

Improving a Dog's Social Skills

By Sherry Woodard

All dogs can benefit from practicing their social skills. Many dogs lack basic social skills, either because of limited exposure to other dogs and people, or a lack of positive experiences. Dogs who were raised without leaving their house and yard often show fear of many commonplace situations, such as meeting new people. These dogs are uncomfortable near new people because they look, smell and sound different from their families.



If a dog has had limited experience with the outside world, any change, such as a move to a new house or city, can be quite a challenge. When dogs like these end up in shelters, they often have a very hard time adjusting to their new environment. They may have been great with their people, even with a few family friends, but when everything in their lives has been turned upside down, they become fearful and antisocial. Unless someone works with them to improve their social skills, they are often deemed unsuitable family pets.

We can help these dogs by teaching them that the world isn't as scary as it seems. On the next page is a list of things to practice with a dog to get him up to speed on his social skills and more comfortable with all types of situations. When working with a dog, try to check all the boxes and use a fresh copy of the worksheet each month. If your dog develops positive associations with meeting new challenges, he will soon be comfortable and relaxed, ready to go places and do many fun things.

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Dog Socialization Check-Off Sheet

Handle all the dog's body parts on a daily basis, giving praise and small food rewards for relaxing. As the dog becomes more comfortable, have other people start to handle the dog, too.

Introduce the dog to people.

People of various ages:

- Newborn to three months
- Three months to six months
- Six months to nine months
- Newly walking toddlers
- One year old
- Two years old
- More than one toddler at a time
- Three to four years old
- Groups of children playing
- Teenagers – boys and girls
- Adults – many different ones
- Seniors – many different ones

People doing different things:

- Singing
- Dancing
- Clapping
- Jumping
- Hopping
- Skipping
- Whistling
- Jogging
- Other _____

Differences in people:

- Loud man
- Loud woman
- Ethnic differences
- Using oxygen
- Using a cane
- Using a walker
- Using a wheelchair
- Other _____

People wearing different things:

- Hats
- Glasses
- Sunglasses
- A helmet
- Coats with hood up
- Capes with hood up
- Gloves
- Masks
- Big boots
- Uniforms

Introduce the dog to other animals.

To keep all pets safe, supervise at all times.

- Cats
- Kittens
- Dogs
- Puppies
- Horses
- Small pet animals

Introduce the dog to household activities.

If the dog was an outdoor pet, everything will be new, so don't do too much at once.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vacuum | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog nail clippers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Broom | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog brush and comb |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mop | <input type="checkbox"/> Sound of electric hair clippers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alarm clock | <input type="checkbox"/> Sound of electric fan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic bags flapping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio | <input type="checkbox"/> A balloon with air escaping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noise-making children's toys | <input type="checkbox"/> A recording of storm sounds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children's pull toys | <input type="checkbox"/> A kite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Umbrella (open and close it) | <input type="checkbox"/> Things being dropped |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |

Introduce the dog to the big, wide world.

Take the dog on many different types of outings.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ride in cars | <input type="checkbox"/> See people on bicycles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk on different flooring | <input type="checkbox"/> See people on skates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use stairs with and without backs | <input type="checkbox"/> See people using shopping carts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk on bridges | <input type="checkbox"/> Meet new friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visit other people's homes | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take the dog to be groomed | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See and smell parks | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sit at coffee shop with you | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use elevators | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use automatic doors at stores | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |