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## **Puppy Socialization Tips**

I am sure you have heard about the importance of socialization, especially in young puppies. Socialization is introducing and exposing your dog to as many experiences as possible and conditioning them to the sights, sounds and touches in our human world. Most training books I read discuss the importance of socialization but don't really talk about the proper way to socialize your dog. Below are the top behavior issues I deal with in adult dogs, and how socialization will help to prevent these bad behaviors from developing.

**The socialization techniques I recommend below are for prevention of undesirable behaviors. If your dog is already displaying these behaviors, please see a good trainer.**

**Dog-dog aggression:** Puppies need to be introduced to as many dogs of all ages, shapes and sizes as possible. I am not a fan of dog parks as a venue to do this. Dog parks are great for the dog with a rock solid temperament. The dog that can have a bad experience and just brush it off do very well in dog parks. The rough house bully dogs or the shy sensitive dogs are often not good dog park candidates. The rough house bully dogs learn they can intimidate the shy dogs through play and this tends to make the bully dog into more of a bully, and the shy dog more fearful and shy. For examples, puppies tend to rush and jump in the face of other dogs. You may have an older dog that will not tolerate that behavior and wants to teach the puppy a lesson. Puppies can get scared in this environment and they sometimes learn to fear adult dogs. They might carry this bad experience into adulthood.

My recommendation for dogs that are not great dog park candidates is to socialize them through puppy parties. A great place to meet other puppy owners is in basic obedience classes. I often help owners set up puppy play dates at classmate's homes where between three and five well-matched puppies can be socialized in a supervised environment. It's best that the puppies are fairly close in age and similar in temperament. I can help to make sure the temperaments and play styles of the puppies are a good match. Again, you don't want an assertive puppy intimidating a shy one. Developmentally, a 20 week old puppy is a lot more mature and confident than a 12 week old. Often they do fine together but not always, so the play styles of dogs of different ages need to be watched carefully.

**Leash Aggression:** Dogs are often fine with other dogs when they are off leash, but turn into monsters when meeting another dog while on leash. We as owners have created this problem. Dogs feel trapped on leash and can't properly greet another dog. We drag them up to dogs they do not want to meet because we see that dog as friendly but your dog might be reading body language that says that dog is not going to be so nice. We hold the leash tight when dogs greet and dogs feel they can't pull away or defend themselves. This adds tension to the introduction. Often leash aggression starts out as leash frustration. We often begin socializing our dogs on leash and let our dogs go up to every dog. As they get older, we stop allowing them to greet every dog. They throw a temper tantrum which raises their arousal level and arousal very easily tips into aggression.

Leash aggression can be prevented by keeping a loose leash when dogs are meeting and carefully watching the body language of the dogs for signs of trouble. If either dog starts to get stiff and freeze, their ears go way forward or way back, or if there is any vocalization, turn your dog away with your best "happy voice" and move away. The worst thing we can do is to yell and correct our dog for snapping or growling. He is telling the other dog he is fearful (that's how dogs communicate), and we just punished our dog for fearful behavior. Instead, listen to the information that the dogs are broadcasting, respect it, and turn your dog away. Then once away from the other dog, ask for a sit and watch so he learns he is supposed to check in and pay attention to you when he gets scared. Work hard on not getting nervous yourself as that will go right down the leash.

**Fear of people:** Dogs will display their fear of people by growling, snapping, or cowering. Whether your dogs snaps/growls, or runs and hides, they are both displays of fear. If dogs are born with a shy temperament, they are commonly afraid of men. There are lots of theories why, which I won't delve into, but just be aware. If you have a shelter dog that is afraid of men, and you don't know their history, it doesn't necessarily mean they were mistreated by a man. Many shelter dogs I meet are initially afraid of men.

To prevent a fear of people from getting out of hand, it is important to get your puppy out to meet as many people as possible, especially men. Dogs don't understand the strange accessories we wear like cowboy hats, baseball caps, sunglasses, purses, umbrellas, or gloves. So, if you don't wear or carry them yourself, it could be frightening to a dog. Expose your dog to people wearing these strange accessories.

Dogs are often afraid of children. Children have sudden movements, smell and sound different than adults, and can be unpredictable. As puppies, expose your dog to children as much as possible, especially toddlers. Get them used to the fact that toddlers may grab ears and tails or pinch. You can grab ears and tails and pinch your puppy lightly, then reward with a yummy treat to get them used to it. Be very careful -- your job is to keep a child safe. Don't do this with an adult dog that hasn't been exposed to children and be very careful with puppies.

The behavior of a dog towards children can change – not always for the better – as the dog matures. When my dogs were puppies, they accepted children, but I believe that now they are adult dogs, they would be nervous and defend themselves if a child accidentally stepped on them or made sudden movements towards them. I exposed my puppies to older children at soccer and baseball games. Here they learn children scream, yell and run around and that is normal for pint size humans.

**Possession Aggression:** Possession Aggression is also called Resource Guarding. Dogs will guard things they don't want to give up, sometimes growling, snapping, and biting to get you to back away. Puppies naturally steal things and run to see how much control they have over you and what kind of reaction they get from you. This is the time to make sure you can get back what they steal. Play the exchange game with them. Give them a toy and say "give" or "drop" and when they give it up, give them a yummy treat. If they don't give it up, set them up for success and put a treat right in front of their mouth. Always give the toy right back. Many dogs start to guard because everything you take away they never get back. If your puppy steals your shoe, the worst thing you can do is chase them and then punish them. Chasing them is playing their game with their rules. If you punish them they will remember that when they gave it up they got punished. Try to get that shoe from them the next time -- do you think they will give it up if they know they will get punished? If you have trained the exchange game right, they will very willingly give it up because they know they will get rewarded. Instead of punishing, call them to you with the stolen object in their mouth, say "give" or "drop" (which they've learned how to do by playing the exchange game) and then thank them for bringing it to you and dropping it. I have heard of dogs that learned the exchange game, and then go and find things and bring them to their owner to get rewarded. I'd much rather see that behavior than have them find something and then run and hide somewhere and to chew it to bits.

Possession Aggression around the food bowl is also very common. It is a hardwired behavior for dogs to protect their food. Make sure you can take the bowl away and always give it right back. Have a yummy treat ready, say "can I have that?," and take it away. Reward with a yummy treat and give the bowl right back. They will start to love having their bowl taken away. It is important that dogs learn they will get back some of the things they have to give up.

**Separation Anxiety:** Dogs need to learn you will come back. The dogs who have separation anxiety are often very bonded or very insecure. I see a lot of these cases in shelter dogs. They have been left once by a person they love, and put in a stressful shelter environment which they will never forget, and they think it could happen again. Breeders and trainers often recommend that new owners take a few weeks off work to bond with a new puppy and start the training process. I agree whole heartedly. But during this period, do not spend every minute with your puppy. Gradually increase your absences. If you spend three straight weeks with them, taking them everywhere with you to socialize, and then suddenly you leave for 8 hours, your puppy could have problems adjusting. Prepare your dog gradually for long absences. You can start by teaching them to be in a room in your house by

themselves. Never make a big deal of your departures or arrivals. If you are guilty, nervous, or over excited, your dog will pick up on this. Seeing that your behavior is different will change their behavior. Pay little attention to your dog when you depart and return.

**Territorial Aggression:** This is the dog who protects his space, a location, or his “territory.” The way to prevent territorial aggression is for your dog, through leadership training, to learn that this is not his space to protect, it is yours. During your recall training (aka “coming when called”), practice calling your dog from the fence, the front door, or windows when they aren’t aroused. Work up to calling them when they are in full arousal and barking. Never call them away when you know they will blow you off, or you will be teaching them that in high arousal they don’t have to listen. Reward every time you can call them away. If they don’t come the first time you call, go get them and don’t reward them.

**Barrier Aggression:** Leash aggression and barrier aggression are very similar. A dog feels trapped because he can’t move away or see the subject that makes him afraid. You often see this in a car. Most diagnose this as territorial aggression, and it very well may be, but often it is caused by barrier aggression. You sometimes see this when a dog is inside a crate or enclosed behind a fence—often called “fence fighting”. With your puppy in your car, roll down the window far enough that people can give treats to him/her but he/she can’t get out. If you aren’t shy, ask people in parking lots to give your puppy treats. Same goes for the crate, when people come over and your puppy is in the crate, have them drop treats in.

**Predatory Aggression:** This is the hardest behavior to modify but luckily the most rare aggressive behavior in pet dogs. Predatory aggression is aggressing towards anything that is fast moving. It is most often seen in the herding breeds. Fast moving could be cars, bikes, skateboards, jogging strollers, adults or children running or jogging, or other dogs running. The best way to prevent this is to expose your puppy to these things when young and reward them when they see these objects fly by them and they don’t lunge. If you have some training underway, when they object flies by, ask for an attention and watch and then reward. Be very aware of this behavior if you own a herding dog or mix, and watch for changes, and modify this behavior as early as you can.

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