

Socialisation and Habituation of Your Puppy

Please feel free to ask any of our staff at Championvet.com for further information or advice



Introduction: What are Socialisation and Habituation?

These are the processes that allow a dog to learn about their world:

- Socialisation - Learning about the dogs they come across e.g. dogs, humans, cats etc.
- Habituation - Learning about their environment e.g. traffic, crowds, car travel, loud noises etc.

If these processes do not happen or are not effective then many behavioural problems may occur later in life e.g. aggression towards people or dogs, fear of noises, unwanted barking etc.

When does this happen?

There is a sensitive period when the puppy is receptive to socialisation and habituation. This is from about 6 weeks to about 12-14 weeks. Socialisation can be 'forgotten' if it does not continue to adulthood, at about 1-1½ years old.

So am I too late at 12 weeks old?

Definitely not! Although socialisation is most effective up to 12 weeks old, the dog can learn about new situations at an older age, but it will be a much slower process that would need to be handled carefully.

So how do I do it?

The puppy's exposure to its environment should be as systematic as possible to ensure it has the best chance of developing a sound temperament. Use a checklist to ensure that your puppy has had experience of as many different situations as possible.



What should I do if my pup appears to be afraid during the socialisation process?

1. **Don't overreact** - reassuring the puppy just tells him/her that there was something to be afraid of in the first place. You need to set the example of not being phased by whatever it is that is provoking the response.
2. **Don't apply Pressure** - Don't pressure the pup into approaching whatever it is he/she is afraid of, this will just increase the level of anxiety.
3. **Repeat the experience** - Expose the pup to whatever it was afraid of as often as possible, but from a distance, which does not cause him/her distress. As the pup gets used to it, you can gradually get nearer and nearer.
4. **Reward Appropriate behaviour** - When the pup is not acting afraid, give it plenty of rewards and fuss. If the pup was showing fear, reward it as soon as it recovers from its fright.



Socialisation and Habituation at home checklist

Visitors Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Both sexes and all ages. Ensure your visitors only make a fuss of your puppy and say hello, when he/she is calm and all four feet on the floor.

Children Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Get your puppy used to being handled by children (don't let the children treat him/her as a cuddly toy). Arrange to meet someone with a baby regularly, if you can, especially if you plan to have a family.

Feeding Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Get your puppy used to you and your family adding more food to his/her bowl while he/she's eating, to teach him/her you're not a threat.

Grooming Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Groom your puppy gently every day, even breeds that don't really need it.

Veterinary Examination Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Look in your puppy's ears, eyes, teeth, lift up his/her feet, check his/her paws and examine under his/her tail. When your pup is happy for you to do this, ask visitors to do the same.

Domestic Sights and Sounds Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Expose your puppy to the Hoover, tumble drier, etc.

The Postman Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Carry your puppy to meet deliverymen as often as possible so that they get to know them and understand that it's normal for people to come and go.

Cats Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

If you have one, introduce your puppy to it slowly and reward him/her for not pestering it. If necessary have your cat in it's basket just out of reach of the puppy.

Other dogs at Home Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

If you already have a dog introduce them in the garden if possible. Once the initial acceptance has been made by the older dog the two should find their own level and settle down without too much intervention from you.

Prevent Play Biting Ongoing

It is normal for pups in a pack to play physical games with adults such as pulling ears and tails in the early days this is tolerated but as the pups grow up, the adults and other pups grow increasingly intolerant especially as teeth develop and become sharp. This is important process through which the pup learns its own strength. By 18 weeks puppies learn that play biting isn't allowed and any biting will result in a short bark as a reprimand.

When the pup comes into the family, the family must take over where the pack has left off, and ensure that play biting is not tolerated. Whenever the pup uses its teeth in play, the person must respond with a sharp 'NO' and sound as if they've been really hurt, and then walk off and ignore the pup for about 5 minutes.

Socialisation and Habituation Outside the Home Checklist

It is important to introduce your pup to as many different places as possible. If your pup's not yet vaccinated you should still do this, but you will have to hold him/her in your arms. Start in quieter places and gradually work up to busier/noisier places.



The Street Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Expose your puppy to the sound of traffic and the movement of people. Start in quiet side streets and move up to busier ones.

Places that people Congregate Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Anywhere that people tend to sit and chat will do. Encourage people to take an interest in and handle your pup.

Children's Play Areas Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Make sure your pup has been adequately wormed before making contact with children and ask permission of the supervising adults. Start with just a few children to prevent your pup from being overwhelmed.

The Car Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Plenty of car travel at an early age accustoms your puppy to it and helps prevent carsickness. Put the pup in the boot or where he/she will travel as an adult. Ignore any crying - it will soon stop. Take your pup on daily short car journeys.

The Countryside Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Accustom your pup to the sights, sounds and smells of the countryside of park.

Lead Training Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Once your vet says your pup can be walked on a lead instead of carried prepare your pup for walking on the lead by getting it used to it's colour and lead in the garden. For outside the house, carry on as before but go back to the quiet areas before gradually building up to noisy and busy ones again. Add in unusual places such as staircases, footbridges, station platforms etc.

Socialisation with other Dogs Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Ensure that your pup gets plenty of canine company. Invite dogs that you know round to visit - ensure they are fully vaccinated, wormed and flea treated and are not showing any signs of illness such as coughing or diarrhoea. Socialise your dog with dogs that you know have a good nature and are not aggressive. Puppy socialisation classes can help in the early months, and remember socialisation must continue until your dog is an adult.

Learning to be Alone

Puppies who are not used to being left alone on a regular basis are much more likely to be very distressed when left alone when they are adults. The three main symptoms of anxiety associated with being left alone are:

- Destructiveness
- Barking
- House soiling

You must train your pup to be used to being on its own.

Sleeping Area Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Your pup should sleep somewhere that isn't your bedroom. Choose a safe place (an indoor kennel is ideal) that is covered over, comfortable and has plenty of things to chew and fresh water. Ensure that this place is accessible during the day. Hide tasty treats in this area, which 'appear' there without your pup realising it was you that put them there. Never put your pup in this area as a punishment - in the pup's mind it should be a pleasant place where nice treats appear. Place your pup in there at night and ignore any crying or whining - it will soon stop after a few nights.

During the Day Done (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)

Start with leaving your pup for 5 mins in the next room with the door open. Over time do the same with the door shut. Never return to the pup or respond to him/her if he/she is crying - wait until the crying stops and then return, otherwise the pup will learn he/she can call you back. As the pup improves, you can progress next door for a coffee, and leave him/her for an hour or more at a time on a regular basis.

When you leave or come back:

- Be as matter of fact as possible
- If you fuss over your pup before you leave you will make him/her more attached to you at the point you're about to leave. (There is no dog language for 'bye bye' or 'see you later')
- Too much fuss when you come back highlights the loneliness of being at home.

10 Golden Rules for a Happy Household

1. Agree with the rest of the household what behaviour is allowed and what isn't, for example, is the dog allowed upstairs, on the sofa etc. Make sure everyone sticks to the same rules.
2. Before the dog is given anything he/she wants, ask him/her to sit first and give him/her a reward once he/she has done this e.g. attention or fuss, a toy, dinner, a treat.
3. Do not talk to your pup, pat him/her or even look at him/her unless he/she has all feet on the ground - simply turn your back until he/she gets down, tell him/her to sit and then give plenty of fuss and attention - this prevents jumping up.
4. Never feed your pup human food - the best thing for him/her is a well-balanced dog food. If he/she has never tasted a crisp, he/she won't miss them! This prevents begging.
5. Reward good behaviour - when your pup is behaving well, tell him/her!
6. Ignore inappropriate behaviour - being ignored is a very effective punishment, don't speak to, touch or even look at your pup until he/she is behaving appropriately again.
7. Play with your pup frequently, but don't allow play biting! Finish the play with a short session of obedience training to help your pup calm down.
8. Socialise your pup well, especially during the critical period of up to 12 weeks old, but also continuing until he/she is an adult.
9. Don't give up! Training dogs takes a long time - many processes take 6 months or a year to make a difference.
10. Don't be afraid to ask for advice - dogs don't come with an instruction manual. Feel free to phone the surgery at any time for advice about behaviour and training, not matter how silly you think your query might be!

Top Tips for Toilet Training

1. When your pup is preparing to go to the toilet, pick him/her up and place on a puppy pad or outside.
2. Give plenty of praise and treats every time he/she goes in an appropriate area.
3. Avoid punishment - it doesn't work and may actually make the problem worse.
4. Anticipate when your pup wants to go - when he/she has just woken up, after eating, drinking or playing. Make sure you are alert at this time and ready to pick your pup up and put him/her on a puppy pad or outside when he/she is about to go.
5. Provide plenty of opportunities for toileting outdoors.
6. Provide a consistent feeding schedule - this will result in a more consistent toileting schedule.
7. Accidents happen! - Use commercial deodorizing product to prevent repeat visits to the same area, or move furniture into the way to prevent habits forming.
8. Don't panic! Successful house training can take a matter of weeks to several months - just keep rewarding correct toileting, be as consistent as possible and you'll get there!