

Teach Your Dog Social Etiquette

Good social skills are necessary for all dogs.

Your PRT's social skills began in the whelping box with his dam. There he learned how to talk dog and how to interact in proper canine body language. What does a growl mean? What does rolling on my back mean? What does it mean when mom slicks back her ears and shows me her teeth? Likewise, your pup and his littermates learned the social rules and canine hierarchy through playwrestling, chasing, nipping (not too hard) and licking. Your family now becomes your pup's social circle and must introduce him to humans (big and small) and other dogs (mostly bigger). Socializing your puppy is very important if you want a dog that fits into your home and that you are able to take out in public with no problems. A PRT who is a good companion is enjoyed by everyone.

Socializing a puppy is similar to when you bring home a new baby. A baby needs to be held, cuddled and loved, and so does your pup! Hold and pet your puppy so that he knows that he is wanted and loved. Do not play with him constantly, though, as he is very young and needs time to rest up and sleep.

Once he has had the necessary vaccinations (ask your vet when it is safe for him to be out and about), let your pup meet the neighbors and let him play for a few minutes. Take him for short walks in public places where he will see people and other dogs as well as hear strange noises. Watch other dogs, however, as they are not always friendly. Keep your PRT on a short leash and you will have control over him so he does not jump on anyone.

All dogs thrive on structure and routine. Keep your PRT pup to a schedule as much as you can, as he will become schedule-oriented very quickly. If he knows that you rise at 7 a.m. every day and that shortly after you will take him out, he will wait for you to let him out before relieving himself in his crate. He may even get used to your getting up at 9 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays (but not during the first month!).

Habits, and that includes good and bad habits, that are learned at an early age become lifelong habits. Thus it goes without saying that it is best to start out on the right foot. Don't let your PRT chew on the leg of the old kitchen table and think that it's cute, because before long he will have chewed up the leg of your expensive dining room table. He won't know the difference, but you will! Likewise, don't give him your old leather shoe to gnaw on, because he may decide it's time to taste your Guccis next week. Set limits and make sure that the pup understands them, accepts them and sticks to them. Your consistency is the key to his understanding the house rules and the daily routine.

Keep your pup confined to a specific area, such as the kitchen or den, until he is trained and fairly mature. Use baby gates and barricades and he will quickly learn that he is welcomed in certain areas of the house and not welcomed in other areas. And, of course, put him into his crate when you leave home, as he will be comfortable in his house and he will sleep until you return. The crate, as you will see, becomes the key element in house-training the pup.

Next Step: Naming Your Puppy