



Early Socialization In Puppies: Veterinary Guidelines & Resources

by Dr Karen Ashby, DVM based On The Recommendations Veterinary Behaviorists

Inside Behavior: Puppy Socialization: More Than Just Exposure*

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“Behavior problems are the number-one cause of euthanasia in healthy animals. Behavior problems are the number-one cause of relinquishment to shelters. Puppies that have inadequate exposure (to various environments and to novelty) or negative experiences during their first 3 to 4 months of life can develop behavior problems and disorders, including fear and aggression.

- Just as puppies are vaccinated against infectious diseases during their routine veterinary visits, they also need to be “vaccinated” against behavior problems. The best way to do the latter is to recommend enrollment of every healthy 7- to 12-week-old puppy in a good socialization class.
- Negative experiences during the socialization period, especially at 8 to 10 weeks of age, can cause *permanent psychologic damage*.
- Puppy socialization classes can provide a safe and controlled environment for exposure to novel people, dogs, and stimuli. The focuses of these classes are **positive proactive** exploration of novelty, problem solving

using positive training methodology, and exposure to different phenotypes (appearances) and play styles of puppies to help develop good social skills.”

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- - “Only attend a puppy socialization class that requires proof of vaccination and other health requirements.
- - Avoid taking the puppy to public areas where stray or unvaccinated dogs roam.
- - Know the health and vaccination status of dogs that the puppy meets.
- - With puppies younger than 14 weeks, avoid high-traffic dog areas such as dog parks or festivals.
- - Because most dogs choose to eliminate on porous surfaces (e.g., grass), when in public, restrict your young puppy to concrete or asphalt surfaces to minimize potential exposure to feces-contaminated soil; although concrete and asphalt are not necessarily free of viruses, elimination is less likely on these surfaces.”

American Veterinary Society Of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) Position Statement:

- - The AVSAB believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive socialization (as described in their position statement) BEFORE they are fully vaccinated...as early as 7 – 8 weeks of age.

- ➤ Minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days before prior to the first class and a first deworming.
- ➤ They should be up to date on vaccines throughout the class.”
- ➤ For Complete Position Statement: Visit www.avsabonline.org: Position Statements, then *Puppy Socialization*

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2015 AAHA Behavior Guidelines (still considered current 2018):

- ➤ “If dogs and cats are deprived of appropriate exposure during critical sensitive periods, they have an increased risk of developing problematic behavior....this risk far exceeds any disease risk.
- ➤ There is no medical reason to delay puppy and kitten classes or social exposure until the vaccination series is completed as long as exposure to sick animals is prohibited, basic hygiene is practiced, and diets are high quality.
- ➤ For Complete Guidelines, Visit: www.aaha.org, go to Veterinary Professional, then go to Resources, then go to Library, then go to AAHA Guidelines & Implementation Toolkits, then go to [Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines \(AAHA, 2015\)](#), OR Just Google it! Direct link: https://www.aaha.org/graphics/original/professional/resources/guidelines/2015_aaha_behavior_mgmt_guidelines.pdf