



Socialization Course Developmental Stages & Socialization

What is Socialization?

It is a very short window of time in a puppy's life when they are receptive and open to new experiences. During this specific period of time a puppy's brain and neurological system is primed to take in information from novel situations and events.

Developmental Stages

1) Prenatal and Birth to 3 Weeks

During this time a puppy may be positively affected by how nurturing, calm and available for nursing her mother is. The puppy can also be negatively impacted by her mother's stress, and her mom's stress can be caused by things like an unsafe environment, lack of food, water, adequate shelter, etc.

Key Concept: Developing puppies can be heavily impacted by things that happen before they are even born and just after they are born.

2) Critical Period of Socialization (3 - 16 Weeks)

Often puppies go home with a family at around 8 weeks of age so that means that part of their Critical Period of Socialization has passed while the puppy is still with the breeder, rescue group, etc.

When your puppy comes home at 8-9 weeks of age, you have about 2 more months of opportunity in the Critical Period of Socialization. The exact end depends on each individual puppy, but it will end somewhere around the 4-5 month mark.

This is the period of time to show your puppy "how life works" in your home.

Now is the time to set up the patterns and routines you will want in the future.

- Where do you want your dog to sleep when she is full grown?
- Do you want to travel?
- Do you want to have people over?
- Do you camp in an RV or tent?
- Does the dog sit before she gets fed?
- Does the dog sit and wait before she goes through a door?
- Where does the dog sit when riding in the car?

During this developmental stage, take the time to introduce your puppy to the things you want them to be comfortable with in the future.

Take your puppy's lead and go slow when she needs more time. Remember the key concept of giving your puppy the most Choice and Control at this stage.

Key Concept: This period of time is when puppies need to be introduced to your routines and things you want her to be comfortable with in the future. She should also be given the most choice and control at this stage. It is OK for a puppy to say "No, thank you" to an interaction or to not walk far from home. You want to avoid forcing the puppy into situations that she is trying to opt out of.

3) Juvenile Period (3 - 6 Months)

This developmental stage overlaps with the Critical Period of Socialization. During this time you will want to maintain the routines and patterns you started during the previous developmental stage, and you are going to be more of a "parent" who offers guidance.

During the Juvenile Period you will offer more social feedback in reference to the rules of your household.

- You are not allowed to mouth/bite us.
- You are allowed to chew on your toys.
- You are not allowed to stand on the back of the couch and bark out the window.
- You are allowed to sit on the back of the couch and quietly watch the world go by.

Key Concept: Continue to focus on the patterns and routines you began establishing during the Critical Period of Socialization. Begin to offer more social feedback about the rules and culture of your home. What is the puppy going to be allowed to do or not do when she is full grown? Start establishing rules and patterns around that now.

4) Adolescent Period (6-14 Months)

Your puppy is not quite a puppy anymore. She is transitioning into adulthood and becoming sexually mature. Her brain is losing its puppy neuro pathways and rewiring new ones. This means that she is seeing and experiencing the world through a new lens which can be both arousing and over-stimulating as her brain works to sort it all out.

During this stage you may see increased impulsivity, desire to explore, confidence and also intermittent fearfulness. Dogs between 6 and 14 months may become “more” of everything ... more mouthy, more jumpy, more active, etc. Sometimes it seems like they are literally out of their minds and, in actuality, they are. Her brain is building new pathways and rewiring itself.

The best strategy during this stage is to keep up your patterns and routines, manage exploration behaviors with a leash or long line, manage jumping with a crate when your guests come over, use Kongs and other brain toys and be sure your pup is getting plenty of exercise.

Key Concept: Adolescence can be a very challenging developmental stage for some dogs. The brain is breaking down and rewiring and this can make it very hard for your dog to “just behave”. Continue to be consistent about your house rules, patterns and routines. Be sure your dog is getting plenty of exercise and additional enrichment activities (Kongs and other brain toys, sniffing games, training, flirt pole, etc.).

5) Social Maturity (2-3 Years)

At this stage dogs may become more concerned about things like resources and territory and the odor dogs give off in this stage changes. This is a common age where we start to see more conflicts, fights and aggression both within a household and towards people and dogs who are outside of the household.

Key Concept: Dogs in this stage may become more clear about their likes and preferences when it comes to interacting with dogs and people. Your puppy who loved all other dogs may be more selective about who she wants to play with or spend time with. It's OK if you start to observe this, your dog is just maturing and her preferences are changing. Be respectful of what she is communicating.

6) Senior Dog (7+ Years)

Depending on breed your dog may enter this stage a little later than 7 years. Dogs in this stage are more vulnerable as their sight, hearing and ability to process social signals diminishes. Relationships with the other household dogs may change and the senior dog may need you to step in and protect her from the shenanigans of puppies or younger dogs. Arthritis, diminished hearing, diminished sight and conditions that cause discomfort may make your senior dog less tolerant of play or being bumped around by other dogs.

Key Concept: As dogs age and they start to lose their sight, hearing and ability to process social signals their relationship with other dogs may change. Senior dogs need protection from younger dogs who may want to play and romp more than your older dog is comfortable with.