

## **SOCIALIZATION beyond the puppy years**

A great concept: older dogs in need of homes and dog owners with big hearts wanting to help. Rescue dogs seem to be becoming more often than not the family pet. Unfortunately these dogs do not always arrive with years of training or socialization under their belts. This doesn't mean that the dogs aren't just as great as any other dog. It just means that your new pet may need a little extra time, and attention to turn it into that perfect companion.

Socialization problems are very common with dogs. Dogs who have not received the proper socialization during their critical period (before 16 weeks of age) can develop fears and anxieties towards everything except for experiences that they have encountered. 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.

Socializing an adult dog may present a few challenges. It will not be easy to provide remedial socialization but with hard work and dedication you can improve your dog's level of socialization quite a bit.

Research a breed that will fit into your lifestyle and energy level. Before you even bring the dog home, decide on a plan of action that you will follow with the dog and stick to it. Be sure that family members and friends are all on the same page. Consistency is your key to success. Love is not always enough. Be prepared for a challenging road ahead. However, you do not have to travel this road alone. Find a qualified positive trainer that can help you decide how to best handle specific behavior problems. This may include private training sessions, group classes or a combination of both. Also, a foundation of basic obedience will give your dog more security. When a stressful situation arises, you can always ask the dog to follow a command. The dog no longer worries how it is expected to act, only how to follow its owners instructions.

### **Some tips to get you started on the right road:**

- Prepare to manage the dog's behavior while you are working on improving it. Surprises can set your training back and some problems may take a long time to fix, so management provides a fall back option.
- Read and become knowledgeable about basic principles of classical conditioning and desensitization. These are the foundations of learning and will help you map a route for your dog's training. Breaking a seemingly complex problem into small steps will help you achieve your short term goals quickly. This will provide both you and your dog the confidence necessary to continue to push forward.

- Become familiar with your dog's body language. It can be very subtle but with practice you can improve your skills at reading it. As humans we often misread dogs' body signals. A common mistake is a wagging tail. This can mean a friendly dog but can also mean apprehension or nervousness. The same holds true for raised hackles. This can be a sign of aggression or mere stimulation at the surrounding environment.
- Make a list of appropriate socialization places. The more practice your dog receives in new situations, the more confidence it will have in handling future unfamiliar situations.

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Veterinary clinic</li> <li>✓ Dog friendly pet stores</li> <li>✓ A friend's house</li> <li>✓ Dog friendly parks or beaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Places where you can't give him enough attention.</li> <li>✓ Places that might be too loud or rowdy for his level of experience.</li> <li>✓ Places where you would have difficulty quickly moving him out of a stressful situation.</li> </ul>

- Decide whether a dog park is an appropriate place for you and your dog. Dog parks *are not always* a safe bet. They can be lots of fun for dogs but they can also be a stressful place for some dogs. See what your dog's response is.

<b>DO'S</b>	<b>DON'TS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Scan the park before you enter and be sure that a group of dogs is not congregated at the entrance.</li> <li>❖ Pay attention to your own dog's feelings Remove your dog if he appears afraid or overwhelmed</li> <li>❖ Pay attention to your dog's play style. Keep control over the situation. If your dog becomes too crazy and excited in his play ask the dog to sit or down for a moment. You want to prevent heated play from quickly turning into a fight.</li> <li>❖ Become involved if the situation calls for help. Dogs should not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Let your dog enter if he is going crazy. This will just reinforce that behavior and may cause a dangerous situation for the other dogs in the park. Overexcited dogs can often forget their manners and jump all over other dogs nearby.</li> <li>❖ Let your dog be bullied by other dogs.</li> <li>❖ Just stand in the same location. Walk around, observe and encourage your dog to pay attention to your whereabouts.</li> <li>❖ Get distracted yourself. Watch what your dog is doing and do not just chat with other dog</li> </ul>

<p>be allowed to always work out their own problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Find people and other dogs that your dog is comfortable with. Try to coordinate times and places for play dates. A special friend that your dog plays with often can greatly improve his social skills.</li></ul>	<p>owners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Let other dog owners tell you what's best. Become familiar with your own dog's responses and movements.</li><li>❖ Bring your own dog's toys to the park. Resource guarding can often be seen in a group situation.</li></ul> <p>..</p>
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Socializing an adult dog can be a long and difficult road but have faith that with time the dog's behavior will change. Even the most fearful or anxious dogs will improve if they are given the proper resources and experiences. Owners need to set realistic expectations and put their dogs in situations where the dog will be likely to succeed. Then success is inevitable!