

Week 9 – 12 – Learning about the world – safely!

The Science

This is a difficult period for new puppy owners – because they need to spend as much time socialising their puppy to his new life as possible but at this age, he is not yet fully vaccinated. It is a bit of a balancing act – but the benefits of socialisation are too important to ignore especially given that the largest causes of death in dogs under two years old is not disease but euthanasia because of behaviour problems. Your puppy's vaccination status doesn't stop you taking him out and about – he just has to be carried, and should only meet dogs whose vaccination status you are 100% sure about. It also doesn't stop you inviting people to come and meet him at home and in the garden, him going out in the car, or him being carried around the town.

Suggested Tasks

1. Try and make sure your puppy meets everything on your personal Puppy Plan three times (or more) in these very important four weeks. Tick each one in the Puppy Plan chart so you can see easily which ones you need to do more work on. These experiences need to be totally positive – so if it is a person, they should give the puppy a treat, and if it is an experience (car, traffic, pub etc) you need to make sure you treat and reward the puppy in that environment (or play a game with him, feed him his dinner there etc). Socialising a young puppy is easy – as most people you meet will want to see him and will be happy to help!
2. Use interactive toys stuffed with food, give him problems to solve, controlled frustration to deal with, and to continue his brain development in his new home. Introduce him to tunnels, steps, things to clamber over, and different surfaces to walk on.
3. Teach him that part of his new life includes being left alone for short periods of time – or not having constant access to you. Do this from the first day you bring him home. Use a dog crate (which can be purchased from a pet shop, and should be made comfortable with bedding) or a baby gate to separate him from you at least once every day at times when there are positive things happening (eating dinner, chewing a stuffed Kong etc). To start with he should still be able to see you (and so not feel deserted).
4. Continue to use the noise CD that the breeder has been using (or you can buy one from Amazon) to play unexpected noises (if he hasn't had the benefits of the first 8 week Puppy Plan, start these very quietly at meal times or game times, and slowly build up the volume).
5. Introduce him to friendly healthy vaccinated dogs if you know any. If not, speak to your veterinary practice or your chosen puppy training class – some have days where your pup can meet friendly staff dogs in a safe environment.
6. Encourage him to follow you – rewarding him with a treat or a game when he does (this means a constant supply of treats in the pocket). This will simplify recall training when your puppy is older and also build the social bond between you.
7. Teach your puppy about relaxation, being calm around you etc. This includes being groomed, and being handled around his feet, face, mouth, ears etc (rewarding him all the time when he is still and relaxed). Many owners miss this one in all the excitement and so the dog thinks everything is a game and never keeps still when the owner is around.
8. Encourage periods of quiet time – when he is relaxed and settles down in your presence. Start these as very short periods, using a crate or a play pen beside you if necessary and giving your puppy something to occupy him such as an interactive toy (like a Kong stuffed with food).