

# Avoiding Socialization Issues with Puppies

Socialization can be particularly challenging right now. Most of you have heard that you need to “socialize your puppy”. You may believe you need to expose your puppy to lots of people, other dogs, and different situations. *This is only half right.*

You do want to introduce your puppy to different situations, **but at a level and pace that keeps your pup comfortable.** You want your puppy to think “Wow, that was such a fun party, loved meeting those people”, rather than “Phew, glad that’s over, that was kind of scary”. Letting your puppy choose the interaction is a really good way to determine their comfort level.

The goal of socialization is to have a well-rounded, “optimistic” adult dog, who doesn’t worry or feel anxious when coming across something new. An optimistic dog sees something they haven’t seen before and they are curious as opposed to fearful. Therefore, we want our puppies to be comfortably introduced to new conditions and new situations.

*How is that possible when we are supposed to limit where we go, and keep a social distance from others?*

Well, it will take a little creativity on your part to achieve the goal of a happy, well-adjusted dog. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. **Add something new to the room before you let your puppy in and let your puppy explore at their own pace.** No need to encourage, lure, or bring your puppy to the item. Here are some examples of items:
  - Have an umbrella open in the room and let your pup check it out.
  - Pull out a seasonal decorative item and let your puppy see it. Remember, you don’t want to scare your puppy; you want it to be at a level where they feel curious. *Do not bring the item to your pup, let your puppy choose to go to it.*
  - A skateboard or other item that moves when your puppy touches it.
  - Put a remote control toy in a room.
    - At first have it be still. When the puppy is further away you can turn it on and have it move a little, gradually increasing speed.
    - If it makes a noise as it moves around and that is concerning to your puppy, hold it still at a distance with the sound on. Once he or she is comfortable with that, move it a little.
    - **You are gradually exposing your puppy to the new item, at a level where your puppy feels comfortable. That is key!**
2. **Have your puppy experience different surfaces** - carpets, hardwood floor, grass, gravel, mulch, pavement, sand are some examples.



### 3. Make a puppy scavenger hunt.

- Set up a kibble scavenger hunt with your puppy's meal!
  - When your puppy is out of the room, put some kibble under a Tupperware lid, under a towel, or in a container and then let them in the room to explore and find the treat.
  - **Have containers made out of different materials to change up the feel, smells, and sounds for your pup!**

### 4. Keep both the puppy and the kids busy.

- This is a "two-fer"! *The kids can have a project of making interactive enrichment toys!* There are many websites to help come up with DIY dog enrichment ideas.
  - **Make sure materials used are safe for the pup.** You don't want your puppy ingesting something they shouldn't. Some dogs will play with a rope toy, while others will try to eat it – which is not safe, so you always want to be sure to supervise.
    - The same principle applies for all toys you give your puppy.

### 5. Rearrange the room.

- While your pup is out of the room, rearrange the furniture, change location of pillows etc. and let the pup back in. **The idea is to teach the puppy that change is not a problem.**

### 6. Real life experiences.

- Don't forget about the regular things in your puppy's life, such as a running vacuum, the doorbell ringing, sounds from the TV, etc.
- Google various sounds, such as a lawn mower, dogs barking, a garbage truck, etc., so that your puppy can get used to hearing those sounds!

### 7. Walks

- Outdoors isn't off limits, so letting your puppy out on leash to explore is terrific. Think of your walks as "sniffari's" – use them as an opportunity for you and your pup to stretch your legs, get some fresh air, and just have fun taking in your surroundings! Not every walk has to be for training a proper heel position.
  - Bonus – your pup can experience seeing other dogs walking by, bikes, cars, and trucks from a distance!

Life will return to normal, so finding ways to allow your puppy to comfortably experience variety and new situations now will help them to become resilient, stable adults!



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