Vet for pets

How To Help Puppies Who Have Missed Out On Socialisation In Lockdown

If you’re about to become the proud owner of a new puppy, or if perhaps you’ve welcomed one into the family during lockdown, you’ll already know you’re going to be busy! But did you know that you’ll also need to try extra hard when it comes to their socialisation?

During their early development, baby animals go through a phase in which their experiences have a big impact on how they are likely to view the world around them as they grow up. At this time, they’re learning what is safe and what is to be avoided, we call this process ‘socialisation’. The phase of a baby animal’s life where this normally happens is called the socialisation period, or socialisation window.

In puppies, the socialisation period begins at birth and is mostly over by 16 weeks, however, the main socialisation period for most puppies is from about three weeks to 12 weeks.

How does puppy socialisation usually work?

Normally, by the time you collect your puppy, reputable breeders will have begun socialising the litter by handling them, letting them see all sorts of people of different ages and appearances, including children, and introducing them to other animal species.

The puppies might also have been lucky enough to have seen other breeds of dog in the breeder’s household, and they might have taken some short car journeys. By being brought up in the home, puppies should be used to the sights and sounds of household appliances, such as the TV, washing machines and vacuum cleaners.

Read more about the puppy socialisation period

How can you help with puppy socialisation during lockdown?

If you brought home your puppy before or during lockdown, you might have been doing everything you can to socialise them while staying at home and within your own garden. You might now have a puppy of four or five months old who knows all about the tumble dryer and is used to loud noises coming from the TV, but who has never met a child, or someone riding a bike or carrying a walking stick.

Without this important exposure to a wide range of early experiences, many dogs – and there is some variation, depending on an individual dog’s temperament – are fearful when they do encounter these things later on. Often, people think dogs must have had something bad happen to make them fearful, when, in fact, it could just be that the dog had no prior experience and has immediately decided that the new experience is scary.

When you do start to venture out with a youngster who’s had incomplete socialisation, they’re likely to find it all a bit worrying and may bark at people, other dogs, or moving vehicles, which is no fun at all for either of you!

Depending on what you and the breeder have been able to manage so far, and on the age of your pet when you collect them, it’s likely that you’ll need to work that bit harder on socialisation to help them to cope with the world around them.

Although they may always have moments of uncertainty in particular situations, the good news is that, with patience and understanding, you can help your puppy to catch up and to grow into a happy, confident dog. Read on for some tips...

How can you help with puppy socialisation during lockdown?

Start small and take it slowly

Introduce new things Stay calm and kind. Plan rewards and motivators. Stick with your socialisation efforts

Remember the Vets4Pets team is here to help...

Know the signs of a worried – or happy – pup

When you’re out exploring together, it’s important to recognise whether your puppy is calm and happy, or whether they’re getting anxious about something, so that you how they’re coping with the situation and can react appropriately.

Signs to look out for

Signs your puppy is feeling relaxed and happy

Signs your puppy is feeling worried or anxious

Puppy Podcast

We've teamed up with our friends at Pets at Home to record an episode of the Puppy Podcast. In this episode, we talk about how social distancing and face coverings can affect our furry friends.