

Important Socialization Periods of a Puppy's First 16 Weeks

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Canine Socialization Period: 3-7 weeks

This is when your dog learns the species-specific behaviors that make him a dog. Through interaction with mother and littermates, the pup learns the body language, facial expressions and vocalizations of canine communication. It's important that puppies remain with their littermates for this entire period. Modern thinking is that it is beneficial to extend this until 8 to 10 weeks, as long as the breeder provides a rich, stimulated environment.

In the absence of the opportunity to experience this entire timeframe, appropriate interaction with other dogs can mean the difference between a normal dog and one that does not have normal canine interaction.

Human Socialization Period: 8-12 weeks

This is the time during which the pup must be socialized with a variety of people and new experiences. Lack of socialization during this time period results in neo-phobic dogs – frightened of “the new”: people, places, objects, and activities.

This is the ideal time for play with other puppies – with the understanding that puppies need rest and can become over stimulated. Daycares accepting puppies at this age must supervise their play to ensure it is appropriate, and separate them for enforced rest and unwinding.

This is a good time for the introduction to a broad range of experiences, including non-punitive, positive training, and a positive introduction to being groomed – including gentle, light brushing, introduction to clippers if appropriate, with lots of treats, praise and patience.

Fear Impact Period: 8-11 weeks

A sub-set of the Human Socialization Period, this is a time when a painful, traumatic experience can have a lasting effect. This doesn't mean isolate the puppy – but it does mean exercise care and avoid frightening, potentially painful experiences: physically painful, not just new and different.

Seniority Classification Period: 13-16 weeks

This is an important pre-adolescent period of testing when puppies develop self-confidence. During this time frame puppies work through a variety of interactive issues such as learning bite inhibition. This is an important time for puppies to play together with the following caveats:

It is especially important to supervise puppies at this age, making sure no puppy is being bullied. Puppies must not be successful in their attempts to bully, or this can become a

learned behavior; and puppies must not be the recipients of bullying, or they can develop fearful responses to other dogs.

A short, one-night stay in a boarding kennel is a good idea during this period to acclimate the puppy to boarding.

Conclusion

It is important to understand the critical periods of emotional development, along with recommendations for the age acceptance into dog services. The window of opportunity for socialization during these early critical stages slams shut. Once this time frame is missed, the effects of lack of socialization can only be overcome through desensitization and behavior modification training through a trainer or daycare program. Training and daycare can help an un-socialized dog to cope in new, unfamiliar, and potentially frightening situations. It can make all the difference between a dog that is comfortable and easy to handle, and one that is terrified and reactive.

Without question, early socialization is one of the most critical components for a dog's mental and emotional well-being.