

Socialising your puppy:

Teaching your dog obedience training can be simple and fun with the correct information and some patience. Nearly all the problems presented to me with adult dogs can be linked to poor socialisation and training during puppyhood. This is probably because, understandably, the owner is too excited about the puppy and busy enjoying its cute antics. Just as for a child, you will be forming the dog's behaviour for the rest of its' life. **Here are some Top Tips on how to socialise your puppy and avoid many problems later.**

1. The period in a puppy's life between 7 and 13 weeks is known as the "critical socialisation period". It is during this time that all learning about how to interact and behave with animals and people happens – and the learning foundation during this time is permanent. It is absolutely critical that you dedicate time to this period of your puppy's life so that it grows into a happy, balanced and confident dog. Dogs mainly bite because they are afraid and fear is bred from a lack of socialisation.
2. Puppies need to get used to as many different environments as possible so set yourself some fun targets! Try to take your puppy to a new place every day: the park, the train station, the shopping precinct, along the high street, in the car, along a busy road – wherever you can think of. But start slowly and with low-impact environments, building up to the louder and busier places so as not to overwhelm and frighten your puppy.
3. Set yourself a target of meeting 3 dogs every single time you go for a walk: 2 walks a day = 6 dogs. When you're out walking, allow people and children to stroke your puppy and handle him.
4. Invite friends and colleagues over to meet and play with the puppy - ask them to bring their children and dogs if they have them. The more experiences the puppy has, the better but these experiences need to be positive. Give your friends and children one of your puppy's treats to give to your puppy so that it associates visitors/people/children/dogs with good times ...and treats!
5. If you notice your puppy becoming anxious or stressed, confidently remove him from the situation and allow him some time and space to calm and familiarise himself. The human world with all its sights, smells, noises, movement and textures, is an incredibly daunting place for a puppy.
6. Find a good puppy training class – believe it or not, there are bad ones about and bad ones will do lasting damage to your puppy's well-being. Ask friends and colleagues or your vet may well recommend some. Classes should be well controlled with no more than 12 puppies and never mixed with adult dogs. They should allow puppies to be off the lead and willing to let you observe one night which is a great opportunity to check that the puppies and owners seem relaxed and are having fun.
7. Never let another puppy or dog play rough or exuberant games with your puppy. Every experience needs to be positive; you will need to supervise all play in case you need to protect your puppy and offer him support or shelter from bigger dogs.



8. It is absolutely critical to socialise your puppy and, contrary to previously popular beliefs, the earlier the better. However, we must also protect the dog from disease as their young immune systems are particularly susceptible. Most vaccinations are two-stage and complete by 12 weeks old, allowing your puppy to venture outside without risk of catching any nasty bugs. However, this doesn't offer you much time to effectively socialise your puppy. A new single vaccine which gives immunity at 10 weeks is now available and I would encourage you to discuss this with your vet. As soon as you get puppy home, the work begins and I'd recommend:

- Mixing with dogs and puppies who you know are definitely vaccinated
- Taking puppy into the garden to get him used to different sounds and experiences
- Taking him out to areas where dogs don't often go so as to avoid dog foul, which is how the deadly Parvovirus is transmitted. You can carry puppy through areas you're not sure about.
- Enrolling in a puppy course as soon as it has had its first vaccination - good puppy classes will allow you to attend with the first vaccine complete in order to start socialisation and training.