

# PUPPY SOCIALIZATION

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Find additional resources at  
[pasadenahumane.org/behavior](https://pasadenahumane.org/behavior).

## The Importance of Socializing Your Dog

Socialization is extremely important. In fact, many behavior problems are preventable with proper socialization of puppies at a young age. Socialization will help your puppy grow into a confident and well-adjusted adult dog. It is the fastest, easiest and most critical way to prevent behavior problems in your adult dog. Under-socialized dogs will experience fear and possibly aggression when they encounter certain people, other animals, sounds and environments that they have not been socialized to. The number one reason for animal relinquishment to shelters is behavior problems that often could have been avoided by proper socialization. These issues include fear, aggression, separation anxiety, dog reactivity and many others.

## When To Start Socialization

The socialization process starts the day your puppy is born and will continue for their life. The critical socialization periods occur up to and around 5 months of age. Secondary socialization periods will occur during adolescence, which, depending on the breed, can last up to 2 years of age. This means the time to start is NOW, don't wait! Socialization, or the lack of it, is happening now, even if you are unaware. The best way forward is to be proactive and work hard to impact this process to prevent behavior problems.

## How To Socialize Your Puppy

We recommend using positive reinforcement training. Start by taking some small, delicious treats with you everywhere you take your dog and ensure positive encounters with multiple new stimuli every day. Meet lots of new people, go to many new places, play with dozens of other puppy-friendly dogs and experience everything that may be a part of your dog's life at any point.

Dog-to-dog socialization is an essential aspect of your puppy's life. They can hone their social skills and learn how to play more appropriately with people. A well-run positive reinforcement puppy class is the ideal place to get access to lots of other puppies. We do caution against going to dog parks with your puppy. Many dogs at the park may not tolerate puppy behaviors and can be a bit over the top for young dogs to learn appropriate play behaviors.

Socialization is not limited to other people and dogs; it includes sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile experiences. It should include all things that may be encountered in your life with your dog. For example, if you decide to go on a beach vacation in three years and your dog has never seen the sand and ocean, this will not be a fun family trip for the dog. Take them to the beach now and play a game so the dog can develop positive associations with all things beach related.

(over)



## Troubleshooting Socialization

If your puppy experiences a negative reaction to anything you encounter, stop! This is the hard part but an important skill to work on. You must properly teach your dog how to get over this fear. Move them away from the fearful stimuli to a point where they can see, smell and hear it but will take treats from you and are showing relaxed body language. Play a game, feed them treats and slowly move them closer to the experience they are afraid of. Your ultimate goal is gradually getting them to experience this stimulus without a fear response. Do not force them to tolerate something that is causing fear, as this is the opposite of proper socialization. Instead, allow for gradual warming up to the object, sound, smell, person or other thing and help them to learn that it is enjoyable.

**We are always here to help! You can find additional behavior and training resources at [pasadenahumane.org/behavior](https://pasadenahumane.org/behavior).**

*Adapted from Northeast Animal Shelter.*



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## Socialization Checklist

Here is a suggested checklist to ensure your puppy is comfortable with whatever they encounter. You do not need to limit yourself to just this list, but it will be a great start. The goal is for the puppy to have positive experiences, not neutral or bad ones, with as many of the listed exposures as possible. It is also important to ensure that you have more than one encounter with each item on the list. This can be done over the course of weeks for your new puppy, but it is important to remember to start right away. You can use the checklist to indicate your dog's reaction at each encounter and ensure you are getting positive interactions with as many things as possible.

If at any time your puppy is frightened — growls, trembles, cowers, snaps, freezes, lip licks, ears back, tucked tail, wide eyes, whines, barks, avoids or tries to run away — remove them from the situation and introduce them to a known positive space.

Handling	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Checking ears							
Nail trims							
Opening eyelids							
Mouth/gums/teeth							
Holding still							
Hugging							
Pulling on harness							
Holding collar							
Wiping feet							
Towelng off							
Putting on leash							



<b>Unfamiliar people</b>	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Men							
Women							
Police Officer							
Fire Fighter							
Postal workers							
Construction workers							
Infants							
Toddlers							
Children							
Teenagers							
Elderly							
Erratic body movements							
Limping/abnormal walking							

<b>Unfamiliar objects</b>	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Hooded Jackets							
Parkas/Winter coats							
Umbrellas							
Hats							
Sunglasses							
Canes/crutches/walkers							
Wheelchairs							
Baby Strollers							
Luggage							
Shopping carts							
Hammocks/swings							
Bike racks/bikes							
Stairs							
Cars							
Large trucks/buses							

<b>Unfamiliar animals</b>	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Large breed dogs							
Small breed dogs							
Older dogs							
Puppies							
Cats							
Fish							
Small house pets							
Squirrels/rodents							
Birds							
Large birds (Geese)							
Farm animals							

<b>New Places</b>	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Beach							
Woods							
Cookouts							
Car rides							
Vet clinic							
Groomers							
Drive Thrus							
Farmers Markets							
Parade							
Sporting event							
Fair							
City/busy area							
Rural area/farm							
Bridges							
Airports							
Friend's/Family's house							
Car wash							
The office							

<b>Surfaces</b>	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Groomers/Clinic table							
Carpet/rug							
Sand							
Mud							
Ice/snow							
Water							
Slippery surfaces							
Wet grass							
Gravel							
Astroturf							
Wobbly surface							
Concrete							
Mulch							
Tile							

<b>Strange sounds</b>	Positive response (+) Negative response (-) Neutral response (0)						
Sirens							
Hair dryers							
Fire alarms							
Thunderstorms							
Doorbells							
Music							
Tea kettle/coffee maker							
Dishwasher							
Washer/dryer							
Fireworks							
Loudspeakers							
Phone ringing							
T.V.							
Microwave							

