

Socializing a Puppy Now

Should I Get a Puppy Now? How Will I Socialize the Puppy?

Maybe you are considering adopting or are working with a responsible breeder to add a puppy to your family while you are staying at home. You probably have the luxury of time to spend with the puppy, playing, cuddling and teaching him the ropes. But special steps need to be taken to prepare the puppy for what life will be like when the world gets back to normal.

The most critical aspect of raising a behaviorally healthy, happy puppy is to provide plenty of exposure to people, other animals, new places and fun experiences. When puppies are young, they tend to be fearless and highly social. As they mature, they become more wary of new things. So it's imperative to expose a puppy to a full range of experiences in fun, positive ways and teach them that they can handle pretty much everything that they are going to encounter in their lives. But clearly, socializing a puppy is not an easy feat while practicing social distancing.

Currently there is no evidence that the coronavirus can be transmitted from dogs to people. Balancing the benefits of puppy socialization with the current CDC recommendations for social distancing of all people and pets, the risks of socializing your puppy with other dogs and humans may be outweighed by the benefits if the following practices are put in place:

- **Lots of walks!** Even though we are all practicing social distancing, that doesn't mean we can't expose our puppy to the world outside by going for walks. Mix up your routes so your puppy continually experiences new things. Walk past construction sites, trains, buses and cars. Try to encounter strollers, scooters, skateboards and bikes, all at a safe social distance. When you pass these things, get excited and say "oh isn't that fun!" while offering your puppy treats. Go out in all types of weather and let the puppy walk on different surfaces. Offer treats and playtime as you encounter new things so your puppy learns to enjoy all of them.

Your puppy is likely going to strain at the end of his leash to greet people and dogs. Repeatedly pulling your puppy away is bound to lead to frustration and possibly teach him to be afraid of people and dogs. It's very important to anticipate and distract your puppy with treats or toys **before** he starts to get excited about an approaching person or dog. This will ensure that he thinks people and dogs are safe while he's also learning to pay attention to you on your walks.

There is currently no evidence that the coronavirus can be transmitted to people via an animal's fur. So, if you are comfortable with it, you can walk your puppy on an 8-10' leash and allow your puppy to approach and greet people who want to say hello, while you maintain a safe physical distance from the people. Prior to interacting, ensure that the person has not been directly exposed to anyone who has tested positive or is under isolation for COVID-19 and that no humans in their household, including themselves, are sick. Remind the person to wash their hands when they get home, especially if they've touched the puppy's collar or leash. And to be on the safe side, as soon as you get home from a walk during which your puppy has interacted with a person, you should remove your puppy's collar and leash, place it in the laundry and then wash your hands immediately. Ensure that the collar and leash are thoroughly washed and dried prior to re-use. We recommend keeping a spare collar (with identification tags) and leash on hand to make this process easier and ensure your puppy is not left without identification.

- **Puppy Play Dates.** It's very important for puppies, especially if your puppy is the only dog in the family, to interact with other dogs so that they learn to speak "dog." If you have family or friends with playful dogs, arrange to have the dog come to your home to visit or drop your puppy off at the dog's home for a play date. Ensure that the playmate dog has not been directly exposed to anyone who has tested positive or is under isolation for COVID-19 and that no humans in either household are sick. Make sure to plan how to arrange the pick-up and drop-off while practicing safe social distancing. For instance, if you have a securely fenced yard, the visiting dog can be let into the yard by the dog's owner. Wait for the owner to leave prior to you entering the yard so you don't have to come into close contact with the person. Do not arrange playdates in public locations.

Limit play dates to interactions with healthy, adult dogs (>20 weeks of age) that have been vaccinated against canine parvovirus, canine distemper and Bordetella (kennel cough). Play dates with other puppies should be considered cautiously because some veterinarians are recommending lengthening the time between vaccinations, in order to minimize travel to the veterinary clinic. Ensure that both your puppy and the visiting puppy have received a vaccination against canine parvovirus and canine distemper within 2 weeks of the play date. Best to limit playdates to one visiting puppy at a time, unless the other puppies are from the same household and meet the vaccination requirements. From a behavioral perspective, it's also a good idea to limit playdates to two puppies — a puppy free-for-all can be hard to monitor to make sure everyone is having good experiences.

Practice frequent hand washing whenever a doggy playmate comes to visit, especially if you handle the dog's collar or leash. When it's time for the playdate to end, conduct the pick-up in the same safe manner that you did the drop-off. If your puppy was handled by the dog's owner, to be on the safe side, remove your puppy's collar and



leash, place it in the laundry and then wash your hands immediately. Ensure that the collar and leash are thoroughly washed and dried prior to re-use. We recommend keeping a spare collar (with identification tags) and leash on hand to make this process easier and ensure your puppy is not left without identification.

NOTE: There have been no documented cases of companion animals transmitting COVID-19 to people either through viral shedding or from virus present on their fur. Further studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by the COVID-19 virus. This is a rapidly evolving situation and recommendations may change as we gain a greater understanding of this virus.