Puppy's 1st Year: Behavior & Socialization

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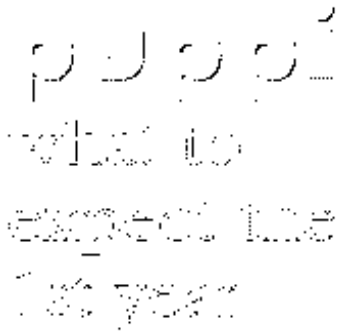

You're a new "parent!" You've just brought your puppy home and have all the right equipment, including a crate, a bed, bowls, toys, dental products, and food, among other things. Maybe your puppy came from a breeder who adequately socialized him with all sorts of people, while his littermates, mother, and other dogs introduced him to canine etiquette. Or, perhaps, your puppy came from a rescue organization or shelter. Are you wondering where you should begin? In addition to the information in this article, please see our Puppy Center for more valuable information.

From the point you bring your pup home and throughout his entire life - but especially during the first two years - it is imperative that you make every effort to expand the puppy's environment and expose him to new things. During this stage of their lives, puppies should be around as many different people and animals as possible. Take them with you when you go for a walk, shopping, or even to work, if possible. Encourage your children to bring friends over to meet the family's new pet, while you supervise their time together. Enroll your pup in an obedience or training course where he will meet other dogs. All types of exposure are important to your pup's development. During this time, make sure your puppy is being properly vaccinated, since strange dogs may expose him to illnesses that could be dangerous to him.

It is essential to understand a little of how your puppy develops, both physically and socially. This way, you can tailor training and socialization to short sessions that fit your pup's abilities. This helps ensure he is getting the most from his expanded environment. It also helps limit training failures - which are most prevalent when your puppy is either bored or asked to perform a task of which he is incapable. However, keep in mind that these are generalized guidelines and your puppy will develop at his own pace.

Puppy Development and Socialization

3 - 5 weeks of age

Puppy Body Language

In puppy class or at puppy parties, you may notice different puppy behavior with the associated body language, including:

Play bow - invitation to play.
Shyness - ears down, tail down or tucked, eyes averted.
Aggression - head up,

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Puppies can now hear, see, and smell. With their rapid sensory development, each puppy is becoming aware of his surroundings. With this awareness, your puppy starts to interact with his littermates and mother and begins to walk, bark, wag his tail, bite his littermates, bare his teeth, growl, chase and play. His teeth also erupt and he may begin to eat solid foods.

5 - 7 weeks of age

Your puppy begins to wean, which is the true start of his growing independence. His uninhibited curiosity continues to grow. As a result, your puppy fears little - making this age the perfect time to begin expanding your pup's surroundings and introducing him to an environment rich in variety and stimulations. In addition, your puppy needs frequent exposure to humans so he can learn how to interact with and develop attachments to them. But puppies also need to remain with their littermates so their relationship can continue to grow through play (both roughhouse and sexual).

7 - 9 weeks of age

By the seventh week, your puppy's senses have more fully developed and he continues to willfully investigate any new addition to his environment. After weeks of interaction with his littermates and the introduction of people into your pup's world, he has begun to develop a sense of how he should behave during interaction with others.

Sometime between seven and nine weeks of age, your puppy's attitude towards his environment seems to completely reverse. Unlike previous weeks, your pup now tends to be very cautious of everything and is increasingly fearful of both sounds and movements - especially when each is sudden and/or loud. This fear may even include activities he previously handled with ease, such as entering and exiting his crate or playing with a small toy. Because of your pup's new attitude, it is best to avoid traumatic, frightening, or painful situations during this time, including unnecessary surgery, travel, or even grooming. If visits to the veterinarian are necessary, ensure the utmost caution, gentle handling, and constant reassurance are continually offered to ease later visits. By about 12 weeks, your puppy should re-gain his former confidence. In addition, your pup's brain is now at the stage where he is ready to begin learning his name, basic commands (sit, stay, down, etc.), housebreaking, and leash training. Maybe the best news, however, is that your pup also has increased bladder control and the ability to sleep completely through the night.

9 - 12 weeks of age

Your puppy's involvement with his environment continues to grow as his motor skills continue to improve. Most importantly, your pup has begun to learn which behaviors are suitable for which times, even if his attention span has remained short. Best of all, your puppy now has a strong desire to earn your attention now that you and your family have taken the place of his littermates.

13 - 16 weeks of age

Your pup starts teething, which is marked by his incessant chewing of any available object. In addition, your pup starts to demonstrate more independence and willfulness. As a result, your puppy's urge to please you may decrease and he may ignore even the most basic training commands. As such, be very careful of where your pup is leashed and where he is not. Previously in a park or open field your puppy may have stayed near you, now he may quickly bolt and not heed your commands as he explores and plays on his own.

Beyond 16 weeks of age

Your puppy will enter a second chewing phase around seven months of age. This chewing has little (if anything) to do with teething and everything to do with his continued sense of exploration and curiosity. If not altered, his sexual behavior becomes commonplace.

Vaccinations Your Puppy Needs

As your puppy develops physically, his immune system matures and the protection he received through his mother's first milk diminishes. By vaccinating your pup, however, you can help prevent various infections. Consult

tail straight out or up, stiff stance, hackles raised, looking at object or puppy he is aggressive toward.
Happiness - tail wagging, head up, looking about, panting, or barking, relaxed stance.

Interesting Puppy Behaviors

Puppies often exhibit behaviors both endearing and puzzling. Some puppy antics arise as your pup explores his new world. Other behaviors are learned. Some may be instinctive. Most are normal occurrences, such as:

Dreaming - paws, legs, ear, and facial muscles twitch while asleep, sometimes accompanied by whimpers, barks, or cries. Dreams are normal and continue throughout life.
Grass Eating - eating fresh new growth or recently cut grass is normal. Make sure not to apply herbicides or other chemicals to the grass the dog has access to. As long as the dog is not coming in the house after eating

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Therefore, now is a good time to have your dog neutered or spayed.

The first several months of the puppy's life are very important for proper socialization with humans and other animals. It is preferable during this time to expose the puppy to anything he might be exposed to in the future, such as walking on different textures (tile, carpet, linoleum, gravel, cement, blacktop, and grass) and meeting people of different ages, genders, races, and handicaps. For instance, children are not the same as adults in a dog's mind, because children do not behave and act like miniature adults. Introduction to cats in the house is typically easier when the puppy is young as he learns to respect the cat quite quickly.

Studies have shown that if you do not socialize your new puppy, he may have socialization problems later in life. A few will become aggressive, but the majority are more likely to become overly shy or timid. They lack confidence in the presence of new people or situations. They cower in the presence of strangers. They jerk at their leash to get away from children or other pets. Forced to be in a new place, they may sit shaking behind you, drooling, and panting rapidly. In the worst case scenario, they may become fear biters. This is a behavioral pattern in which dogs, when encountering new people or pets they are afraid of, do not know how to react and simply attempt to bite the stranger. Once this develops, it can be very difficult to overcome.

There are numerous ways to socialize your puppy to different people and dogs in a safe, controlled environment. Puppy classes or puppy parties combine obedience with fun play and interaction between several like-aged puppies. In some clinics where a veterinarian has several clients with puppies of similar ages, the veterinary staff will sometimes arrange supervised weekly "play dates" where several puppies and their owners get together. Classes typically start when the puppy is between eight and twelve weeks old. Call your veterinary clinic to get information on classes or parties in your area.

The bottom line is to involve your puppy as much as you can in your daily activities. He will be well socialized and happy. Besides, that is the reason you got him, right?

What You Can Do To Properly Socialize Your New Puppy

your veterinarian to determine your puppy's vaccination schedule, which is based on his age, breed, health status, geographical area, and potential to be exposed to certain diseases.

A typical vaccination schedule may include:

5 weeks - Parvovirus vaccine for puppies at high risk of contracting this highly contagious disease, which is spread by contact with infected feces and marked by a loss of appetite, lethargy, bloody diarrhea, and vomiting that could result in the loss of your pet.

6, 9, 12 and 15 weeks - Combination vaccine, which usually includes adenovirus cough and hepatitis, canine distemper, parainfluenza, and parvovirus.

12 weeks or older - Rabies vaccine for all puppies, regardless of the supposed risk of contracting this fatal viral disease that attacks the central

grass and vomiting it all up, eating grass does not need to be discouraged.

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attacks the central nervous system and is transmitted by the bite of infected animals.

The first few weeks your new puppy is in your home are some of the most important in the socialization process. Start a good routine of eating, sleeping, playing, and outdoor exercise. Remember, though, that between seven and ten weeks of age most puppies go through a period in which they lose some of their self-confidence. Trust comes harder for them and things that we would expect them to be comfortable with suddenly elicit anxiety or fear. Where before they would boldly charge into a new situation, they now seem apprehensive. This could be anything from loud noises, new people, play that is a little too rough, going to a new place, etc.

Behaviorists have found that this has little to do with the change in where they are living or the separation from their siblings or mother. Even in cases in which the litter remains together, this same behavioral pattern is noted at this age. Do not overreact. Your puppy will mature through this and be just

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fine if you do your part. You do not want to become overly protective and isolate him from the outside world. We think it is better during this two to three week period for you to increase the range of his experiences by small steps, not giant leaps and bounds. Choose activities that can be controlled. Introduce the puppy to new people including children, but do not let thirty children come screaming at him from all directions. Let him meet the neighbor's friendly dog, just not the rowdy one down the street. At approximate 12 weeks of age, this period comes to an end and most owners will see their puppies become bolder toward new people, animals, and experiences.

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