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Dog Care

Puppy Socialization

Puppies begin learning at birth, and are particularly responsive to retaining what they learn during their first 13 to 16 weeks of life. It is especially important that puppies have experiences with other dogs, as well as with children and adults, during this optimal time from birth to 16 weeks.

Picture two dogs from the same litter. One brother is taken out as a puppy at least once a week to meet new people and dogs. The other puppy is kept at home. A study conducted by the ASPCA's [Dr. Pamela Reid](#) revealed that the socialized brother is less likely to exhibit problematic behavior as an adult than the puppy who was kept at home.

Like human children, young puppies go through a series of developmental stages. The stage of development from 7-16 weeks of age is the "socialization period." During this time, puppies are eager to explore new environments and meet new people and dogs. Research demonstrates clearly that the socialization "window" starts to close at around 16-20 weeks. After that, puppies are often wary of new things, a phenomenon known as neophobia. If they haven't had plenty of pleasant exposure to new people, dogs, and situations before that age, they can acquire fears and anxieties, as well as attachment and aggression problems. Often these behaviors are irreversible, and the puppy is never able to achieve full potential as a companion animal.

If you are a new puppy owner, puppy socialization classes should be a high priority on your to-do list. They can improve the bond between you and your pet, and help ensure that the dog remains a valued member of the family for his lifetime; that can be up to 12 to 18 years.

When looking for a puppy class:

- Be sure to ask questions about the ages of the other puppies allowed to attend, and the type of training used.
- Visit the classes before enrolling to decide for yourself if it is the right place for you.
- Ask your veterinarian for referrals to some good puppy classes.

A Few Words on Puppy Vaccinations & Socialization

Puppy vaccination and socialization should go together. Many veterinarians recommend that new owners take their puppies to puppy socialization classes, beginning at 8 to 9

Did You Know?

Millions of animals enter the shelter system each year, and a staggering 56 percent of the dogs are euthanized.

The primary reason dogs are relinquished to animal shelters is behavior problems, and many behavior problems arise from puppies not receiving adequate socialization and training.

weeks of age. At this age, they should have received at least their first series of vaccines for protection against infectious diseases.

The task faced by the new puppy owner is to weigh the relative risks of contracting disease versus developing behavior problems, and make an educated decision about socializing the puppy. To quote veterinary behavior specialist Dr. Karen Overall, "The single biggest killer of pets is not infectious disease; it is behavioral problems."

Related Articles:

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