

# Socializing Your Dog

Have you ever read about Feral Children? The kids who were raised by wolves? When they finally returned to civilization, they were wild, frightened, and unsocialized. They had to learn how to eat with utensils, wear clothes, and talk to people.

What is socialization? It's learning how to fit into a society. Dogs need socialization to learn how to fit into our society, and guess what? You're the person who has to teach them!

Socialization means a lot of different things. You want to socialize your dog with other dogs so they learn how to interact. Dogs are very social animals, and they have strict rules and procedures for interactions. For example, staring is very rude in dog language. However, sniffing a butt isn't. Leaning on you is an ownership behavior - you're mine! - but grooming your arm is one of the most loving things a dog can do to you.

You also want to socialize your dog with all types of people. Tall people, short people, people of different colors. If you have no kids in your family, you need to teach your dog how to interact with children. You need to teach your dog how to interact with elders, too. One thing about people is that they dress differently. Some dogs are sensitive to people in uniform. It's a good idea to teach your dog to feel comfortable around police, firefighters, delivery drivers, vets, doctors, girl scouts, etc.

Socializing your dog with other animals is also important. You might live with a cat, or a bird. You might have goats in pajamas, or a pot bellied pig. Introducing your dog to other animals ensures that he greets them correctly and doesn't try to eat them. And, socializing also means environments. Urban areas are a lot different than suburban or rural settings. Walking along a beach or in the woods are other environments your dog might never have encountered before.

Don't forget to socialize your dog with objects. Introducing your dog to things like a vacuum cleaner, lawn mower, bike, etc. will allow you to teach him how to act around them. However, some dogs can begin to fear familiar things out of the blue. Trash barrels are a good example. They've walked by them every day and then - BANG - the barrels have turned to beasts!

Lastly, socialization means situations. One day in the fall, your doorbell is going to start ringing like crazy, and when you open the door, there are going to be all sorts of monsters and witches. Or, one day in winter, you may bring an actual tree into your living room. That's like indoor plumbing to a dog! You have to think of these situations as something totally strange to your dog, and introduce him to them so he knows what to do.

Socializing your dog means teaching them the expected behavior for whenever they encounter a specific person, animal, situation, or environment. You need to teach them before they experience it and take their own actions. Think of your dog as a French exchange student who you're hosting. If you introduce them to things, they will surely have that *Joie de Vivre*.

As your dog's guardian, you must see the world from his view as much as you see the world from your view. So, take a minute and think of all of the people, animals, situations, and environments that you've introduced your dog to. If you're drawing a blank, then you've done your dog a disservice. But, it's never too late to start. You just have to make time, have patience, and use treats to introduce your dog to your world. If your dog isn't familiarized with anything, your dog isn't to blame. You are.

*Written by Sheila of Integral Dog Training in collaboration with Animal Rescue Konnection (c) 2022.*