

Socialization Period

CANINE SOCIALIZATION PERIOD (21 to 49 Days)

The period from 21 to 49 Days, or three to seven weeks is the Canine Socialization Period, when the puppy learns to use the species - specific behaviors that make him a dog.

To reach his genetic potential, the puppy must stay in the nest with his mother and littermates throughout this time. During this period he will practice body postures, facial expressions and vocalizations, and learns their effects on his siblings, mother and any other dogs he meets. He learns how it sounds to bark and be barked at; how it feels to bite and be bitten.

He learns the various behaviors that make him a dog: chase games - imitating the chase necessary to catch and bring down game - teach him coordination and timing; greeting behavior teaches him the body postures of greeting; fight games teach him the use of his body, body postures and expressions to elicit various responses. For example, during play, when a fight might begin, the puppy learns that a submissive body posture has the effect of turning off the aggression of his littermate.

During this critical period, the puppy learns one of the most important lessons of his life - to accept discipline. He learns it from his mother, who through discipline teaches the puppies not to bite so hard, or, during the weaning process, to leave her alone.

HUMAN SOCIALIZATION PERIOD (7 to 12 weeks)

The best time to bring a puppy into its new home is during the Human Socialization Period, from 50 to 84 days, or seven to twelve weeks. It is also the best time to introduce him to those things that will play a role in his future life. For example, if he has not already been exposed to farm animals and it is necessary for him to interact peacefully with them, it is at this age that he should meet them in a positive, non-threatening manner. If the breeder has not already introduced him to the sounds of the vacuum cleaner, car engines and city traffic, he needs to be exposed to these now. Children, men with beards, women in floppy hats, and senior citizens while all people to us, appear different to the dog. His education and socialization should include exposure to many types of people of all ages.

At seven weeks of age, a puppy's EEG shows the brain waves are the same as those of an adult dog. His capacity for concentration is not yet adult and his attention span is short. However, he can learn. Not only can a young puppy learn, he will learn whether we teach him or not. This is the age when the most rapid learning occurs. Everything he experiences makes a greater impression on him now than it ever will again. Learning at this age is permanent.

Because of the relative ease of teaching at this age, because the puppy has not yet learned any bad habits that will later have to be cured, and because the puppy is just a fraction of his adult size and weight, this is the ideal time to begin obedience training in a positive, non-punitive manner, taking into account his physical limitations and short attention span.