

Socialization... it's probably not what you think it is.

Dogs go through a critical period of development that lasts roughly from 3 weeks-16 weeks of age. In this time, they're forming ideas and opinions about the world around them; good and bad. They're developing social bonds, and learning how their behaviour impacts other living creatures.

A dog that has a quality socialization program is one that will reach its fullest genetic potential.

Socialization is about giving them the tools and outlook on life to navigate through our society with minimal stress to themselves and others... now to my point.

If your entire plan for socializing your puppy is taking it to puppy classes, puppy play parties or the dog beach, you are GOING to have problems. Unfortunately, the idea that puppy-puppy or puppy-dog interactions constitute 'socialization' has been continually force fed to well-meaning, but misinformed pet professionals.

Either two things will come of such a plan...

1. Your puppy meets the wrong dog and has a bad experience. Bad experiences are just as bad as no experiences. A bad experience during the critical period can result in lasting negative impressions and behavioural problems; namely, fear and aggression.
2. Your dog has a positive experience. And that positive experience creates a positive value for other dogs. And their positive value out-competes the puppy's value in you. Doesn't sound that bad?

As it stands, the second problem is waaaaay more common than the first. Right now, the issues associated with an extreme positive value in other dogs is taking up probably 70-80% of my workload. What issues are they, you ask?

- Inconsistent Recalls
- Poor Leash Walking Skills
- Reactivity (sometimes eventuating into aggression)
- What many refer to as 'selective deafness'; *Fido is perfect when it's just us, but as soon as he sees another dog...*

Just to name a few. And the thing is, most owners see all that 🙅 as the problem. When in fact, it's just the various symptoms of the real problem; a poorly structured socialization program that's resulted in their dogs developing a TONNE of value in other dogs, and comparatively little in them. The owner. The one that feeds, walks, plays and loves them.

And the thing is, it's not the owner's fault. It's my own industry's. Other trainers. Well-known, well-read sciency-folk. And I don't know why other people aren't seeing the correlation. I very rarely see behavioural cases that stem from a LACK of experience, but that overwhelming stem from an extremely skewed socialization picture.

I'm sure the word 'socialization' is the problem too. It implies *social* experiences and interactions. When really we can broadly divide 'socialization' into social and environmental experiences. And of the 'social' experiences, MOST should entail NO direct interaction.

While a lot is missing from most owner's socialization programs, that's probably the biggest thing; they've never given value to themselves, particularly in the presence of other dogs. A huge part of what I do with my personal dogs is to take them around other controlled dogs, and pay them for looking at me. In their head, they're learning that other dogs are good (socialization), and that when they're around, I'm going to pay them really good stuff. Here, I'm giving myself value. I'm building the puppy's engagement in me.

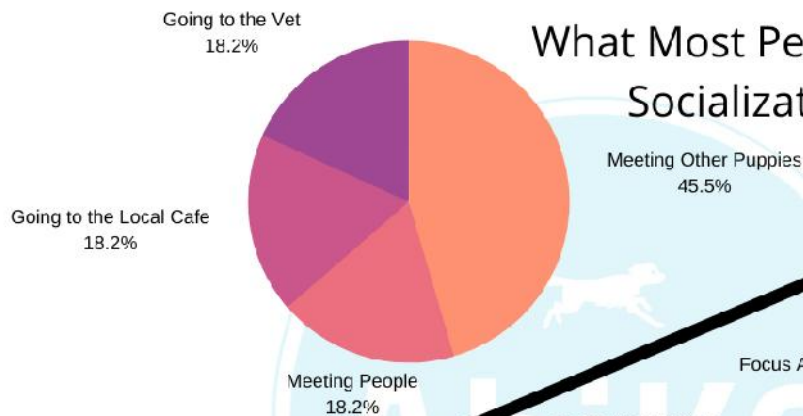
Thus, what often becomes a distraction and a constant thorn in the side of obedience and manners, now becomes a cue to focus on me.

The graph below is an example of a (not very detailed) socialization plan. The exact percentages will differ between puppies a great deal, but the main point to note is that MEETING OTHER DOGS and MEETING PEOPLE constitute a tiny fraction of the whole shebang. And that ratio will stay relatively consistent across the board.

I'm not offering nor recommending any puppy classes anymore, with the exception of @dogmanaustralia. I'm now offering private lesson programs which I've found to be infinitely more successful in preparing puppies for life. If you're after a class environment, I'd also recommend you check out @northcoastk9academy. And for online training purposes (for my remote followers) check out @thedogtraininglab by @solutionk9dogtrainingtaranaki

See Less

What Most People Think Socialization Is



What Socialization
Actually is...
...Or should be!

