

# Socializing your dog

The greatest window of learning in a dog's life starts around 3 weeks of age and closes between 16 and 20 weeks. This period allows puppies to be exposed to a wide variety of sights, sounds, smells, and sensations without becoming fearful. Puppies who miss out on these experiences may never learn to be comfortable around unfamiliar things, paving the way for anxiety, fear, and aggression later on in life. Follow these steps to give your puppy the best start possible:

## Handling

Young puppies should be cuddled and handled daily by as many different people as possible. Keep the contact gentle and pleasant for the puppy. Hold the puppy in different positions, gently finger her feet, rub her muzzle, stroke her back and sides, look in her ears.

## Sounds

Acclimate your puppy to lots of different sounds, being careful not to overwhelm him with too much noise too fast. Expose him to kitchen sounds, telephones ringing, children playing, sportscasters yelling on TV, radios playing, buses moving by, and so on.

## Food bowl exercises

Teach your puppy to enjoy having people approach her bowl while she's eating. This will help to prevent resource guarding, which occurs when dogs feel anxious about others approaching their own valued resources. Walk up to your puppy while she's eating her food, drop an even tastier treat into her dish, and walk away. Repeat once or twice during each meal until your puppy is visibly excited about your approach. Then walk up, physically pick up her dish, put in a treat, give the dish back, and walk away.

## Teach your puppy to be alone

Puppies should learn to tolerate being completely separate from other people and animals every day to avoid developing separation anxiety. [Learn more about preventing separation anxiety in puppies.](#)

## Prevent aggression

There's no need to show the dog who's boss or try to dominate him. Confrontational approaches like pinning your dog down or scruffing him frequently backfire and create the aggression dog owners seek to avoid. Focus on rewarding correct behavior and preventing undesirable behavior to teach your puppy human rules and build a trusting relationship.

## Introduce your puppy to new people

Introduce your puppy to several new people every day, keeping the interactions pleasant and unthreatening. Focus especially on setting up pleasant encounters with unfamiliar men and well-behaved children.

## **Prevent biting**

Provide appropriate toys to redirect your puppy's biting. When your puppy bites too hard during play, making a sudden noise ("Ow!") and end the game to help him learn to use his mouth gently. Never squeeze your puppy's mouth shut, yell at him, or hold him down. This will frighten him and likely make biting worse. Note that while puppies under five months tend to explore the world with their mouths, dogs past this age are considered adolescents and should no longer be play biting.