

Socialising your puppy

WHY DO PUPPIES NEED SOCIALISATION?

A well-socialised puppy is the key to growing a confident, well-behaved and sociable member of your family. Effective socialisation helps your puppy learn what is expected of them and encourages positive associations with the world around them.

Without effective socialisation, puppies can develop significant behaviour problems later in life, which may lead to aggression and anxiety. Such behaviours are extremely detrimental to both dogs and their families. Undesirable behaviour in dogs is among the top 3 most common reasons for euthanasia in dogs. It is also a contributing factor for relinquishment to shelters or rehoming.

SOCIALISING YOUR PUPPY DURING THEIR VACCINATION COURSE

We need to balance the risk of poor socialisation with the risk of infectious disease such as parvovirus. Compromising puppies' socialisation will lead to fear-based behaviours that impact normal life, whilst parvovirus is an extremely infectious disease that can result in severe disease and death in unvaccinated puppies.

The sensitive period for puppies' socialisation is between 2 weeks and 16 weeks of age. This is the most important time when effective socialisation needs to take place. However, puppies will also generally receive their initial vaccination course between 6 weeks and 16 weeks of age, with immunity to parvovirus developing several days after the last vaccination.

Socialisation Recommendations

TALK TO YOUR VET ABOUT THE LOCAL PARVOVIRUS RISK TO SOCIALISE YOUR PUPPY SAFELY

IS YOUR PUPPY VACCINATED?

NO

Socialisation must occur in safe environments (places with no history of parvovirus) such as your own home, car or with friends and family. Open public spaces and physical contact with unknown or unvaccinated dogs are not safe.

YES

UNDER 10 WEEKS OLD, AT LEAST ONE VACCINATION
Socialisation must occur in safe environments such as your own home, car or at the homes of friends and family. Open public spaces and physical contact with unknown or unvaccinated dogs are not safe.

YES

10-12 WEEKS OLD, AT LEAST ONE VACCINATION
Socialisation can be expanded to public spaces when carried or pushed in a vehicle such as a pram. Avoid contact with the ground (put a blanket down if necessary) and avoid physical contact with unknown or unvaccinated dogs. Puppy classes and vet clinic visits are considered lower risk. Avoid dog parks.

YES

12-16 WEEKS OLD, AT LEAST ONE VACCINATION, AREAS OF LOW PARVO RISK
Socialisation can be further expanded to e.g. street walks, café visits. Avoid dog parks and busy grassy areas.

YES

> 16 WEEKS OLD, AT LEAST ONE VACCINATION
Congratulations – your puppy is fully vaccinated! Talk to your vet about how long to wait before activities such as parks, walks and meeting new dogs can begin.

SOCIALISING YOUR PUPPY AT HOME

It's important to start socialising your puppy to a broad range of new experiences in your home, before gradually introducing them to the big wide world. Begin socialisation activities as soon as your puppy joins your family. The use of audiovisual media in the home can bring these experiences indoors when it is not yet safe to go out.

Pair new experiences at a low intensity with yummy treats and rewards like toys. Remember to take things at your puppy's pace – learn to recognise the signs of anxiety or fear and ease back if your puppy displays these. A consistent approach will ensure that your puppy enjoys learning about the experiences and builds resilience.

Socialisation activities should be positive and enjoyable for you and your puppy! Use the suggestions below to start your puppy's journey towards becoming a happy, confident, well-adjusted dog.



TICK OFF EACH BOX IN THE BUBBLES ONCE COMPLETED



TOUCH

Surface experiences such as tiles, wood, concrete, metal, ramps, carpet, plastic, sand, gravel, water



PEOPLE

Adults and children of all ages, shapes, ethnicities, and mobility ranges; clothing – e.g. hats, puffy jackets, uniforms, hi-vis clothing; people holding things - umbrellas, sticks, sports equipment.



OTHER ANIMALS

Cats, birds, sheep, cattle, horses etc.



SMELL

Incorporate scents and scent games into play activities improve the positive experiences for your puppy at home.



SOUNDS

Music, vacuums, thunder, fireworks, sirens, cars and vehicles, electrical tools.



SIGHTS

Cars, trees, buildings, roadworks, construction, bikes, prams, wheelchairs, flapping material



HANDLING

Gentle handling when puppy is relaxed. Ears, mouth, feet, nails, tail, body surfaces. Puppies need to learn to trust and enjoy the physical contact required for future vet exams, grooming, baths, nail trims and general physical contact.



PUPPY CLASSES

Ask your vet about puppy classes in your area. Choose those that focus on understanding your puppy (e.g., body language and how they learn), not just obedience.



DOGS

One-on-one play dates with a range of well-behaved, fully vaccinated dogs of all sizes and breeds. Do not allow unsupervised play with new dogs.



NZVA
New Zealand Veterinary Association



Companion Animals NZ

Thanks to Dr Jess Beer, veterinary behaviourist
<https://www.kiwivetbehaviour.net/>

