



## The Importance of Puppy Socialization

Did you know that by four months of age, a puppy has completed their primary socialization period, which is the window where they are most open to take in new experiences? After that time, you could be overcoming a hurdle each time your puppy is doing something new. This is why it's SO important to help your adopted or foster puppy have as many experiences — as safely and comfortably as possible — by the time they reach three-four months of age. Here are some ways to do that:

### People Introductions

Puppies should meet or take in as many types of people as they can during their early months. Male- and female-presenting, tall and short, younger and older, walking and seated, people of different races and who speak different languages, and even people with features like beards or hats that may make their overall facial structure appear “different.” Over their life, your dog is likely to meet a wide variety of people, so help them be ready to understand all the ways a person can be from their earliest age.

### Dog Introductions

Puppies may not have the full vaccinations to meet with just any dog until they reach four months of age, by which time they are already past their primary socialization period. That said, between two and four months of age, they can still observe different types of dog from a distance, like outside a dog park, and on walks. Additionally, most puppy training classes require puppies of this age to have at least their initial distemper/parvovirus/hepatitis combo vaccination and are scrupulous about maintaining cleaning standards to help address any illnesses that may slip through the cracks. Ask your puppy training class provider about their health policies to see if they can offer safe puppy playdates or playgroups with dogs of the same age to give them additional socialization experiences.

### Experiential Introductions

What else will your dog be doing in the future? Walking on all types of surfaces, so consider getting experiences with grass, cement, dirt, sand, linoleum, and different types of stairs. Walk on a leash and whatever additional equipment you will require (we recommend a Martingale collar and Easy Walk or Freedom harness). If your dog will be living with or meeting other animals, now is the time to visit those animals, at least from a distance. Get your dog used to riding in cars in whatever way they will travel (crates, car harnesses, seat belt attachment.

***Please note that dogs should never ride in the front seat of a car as airbags could be deadly to them.***) Teach them whether they are or are not allowed on furniture, and start working on cues for them to remove themselves safely. If they will be crated regularly, begin practicing now. Sounds are important too, so broadening the locations you visit will get your

puppy used to more unexpected and loud sounds, as well as, potentially, crowds. Start counter-conditioning handling and vet visits, pairing awkward touches (like teeth, ears, and bottoms) with yummy, yummy treats, including basic grooming tools. New pets should get an early vet visit, so make sure it is as comfortable for your dog as possible; again, go slow and offer lots of treats.

### **Separation Anxiety**

Wow, you have done so much work with your new dog, and our final recommendation is to...leave them alone? Separation anxiety is a physical reaction a dog feels to the absence of their people, and when it's extreme, it can cause dogs to hurt themselves by chewing out of metal crates and jumping out of windows. Even moderate separation anxiety is hugely stressful to a dog. Teach them from a young age that they can be alone safely, first for short and then longer periods of time without issue. Make sure to leave behind entertaining, supervision-free things to eat (like an appropriately-sized frozen Kong), favorite toys, and have some fun and soothing noises (the Through a Dog's Ear music channel on most audio subscriptions) or visuals (DogTV) to keep them calm and entertained.

Many of the dogs euthanized in the US for behavioral reasons come from an undersocialized experience, and unfortunately, are never able to overcome those limitations to live a safe and comfortable life. Prioritizing appropriate socialization is not just healthy for your puppy, it can save their life.