

Importance of Socializing Puppies and Kittens

Socialization refers to getting puppies and kittens used to people, other animals and experiences they will encounter in their lives.

Socialization helps puppies and kittens to accept and get used to everything around them; this includes new people, car rides, grooming, vacuum cleaners, other noises, other animals and other pets.



Not all dogs and cats are outgoing or social; these pets may not enjoy spending time in big groups of people or animals. Socialization teaches pets how to handle themselves and communicate appropriately with new environments and experiences. The goal is that puppies and kittens can learn to accept new experiences with confidence and without fear.

The best time to socialize puppies is between 3 to 14 weeks of age; the best time for kittens is 3 to 9 weeks of age. This phase is optimal because puppies and kittens are physically and mentally capable to interact with others. This time frame is a key socialization period that has long-lasting effects. Experiences that occur during this period will continue to have effects on how a puppy or kitten continues to learn throughout their life. Negative experiences will also have lasting effects; it is important that new experiences are as safe, positive and fear free as possible.

The best time to socialize puppies is between 3 to 14 weeks of age; the best time for kittens is 3 to 9 weeks of age.

How to Socialize Your Puppy or Kitten

Remember that the purpose of socialization is to have the puppy or kitten interact in a positive manner with other people, animals, and things in order to be comfortable with the environment in which they live. When socializing, it is important to minimize discipline or training. Socialization is not a time to train your pet because that takes your pet's attention away from the new experiences. It is also important to balance play with these learning experiences; if your pet is comfortable with a new experience try to add play in that experience. For example, if the sound of a



vacuum does not startle or upset your pet see if your pet can play while the noise is still occurring.

Put your pet in situations that she may experience as an adult, such as car rides, being in a carrier, toys, grooming procedures, meeting other animals, meeting new people, and trips to the veterinarian. Make sure that all introductions to new people, animals and things are nonthreatening or scary. If your pet reacts with fear, you likely need to scale back the interaction to the level the puppy or kitten is comfortable. This could mean letting them watch instead of play, distracting them with treats, or moving them farther away from whatever they are afraid of until they become comfortable.

Never punish a fearful puppy or kitten if they are anxious during interactions. This is an important time in their development and creating fearful situations will only lead to more problems in the future. It is also fine for a pet to not interact during these times as socialization is a time for watching and learning; just remember to keep things relaxed. Gently touch, hold or restrain, and physically interact with your pet every day. This is especially important at an early age because it helps your young pet become comfortable with humans and being handled by people. Puppies and kittens need to interact with non-family members (including children) so they get used to meeting and being around new people when they are adults. Handling your puppy or kitten should include gently touching the face, ears, and paws to make grooming and examinations easier. Restraining them means holding them in place gently and in a non-threatening manner so they can get used to being held and to promote calm demeanors for veterinary check-ups or grooming.

What if my Puppy or Kitten Isn't Fully Vaccinated?

If your puppy or kitten isn't fully vaccinated, you can start socializing your pet to new sounds and experiences where there is limited contact with animals with an unknown vaccine history. If there is no way to know animal's vaccine history, the area, such as dog parks, should be avoided until your puppy or kitten is fully vaccinated to prevent spread of contagious diseases. There are many safe places to start to socialize your pet such as parking lots of grocery stores or the periphery of sport fields. When socializing your puppy or kitten to new locations, remember to have your pet in a carrier or on a harness and leash to prevent your pet from escaping.

Consequences of Not Socializing

Socializing puppies and kittens early within the socialization developmental period has been shown to decrease fear, aggression, and anxiety of new people, animals, or situations. Pets not properly socialized often have an increased sensitivity to new experiences. They are often fearful of people or other animals, even within their own species. This can result in avoiding people or other animals, anxious behaviors, or even hostility or violence towards others. Lack of socialization can also delay development and decrease the puppy's or kitten's ability to learn and make connections about social norms, including sleeping habits and where and when to find food. These issues can make it difficult for them to live easily with others and in some cases may lead to them being re-homed or sent to animal shelters. Giving your new puppy or kitten (or young animal of any species) significant socialization during that critical stage will pay off handsomely by helping your pet become a confident adult.

