



Socializing your puppy during the COVID-19 pandemic

It is crucial for puppies that are 8–14 weeks of age to have positive socializing experiences to help shape them into well-rounded, confident dogs. The social distancing required during the COVID-19 pandemic can make it more challenging to provide puppies with the pleasant encounters they need.

In these uncertain times, the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center offers owners tips to help keep both people and puppies safe, while still getting puppies the experiences that they need. Other than going places where your puppy can interact with dogs while you maintain distance from other people, here are 10 tips for socializing your puppy:

1. **Sit with your puppy outside** in an exercise pen and watch the neighbors do activities.
2. **Wear different hats, sunglasses, and odd clothing** (one at a time) around the house and out in the yard at different times, allowing your puppy to practice interacting with a "stranger." You can also have another person in the house do the same things.
3. **Expose your puppy to different things** that you may have in your garage or shed, such as shovels, rakes, skateboards, bikes, different textures of things, and things that make sound, etc. Let your puppy safely explore these things, and use a lot of treats and rewards to make sure your puppy enjoys their time around these objects.
4. **Let your puppy walk over, under, and around different things.** Encourage them to walk across a cookie sheet or a pillow to experience different textures. They can also walk under a coffee table, or over a pool noodle to adapt to various "obstacles."
5. **Help your puppy experience slightly unstable (but still safe) surfaces.** Make a slide for your puppy by placing them on one end of a cookie sheet elevating it slightly. Place a board on top of a firm ball and then have the puppy stand on it while you help stabilize it.
6. **Let the puppy explore different areas of the house** where they may not ordinarily be allowed.
7. **Re-create the vet's office.** Put your puppy on the washer or dryer with a non-skid mat. Use a lot of treats as rewards as you touch your puppy's ears, feet, back, and belly.
8. **Take your puppy for car rides.** If you have a puppy that gets car sick, make the trips short and enjoyable.
9. **Go to an open grocery store and sit in the parking lot,** giving treats as your puppy watches people walk around outside.
10. **Expose your puppy to different sounds.** Find different soundtracks and songs to play while your puppy rests, plays or eats.

