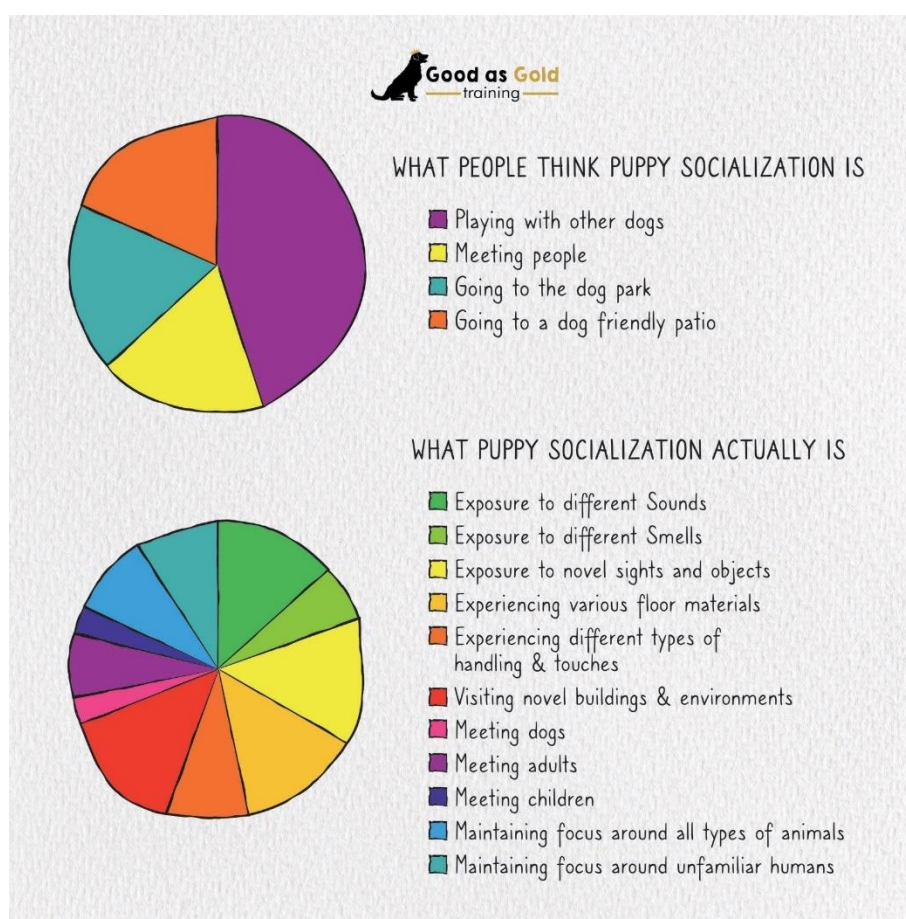


How to Socialize Your Rescue Dog

“Socialization” is one of those funny words that, in the doggy world, seems to have taken on a life of its own. It’s not that people tend to define the term incorrectly—it’s that they don’t apply it broadly enough.

Socialization doesn’t just mean helping a dog to become comfortable with other people and other canines; it means helping a dog to become comfortable with any novel element of the environment.

If you’re bringing a dog into a cityscape, for example, you’ll need to socialize them to all of its sounds, from buses and motorcycles to the chaos of sirens and construction sites. If you’re bringing a dog into a rural environment, you may need to socialize them to the neighbor’s farm animals and the sound of coyotes at night.



****NOTE:** See the checklist below of things to consider exposing your foster dog to.

Socializing A Rescue Dog

After puppies, rescue dogs are probably those most in need of proper socialization. But how you go about socializing a rescue dog will vary depending on its history and abilities.

Even if the shelter isn't able to tell you much about your pup's history, the animal's body language in different environments is likely to give you some good clues.

The fewer positive experiences a dog has had with a variety of situations during their "critical socialization period"—the time between three and 16 weeks of age—the more likely they are to be fearful of new things.

Reading Your Dog's Body Language

What are some of the signs of fear? A dog who tucks its tail and attempts to escape the leash when on busy streets, for example, is likely a dog that has had limited (if any) experience on leash on busy streets.

The key to socializing a rescue dog to any unfamiliar sights, sounds or experiences is to let the dog set the pace.

Look for signs of discomfort, anxiety or fear in your dog's body language, including:

- Tucked tail
- Flattened ears
- Lip licking or nose licking (typically done a few times in a row)
- Yawning
- Shaking
- Crouched body
- Attempting to dart or hide
- Whining
- Piloerection (hair standing on end on the neck and/or spine)

Pushing your new pup into an uncomfortable situation before they're ready is likely to "flood" them, causing them to shut down. They can even form negative associations with whatever you were trying to acclimate them to. Instead, move slowly and allow your dog to "graduate" from less challenging to more challenging exposures.

The following **website is extremely helpful for learning about dog body language** and how to read it;

<http://www.ispeakdog.org/>

The Role Of Negative Past Experiences

In some cases, negative past experiences may cause a dog to feel the need to act “aggressively” to defend themselves against a perceived threat.

Learn to read your dog’s body language for defensive behavior. You may see them:

- Bark
- Lunge
- Snarl
- Growl

If you see these signs, your socialization work will likely need to be combined with other elements of training and counter-conditioning.

If, however, your dog is hesitant but not defensive when being introduced \to other dogs, children, men, busy streets, and so on, the following rules can help to gradually introduce them in a positive way.

Best Practices To Socialize A Rescue Dog

Keep encounters positive.

Praise and encourage your dog. If you’re not introducing your dog to other dogs, use treats liberally (if making introductions to other dogs, it may be better not to use food so that no squabbles ensue). Reward your dog for looking at the “scary” thing or for choosing to interact with it. Never force your dog to interact before they are ready.

Keep Encounters Brief!

If you’re trying on-leash introductions to other dogs, once you’ve determined the other dog is friendly, allow your pup to sniff, praise them and then move on in less than 30 seconds. You may reward with a treat after you have completely moved past the other dog. The longer you hang around, the more likely it is for one dog to become uncomfortable or overstimulated.

Start With Less Challenging Environments Or Encounters.

This is all about keeping your dog under their “stress threshold.” If they’re relaxed, they’ll be able to learn. This often involves creating and maintaining distance from the things that cause them anxiety and stress. Once stress skyrockets, learning goes out the window. If getting your dog to walk comfortably down a busy street is your goal, start first with your backyard where there are few stressors and then graduate to a quiet walking routes.

When you initially start going out for walks choose times when there is minimal traffic, and very few people and dogs around. Also choose routes such as quieter side streets or paths, hydro

right of ways that allow you to cross the street or move far off the path to create distance when things are approaching. To create comfort and predictability for your dog which minimizes stress, walk the same route and gradually expand on that route over time. When their confidence has grown, take them to a slightly busier area, and start to vary your walking route.

When you notice your rescue dog focus on something that may create anxiety and they have a neutral reaction praise them and reward with a treat which will start the development of a positive association towards the thing that they may be anxious or uncertain of. Its important to always take high value treats out on walks with you. Once the positive associations have been created to the potentially stress invoking things then you can start to fade out rewarding with a treat every time and begin rewarding intermittently. Always use verbal praise to ensure the positive association remains.

Imagine walking your foster dog along a path or trail when they have had little experience with a bicycle. Suddenly a cyclist approaches quickly from the rear and startles both you and the dog. The dogs fearful response now establishes a negative emotional reaction to the bicycle and next time they see a bicycle they may lunge or growl out of fear. Rather than waiting for a negative experience to occur and then trying to reverse the negative response by using desensitization and counter conditioning to replace the negative response with a positive one, start with creating positive associations to the things your rescue dog sees and hears in the environment before there is any chance of any negative experience occurring.

How do you do this? It is very simple. When you go out walking your rescue dog pay attention to the things they are noticing. If the dog sees anything novel and has a neutral reaction (a person walking a dog, a person approaching, a bicycle, a stroller, a child on roller blades etc.) immediately use praise (good girl/boy) and reward with a high value treat to start the positive association right from the start. The treat continually paired with the thing that they may be apprehensive/anxious towards will begin to elicit a positive conditioned emotional response.

Troubleshooting Tips

If your dog becomes overwhelmed or if something unexpected occurs, remember to STAY calm. Soothe, don't scold. Yelling at a frightened and anxious dog will only add to their stress and also heighten the emotional intensity of the situation for both you and the dog.

Instead, get your dog out of the situation as quickly as possible and help them relax with physical affection, play and/or food rewards.

Remember maintaining distance from any of the potential stressors will help immensely while you are working on developing the positive associations through exposure to the various things you are socializing them to.

Socialization Checklist

PEOPLE		HANDLING	
☐ Adults	☐ Crowds	☐ Brushing	☐ Wearing
☐ Toddlers	☐ Postman	☐ Cutting nails	☐ harness
☐ Children	☐ People in uniform	☐ Towel dried	☐ Leash walking
☐ Seniors	☐ People with sunglasses	☐ Bathed	☐ Being picked up
☐ Different ethnicities	☐ People with disabilities	☐ Ears touched	☐ Being hugged
☐ People with disabilities	☐ Dark clothed people	☐ Paws touched	☐ Being carried
☐ Joggers	☐ Cyclists	☐ Mouth checked	☐ Sitting on lap
		☐ Teeth brushed	☐ Pet by children
		☐ Tail lifted	☐ Belly scratches

PLACES	SOUNDS	SURFACES
☐ Vet	☐ Sirens	☐ Pavement
☐ Groomer	☐ Cars	☐ Rocks
☐ Car ride	☐ Motorbikes	☐ Leaves
☐ Forest	☐ Tractors	☐ Grass
☐ Lake	☐ TV	☐ Snow/ice
☐ Elevators	☐ Music	☐ Slick floors
☐ Schools	☐ Barking dogs	☐ Bricks
☐ Friend's home	☐ Doorbell	☐ Sand
☐ Park	☐ Dishwasher	☐ Carpet
☐ City/ town	☐ Vacuum	☐ Water/puddles
☐ Shopping areas	☐ Lawnmower	☐ Mud
☐ Puppy classes	☐ Fireworks	☐ Tile/stone floor
☐ Staircases	☐ Gunshots	☐ Hardwood floor
☐ Bridges	☐ Thunder	☐ Linoleum
☐ Nighttime	☐ Alarm clock	☐ Reflective surfaces

ANIMALS		OBJECTS	
☐ Puppies	☐ Rabbits	☐ Toys	☐ Fans
☐ Older dogs	☐ Farm animals	☐ Balloons	☐ Bags
☐ Different breeds	☐ Squirrels	☐ Skateboards	☐ Iron board
☐ Different temperaments	☐ Birds	☐ Feathers	☐ Clothes horse
☐ Flat-faced dogs	☐ Ducks	☐ Trash cans	☐ Shopping cart
☐ Cats	☐ Cows	☐ Agility obstacles	☐ Shovels
☐ Horses	☐ Reptiles	☐ Clothes	☐ Brooms
		☐ Wheelchairs	☐ Umbrellas
		☐ Squeakers	☐ Paper