



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

101 Things to Socialize To

First of all it would be helpful to define what we mean by socialization. This does not just mean tossing a bunch of dogs in a yard and letting them play. All that means is that all of these dogs get along and understand the rules they have set for each other, AND they abide by them. When these rules get violated is when owners see aggressive outbursts towards each other. This can stop and just be a bunch of noise, or can lead to something more serious.

So, what is "socialization" anyways? Introducing and familiarizing a canine to new experiences - including people, places, objects, other animals - in ways that help the dog learn how to respond to and interact with these experiences appropriately and without fear. The puppy's brain is most inclined to accept new stimuli from 4-12 weeks of age. This period is often referred to as the critical period of socialization. Beginning the socialization process after 14 weeks has been shown to significantly impact the dog's ability to adapt to new and novel stimuli. It IS possible to socialize an adult dog, it just takes longer, mostly due to the counter conditioning that has to be done to reduce anything the dog has interpreted as something fearful, or threatening. With saying this, it is far better to prevent, rather than rehabilitate. So, if you have the opportunity to socialize during the critical period, do it and take advantage of it. You and your puppy will be glad you did!

Some things to keep in mind:

1. Always set up the experiences with people, other animals, objects, events, and noises in a controlled and positive manner. Slowly increase the level of difficulty.
2. If your dog is frightened by something, or someone, and begin hiding behind you, or adopt a fear-aggressive posture and/or growl, it is your responsibility to correct the person, situation, or stimuli so the dog learns he can trust you.
3. Interact with your dogs at home. They are social animals who need social structure. Companionship IS vital to your dog's emotional health and well being.
4. Keep it healthy. Make sure the places you are taking your dog isn't frequented by sick animals. Keep your own dogs vaccinations up to date.
5. Play groups between dogs should begin small and slowly get bigger. Bullies should be removed. Never use the ole "they will work it out" adage. Rough and rowdy play is fine, as long as both dogs are having fun. Keep hormones out of the equation by spaying and neutering at appropriate ages deemed by your vet. Hormones (as we can all remember) confuse and cloud situations.
6. Dogs and puppies should not have to be expected to tolerate ears and tails being pulled, yelling, hitting, fur being pulled, etc. Instead we should teach children how to appropriately interact with animals.
7. Keep the interactions positive by using praise, tactile interaction, and food to reward when the dog has behaved in a confident and acceptable manner.
8. Register for an obedience class. Group classes (especially puppy kindergarten or basics can help during the socialization process. Any reputable trainer will allow you to observe a class before registering. This will allow you to see how the trainer interacts with dogs and people, and if/when two dogs do not get along. The classes should always be positive reinforcement based.

Get creative and make a list of 101 things to socialize to in 101 days. Putting the work in now, will pay off in huge dividends in the future. It can take seconds to install fear into your dog, and take years to uninstall it. Keep new stimuli controlled, short and sweet.

Most importantly, keep it pawsitive!