

Guide to Raising a Charmer

A yearlong guide to your dog's socialization process.

Arden Moore

Diane Pucin steers her car into a shaded parking stall. Before she can shut off the ignition, Dillon, her 9-month-old Glen of Imaal Terrier, wiggles and waggles in the passenger seat with unbridled anticipation. "Okay, Dillon, we're here," says Pucin, a first-time dog owner. "Time to have some fun with your buddies." Welcome to Central Bark dog-romping fun park in Irvine, California. On this particular Monday afternoon, Dillon barrels toward the opening gate of the dog park, a fenced-in area that contains a dozen dogs and their owners. Seconds into the enclosure, Dillon races toward Bucky, a 3-year-old German Shepherd Dog. The pair exchange friendly nose-to-tail greetings and then begin a playful dart-and-dash game of chase and be chased. During the next hour, Dillon acts like a four-legged politician on election eve as he rushes to meet and greet Bridget, a Jack Russell Terrier; Shiloh, a Chow-Boxer mix; Harry, a blue-eyed Siberian Husky, plus a half dozen other puppies and dogs. They form huddles; they race in circles; they dive and roll; they leap and chase after tennis balls. By the end of the hour, Dillon's tongue hangs out. He laps up some fresh water from a bowl before returning to Pucin's car. Tired but happy, he snoozes during the return trip home. "I'm so glad I found this dog park," says Pucin, a newspaper sports columnist who lives in nearby Tustin, California. "When my husband, Dan, and I adopted Dillon, we wanted to make sure that he would get the chance to play with other dogs. This is a great place for that to happen." With each visit, Dillon learns new lessons vital to any growing puppy. He learns how to interact with other dogs. He learns what behavior is appropriate and what's unacceptable. He gets to meet big dogs, little dogs, young dogs and old dogs. He also picks up pointers on how to behave around people, too. In essence, he expands the boundaries of his world far beyond the confines of his own home.

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