

PUPPY SOCIALIZATION CHART

By Barbara Smith CPDT-KA, Owner- The *Thinking K9*, LLC

SOCIALIZATION IS CRITICAL.

Most dogs become fearful and “reactive” (e.g. “leash reactive,” “dog reactive,” etc.) due to poor or improper environmental socialization, NOT simply due to inadequate obedience. Reactive and fearful dogs (often confused with aggressive dogs) are not bad dogs—they are usually dogs that never had the opportunity to positively experience the world during the “*Socialization Period*” in their life. The Socialization Period begins when a puppy is only a few weeks of age and lasts until about 6 months of age. This stage in a puppy’s development will permanently shape their personality towards the world around them. Anything that scares a puppy during this time is more likely to cause fear their entire lives. Additionally, anything they haven’t experienced during the Socialization Period will be more likely cause fear in the future (fear of the unknown). We can help older dogs that have issues due to poor/improper socialization to a point, but it is significantly harder. Once that Socialization Period is lost, it is gone forever. Therefore, it is so important to expose puppies now, while nature has given us this small window of opportunity to shape their future. You have your dog’s entire life to work on obedience, but you **ONLY** have about 6 months to socialize them before the period is lost forever! Obedience is important, however, between 0-6months socialization is a priority! Socialization may seem like a cumbersome task, but if it is not done, it will result in a lifetime of struggles with your dog.

ALL EXPERIENCES SHOULD BE SAFE AND POSITIVE!

IMPORTANT: Keep your puppy at a safe distance from novelty, for both their physical and mental wellbeing— At no point should your puppy show fear or over excitement (barking and lunging). **Exposure to new things should be sort and fun!** Start with exposing your puppy to new things from a distance and then get closer as your puppy shows he or she is comfortable— Never pull your puppy towards anything they fear. To help insure each new experience is positive, introduce your puppy to these things when he or she is hungry, such as before a meal, to capitalize their focus on food rather than allowing them to fixate too much on new experiences. Give your puppy many treats in rapid succession the ENTIRE TIME your puppy is being exposed to something new. Our goal is to show our puppies that this experience is fun and carefree, not something to obsess over. Also, show your puppy how much fun the experience is by using a happy voice. However, do not praise a dog that is in a fearful state of mind, because that will make their fear more likely to happen again in the future. If your puppy shows fear, increase your distance while distracting him or her and turning it into a good experience with play. Instead of treats, you can also use toys. Play a fun game of Ball around the new thing you’re exposing your puppy to.

DIRECTIONS:

Each time you expose your puppy to something on the list, check a box across from it. Check increasing numbered boxes for each time you expose your puppy to repeated things on the list (e.g. if your puppy attends 2 different dog events, check boxes 1 & 2). Add variety to each line item— For instance, take your puppy to many different pet friendly stores, not the same one each time.

Your goal is to check off at least 6-12 things PER DAY and have ALL the boxes on this chart checked off by the time your puppy reaches 5 months. This is not as intimidating as it sounds. The following scenario is one example. Have your puppy jump into the car (✓). Take your pup to a pet friendly store (✓). Walk on the sidewalk to get to the store (✓). When inside the store, have a boy (✓) touch your puppy’s ears (✓), while you give your puppy many treats. Then have a man (✓) look at your puppy’s teeth (✓) while you give treats in between. Then have a woman (✓) touch your puppy’s feet (✓). Now have a girl (✓) play with puppy’s collar (✓) while you give your puppy treats. Next, have an elderly person (✓) rub your puppy’s belly (✓) while you give your puppy treats. You may encounter another dog or animal (✓) while on this trip, since you are in a pet friendly store. The floors in said store are probably slippery (✓). Now you’re already *over* the number of things you need to do today (15 total!), all in one relatively short trip! Simply taking your puppy for a walk around the block can also check many new boxes off your list too!

* *Mock vet visit: Take your puppy to the vet, ask them to give your puppy treats and praise. Leave without an exam.*

* *Mock nail trim: Manipulate the toes/nails, gently squeeze nails, use an emery board to file nails, place a dowel the size of a matchstick between the toes and clip it with a nail clipper to give the feeling of nail clipping without actually clipping a nail.*

