



Current recommendations for Puppy Socialisation

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Importance of socialisation

- To grow well balanced, confident and friendly companions.
- Puppies need to have positive experiences with household noises, car travel and different environments early.
- The timing of this socialisation is critically important. From 3 to 12 weeks of age puppies are curious and open to accepting and interacting with other puppies and humans. Learning is extremely rapid at this age. Experiences during this period will become a template for what to expect and accept. Anything that they do not experience during this period may induce a fear response when experienced for the first time later in life.

Critical ages for a puppy's development:

- 3-5 weeks: Socialisation with other dogs (predominantly while they are still in the litter).
- 5-12 weeks: Exposure to humans and environmental stimuli.
- 8-12 weeks: This is a fear sensitivity age. It is extremely important that experiences are positive.



The home environment

- Research suggests that puppies that are not socialised with people by 7 to 9 weeks of age behave differently towards humans than those that are; please do not keep your new puppy isolated.
- Puppies should be gradually introduced to their new environment, both social and physical, as soon as possible after settling into their new home.
- Puppies can go out in the car to gain more exposure to the outside world and to learn to accept and enjoy car travel.
- Encourage visitors to the house but ask them to leave shoes at the door.
- Once introduced, puppies should be gradually exposed to household noises at a low level; such as vacuum cleaners, lawnmowers, television and stereos.
- Make these experiences positive by playing with the puppy and offering treats; these things may be new for the puppy as they may not have experienced them at the breeder or shelter.

Puppy school

- This is a good idea as it broadens the puppy's experience and allows exposure to different people, including children, and to other breeds which often look totally different to the puppy's littermates.
- Ideally start within the first week of ownership if possible.

Pheromones

- These can help puppies settle quickly into their new home, cope with new experiences, and have also been shown to accelerate learning.
- They come as diffusers or collars and are available from your veterinarian.

- Collars are most useful in puppies as they are then constantly exposed to the pheromone both in the house and when out and about.
- It is best to get your puppy's first collar fitted when they leave the breeder, or shelter, before they are exposed to the car journey home or put on a plane.
- Replace the collar each month.

Socialisation and risk of disease

The need for socialisation of puppies must be balanced with the need to protect puppies from exposure to disease. Thanks to continued vaccination the incidence of infectious disease in dogs in New Zealand is low in most areas. A series of vaccinations is given to ensure they receive the best protection. Puppies develop immunity at different ages which is strongly influenced by the amount of protection to disease they got from their mum's milk. Your veterinarian is the best person to talk to about your puppy's individual protection.

Vaccination

Talk to your veterinarian about vaccination. The age at which your puppy will finish its vaccination course will depend on a number of factors including breed, lifestyle and which vaccines are used.

General Recommendations:

- Puppies that have had at least one vaccination will benefit from attending puppy school at their veterinary clinic.
- After the second vaccination puppies may walk in areas such as the beach at low tide on the clean sand and play with other vaccinated dogs.
- Avoid public parks and designated dog parks until after the final vaccination, these areas could be contaminated with, for example, parvovirus.

Regional variation

Risk to puppies in regions where dogs are well contained and thoroughly vaccinated is very small. There are areas which have a higher risk factor, so please check with your veterinarian about which areas are considered high risk, i.e. have had recent cases of infectious diseases, and be guided by their recommendations.

If you live in a high risk area:

1. Ask visitors to remove their shoes before entering your house and do so yourself.
2. Hands should be washed before the puppy is handled.
3. Avoid interaction with friend's dogs that are walked in public areas and dog parks.
4. Don't let your puppy walk on the street or in public areas until after its final vaccination. However, do attend puppy school before this if held at your vet clinic as they will not run it if there is any risk to the puppies.
5. Make sure the puppy goes out in the car regularly so it is exposed to the sights and sounds that it will have to cope with later in life.
6. Park up at your local supermarket car park and let the puppy watch and listen from within the safety of the car.

Protecting your puppy from disease is important, but socialisation is equally important. In most areas the risk of a puppy on a vaccination programme contracting an infectious disease is small, however the risk of a puppy developing behavioural problems due to lack of socialisation in the first twelve weeks of life is relatively high. This can negatively impact not only the enjoyment the adult dog may experience, but the lifelong relationship with the human family and community.

Further resources

Animals with Attitude

Tel: 09 415 7173 Email: e.flint@xtra.co.nz

Kiwi Vet Behaviour

Tel: 022 106 6896 Email: kiwivetbehaviour@outlook.co.nz

Socialisation activities should be positive and enjoyable for you and your puppy!

Use the suggestions below to start your puppy's journey towards becoming a happy, confident, well-adjusted dog.

TICK OFF EACH BOX ONCE COMPLETED

Touch


Surface experiences such as tiles, wood, concrete, metal, ramps, carpet, plastic, sand, gravel, water.


People

Adults and children of all ages, shapes, ethnicities, and mobility ranges; clothing – e.g. hats, puffy jackets, uniforms, hi-vis clothing; people holding things – umbrellas, sticks, sports equipment.

Other Animals

Cats, birds, sheep, cattle, horses etc.

 **Smells**
Incorporate scents and scent games into play activities to improve positive experiences for your puppy at home.

Sounds 
Music, vacuums, thunder, fireworks, sirens, cars and vehicles, electrical tools.

Sights


Cars, trees, buildings, roadworks, construction, bikes, prams, wheelchairs, flapping material.

Handling

Gentle handling when puppy is relaxed. Ears, mouth, feet, nails, tail, body surfaces. Puppies need to learn to trust and enjoy the physical contact required for future vet exams, grooming, baths, nail trims and general physical contact.

Puppy Classes

Ask your vet about puppy classes in your area. Choose those that focus on understanding your puppy (e.g., body language and how they learn), not just obedience.

Dogs 
One-on-one play dates with a range of well-behaved, fully vaccinated dogs of all sizes and breeds. Do not allow unsupervised play with new dogs.

With thanks to:



NZVA
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