

Meeting the
Needs of Your Puppy
During COVID-19



SIT  **HAPPENS**



Bringing a puppy into your home and your family is both fun and challenging. Meeting the needs of your puppy during a mandated period of physical isolation and 'lock-down' is unknown territory that we need to navigate. This is, of course, on top of your existing job to meet the needs of your family and of yourself.

Socialising your puppy is one of the key, and arguably the most important, ingredient in the long term well-being of your puppy. So how do we give our puppies what they need when we can't socialise them in a traditional manner? First, we need to keep in mind that socialisation is about your puppy experiencing lots of different sights, sounds, and noises. This doesn't mean that they need to interact with all of those things. In fact, for your puppy, watching or listening to things from a distance is actually a great way for them to be socialised because it means they are being socialised in a gradual and relaxed way. This means that the current mandate of physical distancing may actually work in your puppy's favour, and we'll break this down in actionable areas that you can work on with your family.

TEACH YOUR PUPPY TO TRUST

The number one thing that you can work on with your puppy during lockdown is to build their trust in you and in people in general. You want your puppy to know that humans are safe.

Trust is a crucial ingredient in how your puppy will react to new things that you introduce them to once this period of isolation comes to an end. If you can grow your puppy's trust now, they will be far more receptive and successful later on in how they approach unfamiliar things.

To grow your puppy's trust in you, the key ingredient is to never choose to scare them, EVER. Full stop. There is still a perception that we need to discipline our puppies and tell them they have done wrong, but if you raise your voice or make intimidating sounds or movements towards your puppy, they will learn that humans aren't always safe, and they will become fearful. This is the last thing you would want.

It also does not teach your puppy what behaviour you want them to do instead. Always be sure to be kind, set them up for success, let them go at their own pace, and encourage and praise them rather than push them into an unknown situation.



A common issue that can easily harm the trust that you and your family have been building with your puppy, is around the topic of resource guarding. It is a normal behaviour for dogs to want to guard things that are of high value for them, if they are feeling threatened. (Dare I say humans are quite similar? e.g. Covid-19 + threatened feeling humans = panic buying of toilet paper...) The point is, that it is up to us, to show our puppies that they have no reason to feel threatened.

This means that you do not take away resources from your puppy, or even touch those resources to test if your puppy is guarding that resource, and absolutely do not tell them off if they growl.

There are plenty of exercises that you can use to show your puppy that their resources are not in danger, and that you are not a threat to those resources, and most importantly, to show them that above all - they can trust you. Ask us if you are unsure, we are happy to help with this.

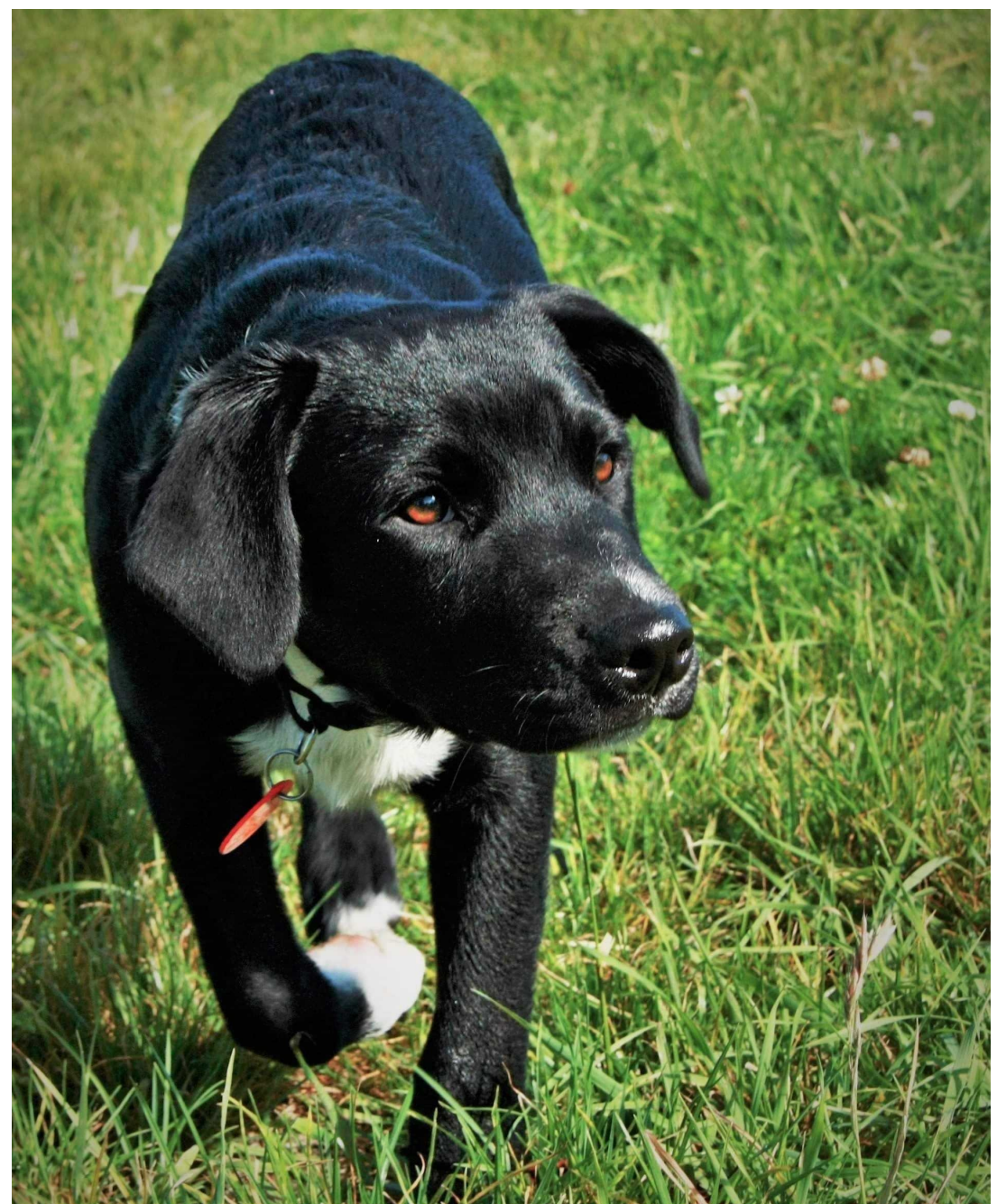
SOCIALISING YOUR PUPPY TO NEW SIGHTS, NEW SOUNDS & NEW PEOPLE - IN YOUR HOME

With a little creative thinking, there are actually a lot of socialisation activities you can do at home. Even better if you can keep the kids busy and having fun setting up a few of these activities!

PLAY DRESS UP

We need our puppies to experience seeing a lot of different kinds of people, and we can still do some of this by ourselves. Raid your family closets and play a little dress up. Using glasses, different hats, scarves, or even Halloween costumes in a non-threatening way can really help your puppy familiarise themselves with different looks. Whilst you can't change the way you smell, you can add a different scent here or there with perfume, cologne, lotions, hairspray etc.

You can play with introducing actual new people - or at least the sight and



sound of them. Set your puppy up on a blanket with a chewie or in their confinement area while you video chat with a friend, or watch some TV.

SIMULATE SOUNDS

You can also do heaps of auditory socialisation in your home. Try searching for puppy socialisation (or socialization) playlists on Spotify /Amazon Music / Apple Music (or wherever you listen to music). These playlists can include the sound of thunder, children playing, car sounds, or even (dare I recommend it) crying babies.

Start with the sounds at a low volume, offering plenty of positive reinforcement for your puppy. But remember, we do not want our puppy to be frightened by sudden loud thunder sounds. Instead, play the sounds at a very low volume to start, and over time you can increase the volume as long as your puppy remains happy and relaxed.

HANDLING

What do you do when you can't take your puppy to be groomed? This is when you need to practice essential handling skills with your puppy, and continue to socialise them to different grooming procedures. If you are in, or have taken one of our puppy classes, you already know that we place a heavy emphasis on making handling a positive experience for our pups early on. Even when we are stuck at home in isolation, this does not

change. Handling is a great exercise to practice at home by socialising your puppy to the bath, a brush, the nail clippers etc, and by increasing the difficulty as your puppy grows more confident. This will help your puppy grow into a confident and relaxed dog who has a positive association to formal handling. This is covered in week 3 of our Puppy Fun & Focus class, and if you have not yet taken one of our classes, please get in touch with us for more information on handling.

NEW PLACES & NEW THINGS

There's nothing like a little redecorating around the house! Pop your puppy in their short or long-term confinement area while you rearrange some of the furniture and plants in a different room. Invite your puppy into this 'new' room, and they now have the ability to explore it for the 'first time'.

You can also gather odd things from around the house - maybe some books, chairs and some kitchen items like a pie tin or measuring cups and you can create an at-home obstacle course for your puppy to sniff and explore. Add a few treats throughout your maze of items and encourage and praise your puppy when they choose to explore it.

For additional tips, head here:

www.sithappens.co.nz/socialising-puppies

MOOCHING & OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

OUTDOOR WALKS

At this time, we are still allowed to go for walks to get fresh air so long as we stay physically separated from other people and pets. This is a great activity for your puppy to experience different

sights, sounds and smells. Where it is safe and possible, DO continue to take your puppy for a mooching walk where they get the opportunity to do a lot of sniffing. This could be in a nearby park, out on a quiet road or parking lot in your neighbourhood, just moving slowly with your puppy, letting them watch other people from a distance.

TIP: If your puppy does not have all their vaccinations yet, you can still do this by popping your puppy in a carrier or even a pram, so that they can still experience new things from a safe set up.

OUTSIDE YOUR HOUSE

You can also ask your partner or your kids to ride a scooter or bike in the driveway or on the footpath in front of your house while allowing your puppy to watch the activity from a distance. You want to be sure that your puppy is nice and relaxed and to give them lots of praise and treats. This could also be done with rollerblades, skateboards, pushing a pram, bouncing on a medicine ball, watching the washing on the line, or someone with a rake or a lawnmower. We don't, however, recommend letting your puppy watch you digging in the garden. I promise - **if they see you digging, they will want to help!**

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE WHOLE FAMILY IS AT HOME

COMING HOME TO YOUR PUPPY

When you (or another family member) comes home from a walk without your puppy, or return from a regular shop at the supermarket (remember to shop normally), you have a great training opportunity to ensure that the reunion with your puppy is nice and relaxed, and **not a big deal**. Ultimately, you want your puppy to get used to calm greetings, so



practicing with family members returning home is a great way to get there. You can even practice proper visitor training where your puppy learns to stay on their bed when people enter the house. Please be in touch if you'd like any guidance on that.

KIDS AND YOUR PUPPY

It's important to understand as well as to teach kids how to engage appropriately with your puppy. We have some great resources and reading on this topic here:

www.sithappens.co.nz/supervising-kids

MY PUPPY IS BORED, WHAT DO I DO?

Simply put, if your puppy seems bored or in need of something to do, give your puppy the opportunity to work for their food. (e.g. no food bowls...) For the vast majority of animals, finding food takes up a huge amount of their time and energy.

Our domesticated pets often have this behavioural opportunity removed, resulting in a huge behaviour deficit. We then wonder why they develop behaviour problems. While many factors contribute to behaviour problems, one of the leading factors is simply a lack of appropriate stimulation, which we can



easily provide to our puppies by allowing them to work for their food.

Enrichment feeding is all about adding greater value and benefit to their food, which allows them to use their brain and engage in those natural behaviours that they crave. It gives your puppy an opportunity to build their confidence and partake in an activity that feels enriching to them.

We have heaps of recommended food toys that will help with this, and as long as we have stock, we are still able to ship these to you:

www.kiwicanine.co.nz/collections/store-toys

GIVE YOUR PUPPY SOME ALONE TIME

On a final note, remember that your puppy needs 18-20 hours of rest per day. Be sure to let your puppy get plenty of rest, but you must also give your puppy alone time when they are awake.

This is crucial.

If you don't give your puppy time to themselves and away from the family, they won't know what to do when you head back to work after this isolation period ends. If they don't know what to do when you are away, they will develop separation anxiety down the road.

To keep that from happening, be sure to set your puppy up with regular alone-time in their long-term confinement area and away from the humans in the house. You can give them a filled kong or a food toy to keep them busy, but you must let them practice spending time away from you so they can learn that it is a positive experience.

Tell us how it goes!

Ask us about our online puppy classes and private training sessions.



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