

# Puppy Training 101: How to Properly Socialize Your Dog

BY DR. MARTY BECKER | JULY 5, 2011



Getty Images

Socializing a puppy is a lot like drumming up friends of your own: The more you mingle, the more progress you make. Introduce a puppy to all the new things you can (people, places and other animals). When a puppy isn't exposed to new things, social development may become stunted or, worse, regress. The goal of socializing is a confident, outgoing dog that isn't shy or aggressive.

## Practice Safe Socialization

"But wait!" you say. "What about disease? My veterinarian told me to keep my puppy at home until his last puppy shot. And you're saying I should go out? Is that safe?"

Your veterinarian is right: Your puppy is at risk of contracting diseases from other dogs before his full immunity is in place. This is why you shouldn't go anywhere where dogs you do not know hang out — parks, dog events or pet stores — until your veterinarian gives the go-ahead. But that doesn't mean you should leave your puppy at home.

Use common sense. Plan safe outings. Take a puppy class: Good trainers know the risks and work to minimize them by keeping the training area sanitized.

## Impart a Life-Saving Skill Set

Why take any chances at all? An unsocialized dog — whether fearful or aggressive — is at a higher risk of ending up in a shelter with little chance at being adopted again. Some experts argue that, in the long run, behavior problems kill more dogs than parvovirus does. Perhaps that puts the importance of proper and safe socialization into perspective.

## Limit the Paw-Holding

Unlike wolves or coyotes, dogs are genetically predisposed to become part of human society, but it's not always easy. So socialize, and remember that the world is full of scary things, especially to a little puppy. At times, even the boldest of them may become paralyzed with uncertainty, especially when faced with something they have never seen before.

Your response to this fear is very important. Don't soothe your pup. Petting him and saying, "It's OK, baby" (or something similar) gives your puppy the idea that being scared is OK and that you're rewarding him for the behavior. Instead, be matter-of-fact and encouraging. Let him work it out, and when he takes that step forward, praise him for his courage.