



**THE KENNEL CLUB**  
*Making a difference for dogs*

## Information Guide

# Puppy socialisation



[www.thepuppyplan.com](http://www.thepuppyplan.com)

## Puppy socialisation

### **What is meant by socialisation?**

Socialisation is a broad term that is used to describe mentally and behaviourally preparing a puppy for the world around them. Furthermore, it is for laying the foundations for successful interactions with people, dogs and other animals. These important skills are developed in the first few weeks of a puppy's life – and will last forever.

Puppies that have been socialised effectively in these early weeks are far less likely to react negatively to new situations, noises, people, dogs and animals than their counterparts, who have not had these important early experiences. A well socialised puppy is far more likely to integrate easily into your life, therefore making your life together much more enjoyable and rewarding.

There are two parts to socialisation and both are equally important. The first is teaching the puppy to be social with people and other dogs, while the other (called habituation) is about teaching all the things we want the puppy to ignore and not be worried about (noises, traffic, household objects etc).

Being a companion is the hardest job we ever ask a dog to do as our expectations are so high. We want dogs to get on with everybody and everything, and to go everywhere with us when we want, but be happy to be left alone without complaint when we don't, to be accepting of loud noises, strangers, other dogs... The list is endless.

It is a sad fact that one of the major causes of death in dogs under two years old is euthanasia, as a result of behaviour problems. Most of these behaviour problems arise from fear (fear of strange noises, fear of being left alone – and indeed aggression nearly always arises from fear – fear of strange dogs, fear of strange people or fear of strange situations). In addition, far too many dogs are ending up in rescue centres. Behaviourists and trainers up and down the country are seeing dogs with problems that could so easily have been prevented if the first 16 weeks of that dog's life had been properly managed, and they had been prepared for the life they were going to lead.

Some breeds need far more socialisation and habituation than others – with more reactive breeds (such as those bred to guard, some terriers etc) needing more – and earlier – socialisation than others. Therefore, it is important for breeders and new owners to know how reactive their chosen breed is so they can focus their socialisation accordingly.

### **Start as we mean to go on**

On the breeders' part, socialising and habituating their litter can start as early as when the puppies are a few days old. Gentle handling and checking the progress of the litter are all important steps in the first few days of a puppy's life. Over the course of the following weeks the breeder can introduce noises, different surfaces, different play items as well as different play and feeding locations around the house – all of this habituation and novelty contributes to the puppies' early development.

***“As a first time breeder the Plan provided structure on the appropriate things to be doing with the puppies to stimulate their development, which really made me confident that I was doing the best for my puppies.”***

The early ground work that the breeder puts into their litters' social and emotional wellbeing has a direct impact on their puppies' ability to be fit for function as a family dog. It is therefore very important that, in addition to asking all the necessary questions about the health and breeding of a litter of puppies, new owners ask about how the litter have been socialised and habituated as this will give them a clear indication as to how the puppy will fit into



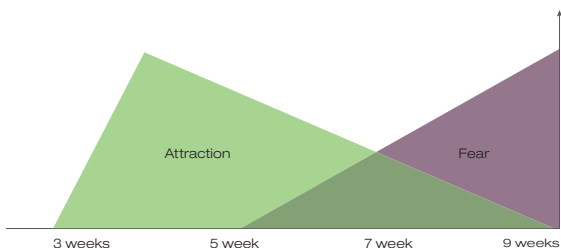
## Puppy socialisation

their lives.

### Beginning a new life as a family dog

The breeder establishes the foundations for a puppy's social skills, learning skills, and problem solving abilities, and his ability to cope with his new world in the early weeks where he is totally accepting of new things. It is imperative that the puppy's new owner continues this when their new puppy comes home.

From around 5 weeks and continuing at the time the puppy goes to his or her new home, an important transition takes place in the puppy's ability to take in new situations as his natural fearfulness increases.



It is therefore so important that new owners don't miss this valuable window of opportunity for their puppy to experience new things – which will close at around 14-16 weeks. This time also coincides with the puppy's vaccinations, so a balance must be struck so not to miss out on this important learning opportunity. This can be achieved by taking your puppy out and about in your arms, while not allowing them to come into direct contact with other dogs until their vaccinations have taken place.

Getting out and about with your puppy is key to them accepting everyday things, such as traffic and busy places, as part of normal life. It is important that you think about what life as part of your family will entail for a puppy – for instance, if you live in the inner city

spending a significant amount of time socialising your puppy to farm animals will be counterproductive,

***“It gave me a clear plan of action, which was much more detailed than some of the other sources I had found.”***

as it is unlikely they will encounter them in their day to day life:

Rural Lifestyle	City Lifestyle
Farm animals	Heavy traffic
Farm machinery	Crowds of people
Horses with/without riders	Emergency sirens
Road walking	Public transport

The same also goes for all the different people your puppy is likely to meet such as: people with beards, people wearing hats, people wearing high visibility clothing, babies, children, people with pushchairs/prams, elderly people, people with walking sticks and people in wheelchairs to name but a few, or anyone else you are likely to meet.

**Puppy parties**

Vet surgeries often hold ‘puppy parties’ for their new clients, but these should be treated with some caution. Well managed puppy parties can be great social interaction for puppies of all ages and sizes. Well managed parties should:

- Match puppies up according to their size so that the bolder puppies don’t intimidate the more nervous or smaller ones, and thereby create negative experiences for the smaller puppies, and make the bolder ones ‘social bullies’
- Manage any off-lead play carefully and if necessary, separate puppies that get a bit too boisterous so that they can calm down and re-join the party once they are calmer
- Discourage any kind of anti-social behaviour, such as biting that gets out of hand, very rough play and also show the owners how to discourage this
- Show owners how to handle and groom their puppies – and have others do this too
- Be fun positive experiences for puppies and owners



## The Puppy Socialisation Plan

Socialising a litter of puppies from birth or one puppy from eight weeks onwards can seem daunting and time consuming.

The Kennel Club and Dogs Trust have developed the Puppy Socialisation Plan with renowned dog trainer and behaviourist Carolyn Menteith DipCABT, KCAI. This is the best practice

socialisation programme for puppies from pre-birth to 16 weeks of age which

takes the form of a free online resource for breeders and rescue centres, and new owners. It comprises a simple week by week set of tasks that breeders and new owners follow, and it establishes an excellent foundation for a puppy's 'primary' education.



**DogsTrust**

***"It made me focus more on goals each week, and ensured nothing important was left out."***



To find out more about the Puppy Socialisation Plan and to register your litter or your new puppy visit **[www.thepuppyplan.com](http://www.thepuppyplan.com)**.

**Between the age of 8-16 weeks, has your new puppy been introduced:**



To different people



To different distractions



To different dogs



To other things in your life that will become part of theirs



To different animals



To new places

Find out about the **Puppy Socialisation Plan** and how it can benefit you and your canine family member

Visit **[www.thepuppyplan.com](http://www.thepuppyplan.com)**  
to register and find out more!

Visit **[www.thepuppyplan.com](http://www.thepuppyplan.com)**  
to find out more

Preparing your puppy both mentally and behaviourally for the world around them, lays the foundations for successful interactions with people, dogs and other animals.

These important skills are developed in the first few weeks of a puppy's life – and will last forever.



**THE KENNEL CLUB**

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**THE KENNEL CLUB**

*Making a difference for dogs*

The Kennel Club works to protect and promote the health and welfare of all dogs in the UK. We want happy, healthy dogs living long lives with responsible owners. All profits from the organisation go straight into funding the many programmes run in the best interest of dogs and dog owners and to support the Kennel Club Charitable Trust to re-invest into a wide variety of welfare and health programmes.

Anyone can register their dog with the Kennel Club. By registering you will demonstrate your commitment to your dog's well-being and to the health and welfare of all dogs. You can register online today at

**[www.thekennelclub.org.uk/dogregistration](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/dogregistration).**

Whatever your dog's needs, the Kennel Club is here to help and support you.

Find out more by contacting us on **01296 318540**, or visit our website at **[www.thekennelclub.org.uk](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk)** to find out more about the wonderful world of dogs.

**Additional guides on a wide range of subjects are also available to download from our website at [www.thekennelclub.org.uk](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk):**

- Asthma and your dog
- Breeding for health
- Breeding from your dogs
- Choosing and bringing home the right dog for you
- Common canine poisons in the house and garden
- DNA profiling and parentage analysis services
- Do you know dog law?
- Do you know how to look after your dog in its senior years?
- How to get involved in fun activities and competitions with your dog
- How to get started with dog training
- How to register your dog with the Kennel Club
- Introducing dogs to children or babies
- Kennel Club endorsements
- Managing your dog's weight
- Moving house with your dog
- Pet Insurance Guide for dog owners
- Road travel with your dog
- So you are thinking of working with dogs?
- Thinking of showing your dog in the UK?
- Travelling abroad with your dog
- Why should I Microchip my pet?