

Puppy Socialisation

The term socialisation describes the process whereby an animal learns how to interact with the species with which it lives. For puppies, as well as other dogs this includes other species such as humans (both adults and children) and cats. A puppy must also become accustomed to its environment, learning not to react to non-threatening stimuli (habituation).

Puppy Development

Puppies have a development period up to the age of around 12 weeks during which socialisation and habituation must occur in order that they grow up to be well-adjusted. This is not a new concept: a study from 1961 showed that the earlier puppies were introduced to humans, the more confident they were and better able to enjoy interaction. Delaying human contact resulted in increasing apprehension, which persists into adulthood. The same pattern is noted for environmental stimuli – for example traffic noise, noisy playgrounds and the vet practice waiting room. The 1961 study remains one of the most significant in terms of our understanding of dog behaviour, and along with more recent work helps shape our advice as to



how puppy owners can achieve a happy, well-adjusted, relaxed adult dog.

Before you get your puppy

Puppies should stay with their mother and littermates until around 6 weeks of age; indeed it is typical for them to remain until 8 weeks old. Much of the early socialisation will therefore occur before you acquire your puppy, and getting a puppy from a 'home' environment where it will have had plenty of human contact (both male and female, and ideally also children) is an important factor in its onward development.

It will also make it more likely that it will have acclimatised to everyday noises such as doorbells and vacuum cleaners.



Puppy Socialisation continued

Onward socialisation

Once you have your puppy home, continuing and building on this early socialisation is essential. Try to ensure your puppy meets people of various ages and appearances and gets the chance to interact with other dogs, for example friends' dogs who are up to date with their vaccinations.

Habituation

As well as ensuring your puppy is part of the various sounds of home life, you can go one step further to habituating your puppy to everyday noises.

Prevention of noise phobia is best achieved early, by exposing puppies to loud noises in a controlled environment. This can be readily achieved with the use of a sound-based treatment programme developed by Behaviour Specialist Vets. These can be downloaded for free online and can be found via our website – calwetonvets.com – on the Useful Links page (located in the Pets dropdown menu).

The great outdoors

Getting your puppy used to the big wide world is another vital part of ensuring your puppy will develop into a well-adjusted dog. The outside environment does, however, hold a number of



potential risks, including infectious disease.

Your puppy will have a degree of protection after its first puppy vaccinations (usually done at 8 weeks), but it is not fully protected until around a week after its second dose (at 12 weeks; see our Puppy Vaccination factsheet for further details).

Therefore there is a need to weigh the risks of infection (potentially serious disease) against the risks of delayed socialisation and habituation (behaviour issues), the effects of which may be lifelong.

There is no right or wrong answer but happily many outside environments carry a lower of risk of disease

and it is usually possible to balance the two risks. Please talk to one of our vets if you would like further guidance.

Puppy parties

Once your puppy has had its first vaccinations we would encourage you to attend one of our puppy parties. These provide an excellent opportunity for your puppy to mix with others and hone its 'social skills'. The sessions are run by our nurses, who will be happy to help with any questions you may have. For more information see our Events pages at calwetonvets.com.