

## SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is not a one time, short term experience. Socialization is the ongoing exposure of the dog to all of the experiences of life. To be fully successful, it must be done continuously and on a recurring basis, with all possible and varied distractions. The goal of socialization is to help the dog learn to act appropriately around people, other animals, and in the many public and private social situations of human life. A dog can not be considered well socialized until it has demonstrated the ability to act in a confident and relaxed manner to changing environments.

Developing a dog that is mentally balanced, and able to readily adapt to changing environments can not be approached haphazardly. There are well-defined critical periods in the development of a dog from puppy to adult that need special attention in the work of socialization. These critical periods are recognized because the dog's experiences during them results in well documented behaviors and attitudes later in the dogs' life. The first of these, is the period of age 12 to 16 weeks, and is generally viewed as the most critical. A dog's inappropriate or unacceptable behaviors and attitudes resulting from experiences during this period, are often the most difficult to correct.

Recognizing that these periods are when experiences will have a significant impact on the dog, owners must plan and set up the activities and exposures to ensure positive results. As in any training, the factors of distance, duration, degree of difficulty, and distraction level must be integrated into the learning experience. For example, we want to expose a dog to heavy traffic with blaring vehicle horns and loud mufflers for the first time. How would we consider the four factors in planning the exposure?

One approach would be to take the dog to a large, busy parking lot at a mall, and park at the far end away from the high level of traffic (distance). We would then gradually work closer to the higher levels of traffic and noise (duration) until the dog showed signs of anxiety (degree of difficulty for the dog). Now we have established the level of comfort for the dog that tells us the activity of vehicles and noise (distraction) has become more than the dog can deal with in a calm manner. At this point, socialization has moved from just exposure to a situation, to training for that situation. Failure to recognize a requirement for transition from exposure to specific training is one of the most common reasons for failure, and development of undesirable behaviors.

During socialization that introduces the dog to what could be frightening situations, it is especially critical that the trainer remain calm, and transmit that composure and confidence to the dog. A tight leash, or letting the dog lead its handler away from such situations, has put the human in the follower position with the dog fully in charge. The training has now moved from socialization to fear reinforcement, and the probable development of fear aggression in the dog.

It is also possible for activities not previously causing undesirable reaction, to become ones that are unexpectedly doing so. This may be because there are later periods which required special awareness of the

## SOCIALIZATION

dog's mental development. These periods are generally in the time frames of four to six months, eight to ten months, and sometimes as late as sixteen to twenty months of age. In all cases of expected or unexpected shy or fearful behavior, it is vital that the behavior is not reinforced by coddling or soothing. The dog's actions must be met with the handlers' confident, normal demeanor and tone of voice. The sequence of actions for the handler is to: 1. Distract, 2. Redirect, 3. Train.

Continuous (over the full life of the dog) and repetitive (repeat any given distraction whenever possible) exposure to the vagaries of life is a necessary part of socialization. Fearful and aggressive attitudes regarding a given situation won't go away just because they are ignored, or have been brought under control at a given point. All training requires practice to maintain a given level of response, and issues identified during socialization should be carefully noted for future emphasis in maintaining a mentally healthy and balanced dog.

Keeping a record of the distractions and social situations to which a dog is exposed during its training is a valuable tool in achieving a well rounded socialization program. A very effective way to do this is by creating a table of activities which you will use to expose the dog to a wide variety of people, dogs, other animals, and environments. Then use this table as a record of what has been done. This not only provides a record of what has been done, but should be used to identify areas of concern, activities yet to be accomplished, and how long since any given activity has had a turn in the training.

Some suggestions on the various circumstances dogs should be exposed to include 1.people 2.other dogs' 3.other animals, and 4. various environments and objects.

### **People**

People and dogs get along best when each is respectful of the other. Unfortunately for the dog, many humans have no idea how to be respectful from the dog's point of view, and thus the burden of appropriate action falls most heavily on the canine. The dog must be prepared to meet lowed voiced and towering humans that unintentionally present a threatening aura, and small children that back into a corner. It must endure the rough pat of the unknowing as well as the syrupy voice of the uninitiated when offering their unskilled attention. The dog must learn to be calm and confident around men, women, young children, teenagers, and the elderly. It must be exposed to various ethnic groups, sizes of people, and all manner of dress and deportment. This includes people wearing hats or glasses, thick jackets and men with beards. Other examples include people using walkers, canes, or wheelchairs, and those holding umbrellas. It is important to think ahead of any human type or behavior the dog may possibly face in the future and set up the appropriate training scenarios. An effective technique in this particular realm of socialization is to enlist the aid of friends and relatives to stage training scenarios involving unusual dress and activities, and introduce the dog to a variety of different types of people.

# SOCIALIZATION

## **Other dogs**

Interaction with other dogs is an important element in a well-rounded socialization program. A dangerous misconception is that of a dog getting along with all dogs, just because it gets along with one or two others. Dog parks are not recommended for this activity as the variety of untrained dogs, on and off leash, presents a significant potential for a bad experience. In general, if you see another dog owner approaching you with their dog in the lead or on a tight leash, you should move away and ask the owner not to approach you as both of these activities are warning signs about an uncontrolled dog with unpredictable actions. The best place to develop canine social skills is in a controlled class. The ideal situation is to find a class that offers group socialization with all dogs off leash. Regardless of the class situation for socialization, it's imperative to find a trainer knowledgeable in dog body postures and behavior during socialization, and who will help to maintain control of the situation. Groups where the ideal socialization can occur should include big dogs, little dogs, young dogs, old dogs, and dogs from a variety of breeds. These dogs should be allowed to do dog things under control. Humans cannot teach dog-to-dog manners and social skills to dogs. For example, we must not assume obedience to heeling past other dogs (reliability to command) is a display of socialization (lack of anxiety while doing so). Owners can certainly train to a level that achieves one dog ignoring another while under command, but the dog's level of confidence to act appropriately in the absence of command comes from socialization.

## **Other animals**

Dogs should also be exposed to a wide variety of other types of animals. Pet stores that allow dogs are good places to encounter birds, fish in tanks, cats, strange dogs, and sights and scents not otherwise available. Consider again what other animals the dog might possibly encounter in his lifetime. Consider finding a place where the city dog might come across horses, cows, ducks, squirrels, rabbits etc. As with all work in socialization, the handler's calm attitude is critical in achieving and maintaining a calm attitude in the dog.

## **Environment**

Environmental challenges can come in the most mundane form, as well as the exotic. There are dogs that absolutely refuse to walk on tile floor, and others that find a glass door an unexpected and painful barrier. The country dog must endure a hotel elevator for the first time, should not do so with a crowd of people. The city dog that is given its freedom in the forest may quickly become lost, just as the farm dog loose on a city street is apt to be overwhelmed by the cacophony of vehicle noise, fumes, and general activity. Careful and planned introduction into new environments should start early and with short duration. Just as country dogs need exposure to city life, city dogs need to go to the country to encounter new sights, smells, animals and textures. Whether in the city or in the country, dogs should be exposed to various types and levels of noises, and visual stimuli (including bright lights, the dark, and moving objects). Also important is a variety of texture and walking surfaces including tile, gravel, dirt, cement, linoleum, grass, wood, and moving surfaces.

How much, and when to expose the dog to any given activity, are two important considerations in developing your socialization plan. The planned use of activities, the duration of exposure to them, the degree

## SOCIALIZATION

of difficulty they represent to the dog, and the distance of the activity from the dog at its first exposure, must be mixed and matched in determining how much. When to do so must be done with judgment rather than any set formula or time frame. The critical periods vary from dog to dog, and sensitivity is affected by previous exposure and genetics. The decision is to how much, and when are as much in the realm of art as in the practical implementation. There are two rules that may be applied to every socialization activity. First, the handler must be calm and in control from the dogs' point of view. When the handler projects the confidence and energy that he is going to take care of this "normal but unusual" situation the dog is far less likely to attempt to do so by flight or fight. Secondly, any given situation must be handled according to the needs of the dog. Always introduce highly stressful or unusual activities slowly, and with the same confident attitude and energy previously employed. Remember that socialization is a lifelong activity, and those activities not revisited will fade in the order of reliable and predictable response.

## SOCIALIZATION

# SOCIALIZATION SCAVENGER HUNT

This scavenger hunt is designed to help you socialize your puppy. These are things that we encounter in our everyday lives and do not realize what an impact they have on a new puppy. This is to be used as a tool in your training of your puppy and all of these experiences **MUST** be positive for the puppy.

- Handle you puppy daily. (This includes, nails, teeth, bathing, brushing and cuddling)
- Meet a horse
- Meet a cat
- Meet a goose
- Meet a goat
- Meet a bird in a cage
- Meet a man with a beard
- Meet a toddler
- Meet a person of another race
- Walk on bubble wrap
- Ride on an elevator
- Go to a strange house, where the puppy has never been before
- Get treats on the vet table
- Get treats on the groomer's table
- Go on a boat ride
- Go on a car ride
- Go near a bus
- Walk on a grate in a sidewalk
- Go up and down stairs
- Walk on a narrow board placed up off the ground
- Walk up to a mailbox (a big mailbox, not at home) and get a treat

## SOCIALIZATION

- Get treats while next to helium filled balloons
- Walk in very tall grass
- Walk up to an opened umbrella
- Walk near a small fan, then a medium and then a larger one
- Go to a playground or preschool area where children are squealing
- Walk puppy near or under a sprinkler
- Walk past a fire hydrant
- Run a blender or food processor or other noisy appliance with puppy nearby
- Clatter meal baking pans with puppy nearby
- Walk up to a vacuum
- Give the puppy treats when you turn the vacuum on and he is near by
- Walk through a dry or wet wading pool
- Walk through a collapsed agility tunnel or equivalent toy
- Walk along a ladder laid flat on the ground
- Walk on a plastic tarp on the ground
- Meet a woman with a broad brimmed hat
- Meet a person carrying a plastic bag or tote
- Meet somebody in a wheelchair
- Meet someone using a walker
- Give the puppy treats near someone with a Halloween mask on
- Meet a fireman or policeman in full uniform
- Meet a person sitting on a bike
- Meet a man with a ball cap on
- Meet someone riding a skateboard
- If your puppy has had all of his shots, meet a dog of a breed he's never met before.

## SOCIALIZATION

**A PAW ABOVE DOG TRAINING....661-678-DOGS (3647)**