pulling & impulsive barking) when out in public, and once again, will be easier to fix if your dog finds you the most rewarding thing no matter where you go together.

4) Having your dogs attention gives you a huge leg up in Obedience. If you have your dogs attention, you can ask them to do things for you.

#### \*Co Existing

The art of coexisting is something that SO many dogs struggle with. Co existing is being able to just hang out and relax. Even if there's stuff going on. Even if you're at home and have guests. Even if the kids are playing. Even if you are out for a walk and stop to chat with a neighbor. Even if you are at the waiting room in the vet. Co existing is a skill that must be developed and practiced. This is hard. Many dog struggle with this because they don't practice enough co existence at home. Developing co existing skills is largely done through management and boundary setting. Inclusion crate work, tethering, and practicing lots of the place command (go to your bed and stay there no matter what is going on until you are released), are great ways to develop co existing skills. It takes time and patience but creates a stable dog with the ability to have a calm mindset who is more enjoyable to be around.

\*Direct Interaction is the last type of socialization that I mention for an important reason. It is the type of socialization that everyone thinks of when they think of socialization. It is when puppies or dogs are directly interacting and making physical contact with other people or other dogs. Many people think, or are told, that they need to get their puppy handled by as many people as possible and introduce them to as many dogs as possible. THIS SIMPLY IS NOT TRUE. In fact, for many dogs, this brings devastating results.

If you have a super social puppy that may LOVE all the attention you are allowing and encouraging, as this pup grows it will not only want but expect and possibly start to DEMAND attention from everyone. This can result in excessive excitement around people and new people, jumping, leash pulling or frustration, having a hard time bringing people into your home, and not being able to get your dog to settle down around company.

Conversely, if you have a puppy that is somewhat shy or reserved, that likely is a personality trait, just like the very social dog. However, not all dogs are super social and super interested in meeting new people. Just like people, some dogs are more outgoing than others. If you are putting your new puppy, who you yourself is just

developing a relationship with, in the hands of new people all the time, your puppy is learning a few important things that will inform their future behavior.

One, that no one, not even you, respects their need and desire for space.

Two, avoiding or practicing calming signals or avoidance does not work with humans (yawning, looking away, avoiding eye contact, squirming to retreat).

Unfortunately, for many dogs, when all these signals are ignored enough times, dogs learn to practice alternative behavior to create space.

Growling, snarling, barking, lunging, biting.

While we are huge advocates for practicing both Environmental Socialization and Coexisting on a consistent basis, we also love to see pups enjoying appropriate social interaction with new people and new dogs. This is something that we specialize in at our facility on Route 61 South in Orwigsburg. We put a big emphasis on teaching our clients about social interactions, what to do, what not to do, and how to read your dog's body language to allow you to better help them. There is a lot of nuance to properly socialization and the value of having a socialization plan in your dogs life can change their whole world for the better.

When it comes to dog - dog interactions, we recommend only allowing direct interaction with dogs you know are stable and healthy. It's not worth the risk of meeting every dog you meet that is friendly (not to mention the issues this can cause even if it does go 'well' every time - re leash frustration). Public dog parks can cause issues because you don't know the health or history of the other dogs there.

A great way to introduce your dog to a new doggie friend is to first take a nice long walk together (one handler per dog) and get them to just coexist together. If they can't coexist on a walk, they shouldn't have direct interaction. If you have a successful walk, take them to an area where they can be off leash together. If they are off leash trained, the world is your dog park. If they are not, I recommend finding a securely fenced in area. Interrupt any play in which both dogs are not "into it", humping, neck or collar biting, leg biting, or anything else that looks to be over the top or inappropriate to you. Practice recalling your dog out of play and reward them for coming back to you. You should ALWAYS have control of your dog even if they are involved in direct interaction. If you do not, find a trainer who can help you with distraction work.

When it comes to direct interaction with people, again we recommend sticking with people you know and that your puppy is going to have a relationship with. If you took your puppy out in public and let everyone say hello, your puppy is going to think that all people are relevant to them. For most dogs this creates one of two issues : a shy or less confident dog may develop reactivity or bad leash manners to stay away from people. For confident and very social dogs they will expect and possibly demand that they say hello to everyone and not know how to pass by a neighbor without barking and pulling out of excitement.

One thing we talk to our clients about all the time is that it is OK to say "No thank you" to people who want to pet your dog. You are allowed to take your dog in public and work with them on environmental socialization, a very important part of raising a puppy, and set boundaries with the public. Many people struggle with this and get offended. It's hard to do. But, remember, it's YOUR job to advocate for YOUR puppy. Be nice to your neighbors, but be firm as well! After all - you're the one that has to live with and take care of your dog! And we know you want what is best for them.

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