

PUPPY SOCIALIZATION



What is socialization?

Socialization is the process by which your puppy learns about her world. This is the most impressionable time in your puppy's life - a time when life-long memories, associations, social bonds and relationships are forged. These early learning experiences provide an understanding of what is safe or unsafe, what is scary and what is fun ... things that your puppy will use to predict and navigate her world for the rest of her life. When your puppy comes home with you, everything about the world is brand new to her. As your puppy's caretaker, it is your responsibility to help your puppy navigate this world in a safe and positive manner.

The socialization window for puppies opens at about 4 to 5 weeks of age and, depending on the breed, closes at around 12 to 20 weeks. A good breeder will have the socialization process well underway by the time you bring your puppy home. Your next steps in socialization should begin immediately and should be centered around short, positive experiences that focus on quality rather than quantity with the goal of never overwhelming your puppy and always stopping while your puppy is still having fun. If your puppy was not well-socialized before you brought her home, your number one priority for the next few weeks will be socialization, socialization, socialization!

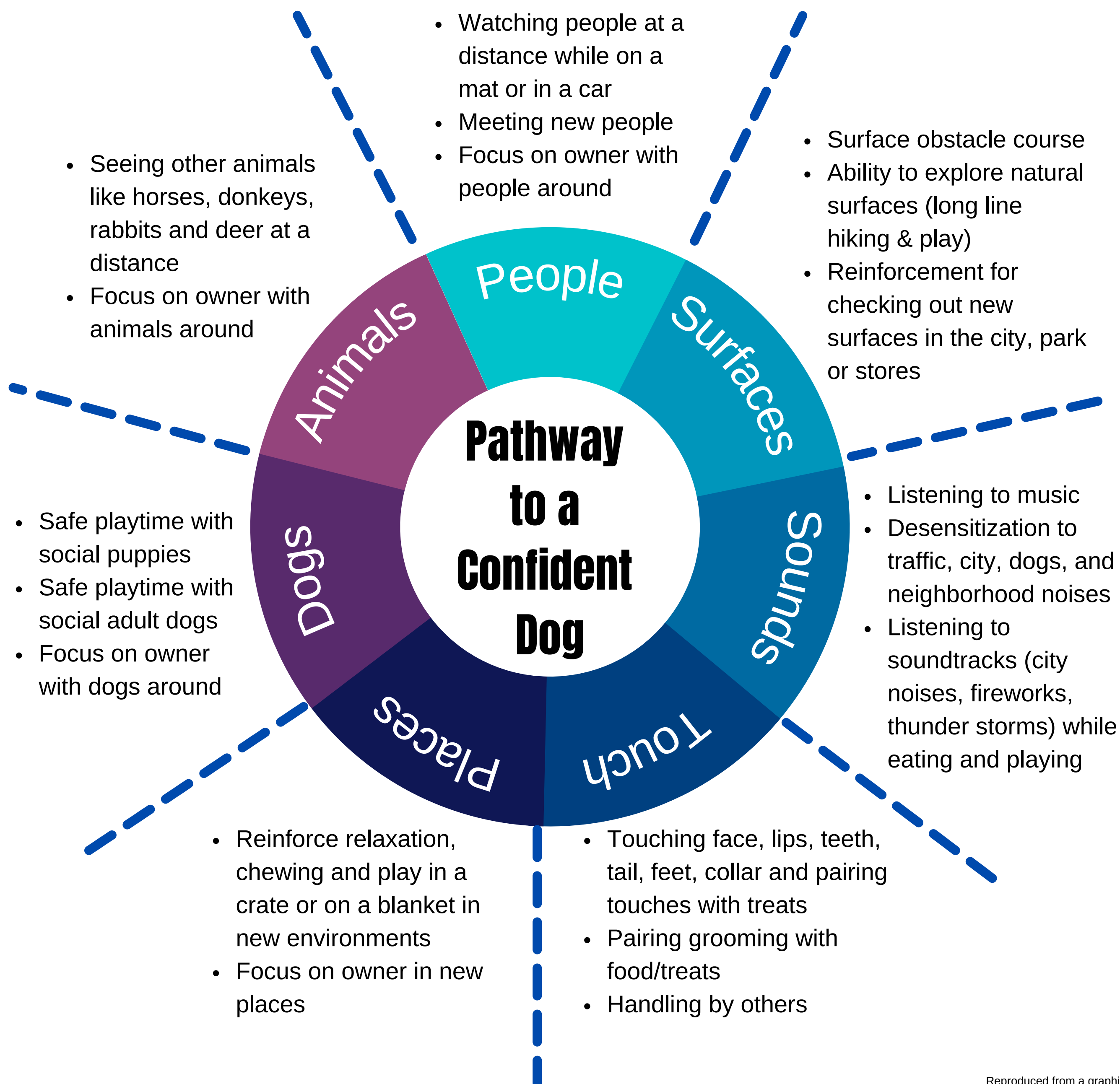
Your puppy should be encouraged to explore and investigate her environment - new people, puppies, dogs, animals, objects, textures, sights and sounds. It is very important that these encounters are safe, positive experiences for your puppy and that you let her explore them at her own pace.

What does socialization look like?

- **Keep your puppy safe.** Until your puppy has been fully vaccinated, she should not be interacting with unvaccinated puppies/dogs or exploring public spaces like floors/spaces where unvaccinated or sick dogs or puppies may have walked.
- **Your puppy sets the pace.** Set the environment up so that your puppy is relaxed and enthusiastic during the encounter. Never lure your puppy or force her to interact in any situation.
- **Keep sessions short.** Plan for 10 to 20 minute sessions. Always stop while your puppy is still having fun. Your goal is to give your puppy time to explore and acclimate, but not to the point of being overstimulated or overwhelmed.
- **Keep it positive.** Incorporating treats and play into your sessions will help keep things positive for your puppy.
- **Advocate for your puppy.** If your puppy's actions or body language (see below) indicate that she is not comfortable, change the situation - increase distance, add a barrier or ask someone to give your puppy space. This will keep things positive. Your puppy will learn that she can trust that you will keep her safe.



- **Socialization is not all about interaction.** The ability to just watch the world go by is a skill that your puppy needs to develop. She is not going to be invited to meet every person who walks by or to join every group of kids playing ball. Now is the time to help her learn this. Use a cue such as "Not today" to help her understand that you are not going to greet this time.
- **Body language indicating your puppy is not comfortable.** Lip/nose licking; whale eye (whites of eyes showing); leaning away; yawning; crouching; and ears pulled down/back are all stress signals.



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