



SOCIALIZATION

Proper **socialization** and **habituation** are essential if you want your puppy to become a well-adjusted adult dog. Socialization is the process of teaching a puppy how to interact with people. Habituation is the process of teaching a puppy to accept things in its environment. Your puppy, if not properly exposed at an early age to many different experiences and people, may find it very difficult to adapt to new experiences as an adult dog.

The planning of your puppy's early socialization and habituation is as important to his development as good nutrition, vaccinations and obedience training and should include experiences that he may encounter later in life. Puppies who are not exposed at an early age to animals and people other than the immediate family are often overwhelmed by the experience when exposure occurs at an older age. This response could be so strong as to lead to aggression and fear biting. Giving your puppy an ongoing variety of experiences is important to the development of his personality even if he is going to be a dog that seldom leaves the house.

Actively plan your puppy's socialization and habituation. The process of meeting new people and experiencing new environments should be maintained throughout your puppy's first year. Dogs are not naturally good with strangers or young children. Therefore, it is necessary to provide your puppy with many opportunities to meet new people in a positive and rewarding manner. Plan early exposure to children, especially if children are not part of your immediate household. Young children and puppies should have **supervised** playtime together. Forbid rough handling, slapping at the puppy or pulling ears or hair, and games of possession such as Tug of War.

In the next six weeks, make an effort to take your puppy to as many new environments as possible. Introduce him to many different people. Make a list of people, places and things for him to experience. Invite friends over. Visit playgrounds and parks, go for walks around the neighborhood and take a trip to the local pet supply store. I know that everyone is busy and time is valuable, but **YOU CAN NEVER RECOVER THIS PERIOD IN YOUR PUPPY'S LIFE.**

If your puppy exhibits fear when introduced to a new experience or new person, **DO NOT ENCOURAGE** fearful behavior by soothing him in a pleasant voice and petting him reassuringly. He will perceive this as praise and be reinforced for fearful behavior. **DON'T DRAG** a puppy up to something he fears. Leave him and go to the object/person. Pretend that they are marvelous. Be patient. Try dropping pieces of food close to the object/person, praising the puppy as he steps closer to get the food. New people should greet the puppy by kneeling down rather than bending over him.