

FEATURE ARTICLE

Hunterdon Dogs
Member **Heesun
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In this article, Heesun dives into all the important aspects of Puppy Socialization that you might not be aware of. We know that the checklist for ensuring proper socialization can sometimes feel overwhelming, but don't worry, you're not alone in this! Raising a confident puppy requires a collaborative effort from the whole community. So let's work together and make sure your puppy gets all the socialization they need!

CREATING YOUR PUPPY'S RICH ECOSYSTEM

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The Importance of Good Puppy Socialization and Husbandry Education: Creating Your Puppy's Rich Ecosystem

By Heesun Andes

Welcoming a new puppy into your home is an exciting experience for everyone involved. It represents a commitment to nurturing and shaping a new life. As responsible dog owners, we are often familiar with the usual guidelines for puppy socialization - introducing them to different stimuli, strangers, children, other pets, unfamiliar sounds, surfaces, and new experiences. **However, there is one aspect that is sometimes overlooked or undervalued:** understanding and adapting to your puppy's unique developmental stages. These stages determine the most appropriate methods of socialization for their current phase of growth

Heesun Andes

Heesun Andes, Founder of Pet Karma Dog Training LLC in Clinton, NJ, began her career in dog behavior under the guidance of Dr. Ian Dunbar and Laura Monaco Torelli. She worked with veterinary hospitals in New Jersey, including All Pets Vet Hospital and Hunterdon Hills Animal Hospital. Heesun started Pet Karma Dog Training LLC to educate pet owners about the importance of puppy socialization.

Heesun and her team created Puppy Kindergarten classes at veterinary hospitals, offering a curriculum that includes AKC Tricks, Puppy Parkour, and K9 Nosework.

Currently, Heesun and the Pet Karma Team teach industry leaders worldwide how to develop ethical and successful dog training businesses and group class curriculum for puppies.

and help in establishing the necessary relationships to build your support network.

Consider this scenario: if your puppy enters a fear stage and suddenly becomes afraid of nail trims, it is crucial that everyone in your network is informed. Failure to do so may result in a groomer or veterinarian unwittingly creating lasting negative associations not only with nail trims but also with paw handling and the entire vet or grooming environment.

Another example could be when your dog walker does not align with your training methods and allows your puppy to approach other dogs or people during walks, or fails to maintain an appropriate distance from stimulating situations. This unintentionally teaches the puppy to pull and react towards stimuli, potentially leading to leash reactivity.

Can you see why it's so important to create an aligned ecosystem and communicate clearly with them? Making your objectives explicit to every team member and collaborating with a trainer to establish a cohesive approach can significantly enhance the long-term effectiveness of your puppy husbandry efforts.

What You May Not Have Known about Puppy Socialization and Puppy Play

Socializing your puppy is like giving them a VIP pass to the world! As they grow into their developmental stages, your priorities shift notably between their initial fear period, typically between 8-12 weeks, and the subsequent several fear periods that can occur from 4-18 months of age.

Remember:

It is crucial to inform your "puppy" network of any changes in behavior or personality.

Make sure anyone who works with your puppy is aligned with your training methods.



During the 8-12 week phase, many puppies undergo their first fear stage. Adjusting to a new environment requires a sensitive touch as they leave behind their familiar surroundings. **How they are introduced to various stimuli—novel sights, sounds, smells, people, wildlife, environments, surfaces, equipment, and other puppies—is of utmost importance during this period.**

Between 8-14 weeks, organizing supervised off-leash puppy play proves highly advantageous. It fosters social skills, refines bite inhibition, and makes them comfortable in new environments. However, many puppies are experiencing a fear period and especially during the adolescent stage (4-18 months), they enter more sensitive fear phases. At this point, it's not solely about puppy play; it's about creating a secure environment away from overwhelming stimuli. It's about nurturing your adolescent dog's confidence by presenting choices,



setting clear boundaries, and teaching them to concentrate in distracting environments.. Although supervised puppy play remains valuable, it should occur in controlled environments where puppies have established connections. As puppies transition into adolescents and young adults, they not only test limits but also get physically stronger, requiring closer supervision to prevent accidental injury.

Why is Puppy Socialization Essential?

Behavioral Development: Socialization plays a pivotal role in shaping a puppy's behavior and how they view the world at large. Effective socialization helps puppies become comfortable and confident in different surroundings, reducing the likelihood of fear-based behaviors, anxiety, and aggression as they grow older. A well-socialized puppy is more adaptable and less likely to develop behavioral issues in unfamiliar situations.

Building Confidence: Introducing a puppy to novel sounds, sights, smells, and experiences helps build their confidence. Early positive encounters with people, other animals, and environments instill a sense of security and ease, enabling them to navigate the world with assurance. This is most impressionable from 7-12 weeks of age.

Preventing Fear and Anxiety: Dogs that lack proper socialization may become fearful or anxious in unfamiliar situations. This fear can lead to aggression or withdrawal, impacting their ability to interact positively with other dogs, people, or new environments. Just remember, even if you adopt your puppy later, it is never too late to boost your pups confidence!



How to Socialize Your Puppy Effectively

Get an Early Start: Collaborate with a professional specializing in puppy and adolescent stages to initiate socialization from as early as 8 weeks when your puppy joins your home. By 12 weeks, the window for socializing with strangers begins to close, so early socialization is time-sensitive. Just keep in mind, many puppies go through a fear stage from 7-12 weeks, so how people and experiences are introduced is very important. If you've adopted a puppy at 6 months, don't give up on understanding your pup's timeline which remains vital to optimize their growth and learning. They may have to start with private lessons, but many can transition into a group setting as well.

During the 8-16 week stage, the focus for pet guardians involves acclimating the pup to family life: potty training, independence, bite inhibition, and domestic manners.

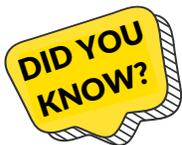
Understanding your puppy's fear stages, body language, and the impact of proximity on confidence building is crucial. Collaborating with professionals can help create a diverse network for your puppy by engaging key community figures. Many of us have a tendency to try to go at it alone (I missed out on a lot because of this when Trinity was a puppy), but it's so much easier with a supportive community.

Positive Exposure: Make interactions positive and rewarding by using high value reinforcers such as treats, praise, real life rewards like exploration and toys to associate new experiences positively, helping your puppy

relate unfamiliar things to pleasant feelings and enrichment.

Monitor Reactions: Observe your puppy's reactions closely. If signs of fear or stress appear, such as excessive yawning, whale eye, trembling, panting, or avoidance (eg. Puppy keeps trying to move away or hide from children), calmly remove them from the situation and reintroduce later in a more gradual manner.

Gradual Exposure: Introduce new experiences gradually and under controlled circumstances. For instance, start with short, calm car rides, gradually extending the duration as your puppy becomes more comfortable.



For clients local to Hunterdon County, Pet Karma still runs their signature Puppy Kindergarten every Wednesday in Clinton, NJ, and Heesun also offers private lessons. In 2024, Heesun will be partnering with Dr. Charlie of Stockton Veterinary Hospital and working on several conservation projects in 2024-2025 with the Karen Pryor Academy.

Tips for Creating a Supportive Ecosystem for Your Puppy: **Building Your Team**

- **Research the breeder or shelter where your puppy originated,** learning about their upbringing, handling and gentling, potty training, and the environment provided.
- **Find a fear-free local veterinarian willing to collaborate with your trainer and other pet care providers.** Effective communication about your puppy's needs is essential. Emails and office hours are a great way to communicate. Cc your entire team in the email.
- **Inquire within your community about fear-free groomers using positive reinforcement methods.** Evaluate the grooming environment for noise levels and traffic. Consider a mobile groomer for a quieter, controlled setting.
- **Evaluate pet sitters, daycare facilities, and boarding centers** for their approach to puppy socialization, fear stages, and preventive measures against overstimulation.
- **Choose a trainer or behavior consultant local to you who specializes in puppy socialization,** focusing on those using science-based positive reinforcement methods, and avoiding aversive, balanced, or fear-based training techniques.



For more tips on Puppy Socialization, training, and creating your ecosystem, you can contact Heesun directly.

Email: petkarma7@gmail.com for your free consult.



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