

Canines & Cake: Why a Puppy Party is Important for Your Puppy's Social Development

Most people want nothing but the best for their baby. Many do background checks on daycare facilities and months of searching for the perfect kindergarten. Socialization problems are very common in dogs of all ages. It doesn't matter whether you're adopting a puppy or an adult dog, you'll probably have to do at least some training to help him get along harmoniously with the other dogs and people in your life.

Leroy was the newest addition to my family. The banner reads, "It's a Boy," But the cake says it best reading, "It's a Border Collie!" It was a Saturday afternoon and as luck would have it, it was raining out. Does rain on your puppy shower day feel the same as rain on your wedding day? Would the other puppies still arrive to welcome baby Leroy into this world? Would all the dogs get along? Would the dogs all enjoy a piñata filled with treats? Yes came to be the answer to all of these questions. The rain let up and a fun-filled afternoon of canines, chaos and cake commenced.

Many owners were amused when their invitations arrived, but did they really understand the most important reason for the puppy shower? My goals for my new Border Collie are high and socialization is the highest point of call. What most owners don't realize is that the biggest window for socialization falls before 16 weeks of age.

Baby steps

Puppies that have not been properly socialized before 16 weeks of age can develop fears of anything not previously encountered, as well as anything they have had negative experiences with. These fears can present themselves in different ways. One dog may shy away from a fearful stimulus while another may feel the need to protect himself. On the other hand, dogs that have been exposed numerous times to people or other dogs may become extremely exuberant and rowdy in their greetings. If you're adopting a young puppy, one of the best ways to start socializing him is to host a puppy party. Invite your friends and family to bring

their own pooches to your house to meet the newcomer. Here's how to ensure the party remains both safe and successful:

- Ensure all the dogs, including your own puppy, are in good health.
- Hold the party in a fenced-in area with a secure entrance, so there is no chance of a dog escaping.
- Have specific people designated as monitors to watch for early signs of dog fights – it's easy for a dog's guardian to get distracted and not see an aggressive situation brewing.
- Try to separate large and small dogs. As gentle and friendly as that big Lab is, it might not prevent him from inadvertently stepping on and injuring a smaller dog.
- Have extra crates available to serve as time-out areas for tired or over-stimulated dogs.
- Don't throw a lot of treats into a group of dogs or puppies. Fighting over food is an extremely common behavior among dogs.

Some owners were skeptics at first, but once all the dogs, about 20 to be exact, arrived at our party all the chaos began. To the skeptics' surprise, all the dogs got along and many owners realized how much fun their dogs were having. Suddenly their fears of dog fights were gone and they allowed themselves to have a great time. Soon everyone was asking when Leroy would have his first birthday party. All owners left with an informed mind of just how important socialization is and how it can affect every aspect of your puppy's life.

This past year Leroy celebrated his 7th birthday and each year the word is spreads to a few more dog owners

If owners would even take their dogs out more in public then the vicious cycle of dog misbehaving and being placed in the backyard would change into owners being relaxed and their dogs enjoying a more fulfilling life.