

Socializing Your Dog will Increase his Confidence

Confident dogs learn from socialization.

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A dog that is well behaved, friendly to other dogs and friendly (but not overwhelming) to other people is the ideal canine companion. Raising a puppy to that level can be a big task, though. Socialization is the term used for exposing your puppy to the society and world it will live in. Hopefully, you carefully chose a puppy from a reputable breeder, or a shelter that screens puppies for behavior. Having good temperament genetically programmed into your puppy gives you a head start on a social dog, but you still have work to do. As Kathy Kraft, a veterinary technician at Guiding Eyes for the Blind in Yorktown, New York, says, The potential for confidence is primarily genetic, but the realization of this potential is developed by properly exposing the puppy to new situations. The Right StartTop breeders start the work of socialization almost as soon as their puppies are born. From 1 to 9 weeks of age, puppies are handled and exposed to toys, different surfaces to walk on and new areas to explore.

Janina Laurin, a Belgian Tervuren breeder in Danbury, Connecticut, agrees that socializing starts right at birth as the puppies are gently handled. Daily weighing, handling and stroking by calm people start puppies off on the right paw. Toys, cardboard boxes and play tunnels may all be used as puppy play items. Puppies need exposure to noises, too, such as the regular household sounds of a dishwasher, vacuum and ringing phone.

This heavy-duty time commitment to providing plenty of exposure should be given to all puppies. Its immaterial whether the puppies are marked for the show ring, performance ring or someones pet-they're all companions first and foremost, Laurin says. She strongly believes that not making a major effort to get the puppy started off right could mean future problems, such as a dog that won't bond to people or a dog that is severely over or under confident.

Your Job, TooAssuming your puppy got a super-duper start, is the socialization work done? Not at all! Now its your turn to provide your budding star with lots of safe and widespread experiences. Animal Behavior Consultant, Eric Louis of Cazenovia, New York, believes puppies need three categories of experiences, socialization with people, socialization with dogs and socialization in different environments. All three categories must be covered to truly have a well-rounded dog.