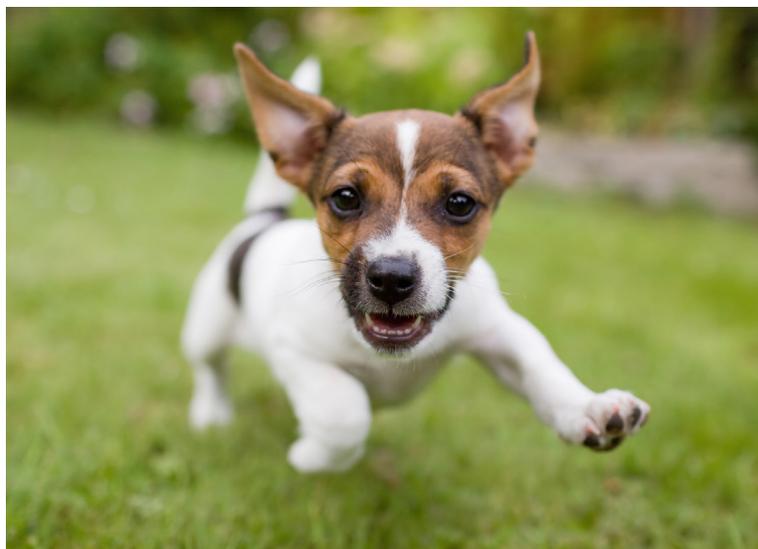


SOCIALIZATION FOR PUPPIES DURING COVID-19



PUPPY SOCIALIZATION

COLD NOSES AND WARM HEARTS

WE HAVE LEARNED...

We have learned that one of the most important things you can do to help your puppy mature into a calm, well-adjusted dog is to provide him with a wide variety of positive experiences of the big world around him.

The optimum developmental window to plan and provide for these experiences occurs during the first three months of his life.

We have a small window in which to most easily and most successfully pack a lot of new experiences for our puppy, but the current COVID-19 pandemic has greatly complicated our ability to prioritize that need.

Most importantly, please remember that exposing your puppy to the big world around him needs to be planned in such a way that every experience creates a positive association. Your goal should be to provide him with a deep history of positive exposure experiences ... and that can happen at a distance! In fact, it actually often happens **best** at a distance, ensuring that your puppy is neither overwhelmed nor overstimulated. Positive exposure rarely involves the need to be in close proximity to the stimuli.

So, perhaps we can actually allow the distancing guidelines to work for us. When we pause and make a list of **sights, sounds, textures, scents, and experiences** for our puppy, we can provide some of those exposure opportunities with the mandated social distancing guidelines serving as a buffer. This will help us keep those experiences at a level that meets the puppy's exposure need without creating too much excitement, arousal, or concern for the puppy. Remember, the goal is to provide a plethora of calm, happy experiences to help that puppy mature into a well-behaved, well-adjusted dog.

On the back are some specific things to do with your puppy. Remember, pair experiences with things your puppy loves. The goal is for your puppy to make some wonderful associations.

All suggestions should be adjusted to meet the guidelines set forth by local authorities. Most guidelines permit leaving home for essentials, for exercise, or for walking pets.

How do you meet your puppy's needs while staying safe and staying within the parameters of restrictions that are in place?

Initially, that dilemma can seem like an overwhelming problem, and it might even cause a wave of anxiety for you when you consider that incomplete or improper socialization could lead to devastating behavioral challenges for the adult dog. How can you possibly provide adequate socialization in the days of stay-at-home orders?

Don't panic. I want to assure you that you can indeed meet the needs of your puppy while keeping yourself and those around you safe, and while following social distancing guidelines.

In fact, as a breeder and raiser of service dogs who understands the intensity of the urgent need for socialization, and as someone who is currently raising such a puppy, I want to encourage you and help you to understand how to meet your puppy's needs during these challenging days.



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Take your puppy with you for rich socialization opportunities during your errands.

- Anytime you are driving somewhere (and can do so without leaving him in the car alone), have your puppy ride with you, safely secured in your vehicle, giving him the opportunity to see and experience things in your community.
- When you do curbside pickup of groceries or other supplies, this is a great chance for your puppy to get accustomed to seeing new people and having them approach your car.
- Stop at the bank. The drive-up teller or ATM at your bank will allow your puppy to experience the unusual tinny sound of the bank employee's voice in the speaker or the beeping of the PIN pad.
- Take a detour. Along your route, watch for novel exposure opportunities. For example, take the time to pull into a parking lot and observe construction vehicles operating in the distance.
- Park your car at a distance from your local vet clinic or boarding facility and allow your pup to observe pets of all shapes and sizes as they enter or exit.
- As a family member goes into the grocery store for supplies, take your puppy to the outer edges of the parking lot and let him experience the bustle of people coming and going, doors slamming, and cars beeping as people lock and unlock.
- Find a huge empty parking lot, and use a long line to let your puppy explore the new place. Spread out a mat and just watch the world together.
- Give your puppy a chance to show you he feels comfortable in a new space by asking him if he can take treats, focus, follow a simple cue, and eliminate appropriately. If he is unable to do those things, wait for your next trip for supplies and plan to visit a quieter location for your puppy.

Socialization opportunities abound at home as well:

- At home, play dress up. Put on silly clothes: big hats and sunglasses, oversized coats, and jewelry. Attach a huge ring of keys to your belt so that you jingle when you walk.
- Play unique sounds in the background at home as you play with your pup.
- Practice things like ringing your door bell and knocking on your door to create the opportunity for sudden sounds to signal great treats for your puppy.
- Plan enrichment experiences daily.
- Design your own agility course at home for your puppy to experience some novel textures and do some problem-solving.
- Build your puppy's confidence by having some fun shaping a new behavior.
- Rearrange your furniture while your puppy is sleeping, or put something new in an unexpected place in your home or yard. Your puppy needs to learn that new things predict good things for him. This will help teach him to assimilate new things without concern. This is a concept that you can create at home, and then you'll be ready to take it on the road when the time is right
- Your puppy needs to learn to recover from a startle. Sudden noises that are low intensity (by virtue of distance or decreased volume) can be set up in your home to help your puppy learn to be startled and then recover and continue playing.
- Help your puppy learn resilience and how to push through a little frustration by hiding food or a toy behind a barrier and letting him problem-solve to get what he wants or needs.

As you can see, the critical puppy skills of resilience, persistence, checking in with you, startle recovery, and accepting novel things can be taught at your home or along the path of your errands and then applied to new areas and new circumstances as those opportunities are available.

Slow down and find safe places to just pause and watch the world around you with your puppy. Distance is actually your friend. It can keep you both safe and healthy, and ensure that these experiences are positive ones for your puppy.