

Playing Well With Others

Socialization is key, says “Greatest American Dog” judge Allan Reznik. The show moves to Wednesdays next week.

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Reznik and the other judges weigh in each week on which dog and owner should be sent home. Courtesy CBS On the new CBS reality show, “Greatest American Dog,” a group of 12 dog-and-owner teams gets to live together in the same house to compete for a \$250,000 cash prize and the title of Greatest American Dog. Allan Reznik, DogChannel expert and a judge on the show, said that the way a dog behaves around other dogs is partly due to his genetic makeup – nature – and partly due to his early life experiences – nurture.

To avoid any disasters when in a group setting, Reznik said dog owners can do the following five things to prepare:

Look for early socialization skills

When selecting a puppy or dog, ask about what kind of socialization an animal has received. When greeting a dog for the first time at a kennel or shelter, take note of whether she is friendly, shy or backs away from people. “At a kennel, observe the other dogs as well, especially the puppy’s mother (friendly? suspicious?). If she is overly guardy and wary, she may instill the same traits in her puppies,” Reznik said.

Continue socialization process

Once a puppy arrives at his new home, do not wait until he gets older to continue socialization. Once he has received the necessary shots, start taking him out for exposure to new experiences.

The more exposure, the better

Introduce the dog to as many new experiences as possible. That includes strangers, children, friends, car rides, and dog parks.

Do not praise negative reactions

If a dog reacts badly to a certain stimulus, whether it’s a child or a stranger, resist the temptation to coddle the animal. Don’t pet the dog, because that will be taken as a form of praise for his actions. Dog owners must address the issues of shyness and aggression.

Enroll in a basic obedience class

Signing up for a basic puppy or dog obedience class helps build confidence, not only for the animal, but for the owner as well. A dog’s quirks tend to show in social settings, and an instructor can demonstrate the best way to handle any problems.

Reznik will be on DogChannel’s message boards at 10 a.m. PDT on Thursday to talk about the latest episode and field questions from visitors about the show.