

ASK OUR VETERINARIANS



Canine Socialization

Have you ever adopted/met/owned a dog that is scared of people? Frightened of new situations? Do you suspect that your dog was abused and that is why he or she is scared of strange people, loud sounds, or new situations? While it is possible that your new friend suffered terrible things at the hands of unsavory people, it is also just as likely that this dog was not properly socialized. Improper socialization of puppies is one of the leading factors in behavioral problems. The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior maintains that the most important time for puppy socialization is within the first 3 months of life. During this time, puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be safely achieved. This means introducing your puppy to: cars, old people, children, cats, other dogs, stores, parks, people with hats, people with beards, people of different ethnicities, etc. Behavioral problems are the greatest threat to the owner-dog bond and are the number one reason dogs are relinquished to shelters. There is some concern about spread of infectious disease among young puppies that are being socialized, but the AVSAB remarks that as long as your puppy has received its first vaccination (DHLPP) it is OK to begin the socialization process. Studies show that there is not an increased incidence of parvovirus infection in puppies that are socialized and vaccinated versus puppies that are not socialized and vaccinated. So, if you are considering purchasing or adopting a puppy, make sure you start socializing him within the first 12 weeks of life to try to avoid undesirable behaviors as an adult. If you have already adopted a dog that is older than 12 weeks of age, it is never too late to start socialization, you may just need additional help from a trainer, animal behaviorist, or your veterinarian.

Submitted by: Dr. Kathleen Spencer



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