

COVID Puppy Survival Guide

By Joanie Leclair, BSc, CAHT

First, congratulations on your new puppy! Welcoming a new member into your family can be a great experience and can be filled with fun! However, it is also be filled with questions, concerns and can be quite overwhelming. Getting a puppy is a lot of work, and even before we were dealing with a pandemic, it was filled with challenges. Now that COVID-19 seems to be staying for a while, this puppy survival guide has been created to help puppy owners.



This survival kit brings you the most up-to-date information in dog behaviour and socialization with a new way of looking at it: the pandemic version. How can you overcome the challenges that COVID-19 presents? How can you best raise a puppy with such limitations?

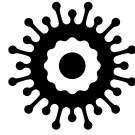
Socialization of your puppy

Socialization refers to the process of desensitization (progressive exposure) to new experiences, animals, objects, environments and situations that your puppy is likely to encounter over the course of its life, while ensuring they are having fun. ¹ Socialization is one of the most important aspects of raising a puppy. The modern role of our dogs is one of companionship, and socialization practices play a huge part in the development of well-adjusted adult dogs that display few undesirable behaviours.² Socialization helps puppies create a positive, lifelong relationship with their owners and with other humans and animals.⁴ As a new puppy owner, your biggest mission will be to teach and show your puppy that the world around them is a safe and fun place to be.

A lack of socialization has been linked to more aggressive behaviours towards humans and other animals, fearful behaviours, decreased trainability (how your puppy responds to training and their capacity to learn), poor coping mechanisms when facing new stimuli and environments and so on. ¹ This is why socialization should be taken very seriously. Socialization starts from the moment they are born to an average of 14 weeks (3.5 months) of age.¹ This is the primary period where dogs learn and absorb new information, and where it is easier to show them that the world is a safe and fun place to live. After 14 weeks of age, it becomes more challenging. If we delay socialization, we have more chance of dealing with behaviour problems in the future. ¹

Socialization of your puppy starts **NOW!**

What does your puppy have to experience within 14 weeks of age?
You will find attached to this document a checklist to help and inspire you.
How can you achieve these goals considering the restrictions of the pandemic?




Organize a meet & greet at your local park or in your driveway

Every city or neighbourhood has a *Facebook* page you can use to post. You can create an event like a meet and greet to ask community members to meet your puppy outside, while maintaining social distancing. This will provide a safe and very effective learning opportunity for your puppy to meet people even during a pandemic.


You can create multiple meet and greet events with different goals: meeting new friendly dogs, exposure to new or weird objects (bicycles, strollers, skateboards, lawnmowers) for your puppy to see. Keep in mind that the interactions should be fun and not overwhelming to your puppy. The possibilities are endless.

This measure may or may not be applicable depending on the public security measures in force in your city and/or province.

Create Post



Joanie Leclair

 Montreal Living

Good afternoon everyone!
I am requesting the help of this community to help me socialize my new puppy! I will be “hosting” a meet & greet afternoon at my house in the driveway and I need volunteers who can be scheduled to come every 10min to meet my puppy and give him a treat :). A table will be setup with hand sanitizer and a small bowl of cookies for you to give to my puppy. I will have him on a leash to respect social distancing and will be wearing my mask! PM me if you want to be scheduled during the 10min slots available and make sure not more than 1 person/family comes at the time. Thank you very much and thanks in advance for all your help!!

Post

Locate an interesting environment for your puppy to go, in your own town

Take a few minutes to locate some interesting places in your neighbourhood to expose your puppy to. This will allow you to socialize your puppy to different environments. Unless you are planning to live the COVID lifestyle for the next 10-15 years, you need to make sure that you expose your puppy to all possible stimuli—within the first 14 weeks of their life—that you would typically visit.

Some examples include; shopping centres, train stations, bus stations, fire stations, parks, areas with different kinds of animals, health centres (people of all ages, wheelchairs, crutches), school yards (children, noises), busy streets (traffic, cars, trucks, people), access to water (pools, lakes), snow & ice (arenas), hiking trails, your dog's veterinary hospital, etc. Take your dog for a short drive around the neighbourhood to get her/him used to the car and its motion.

Recreate what your future life will be (post-COVID)

Once again, unless you (and your family) intend to work from home for eternity with the same routine, you will need to try to recreate what your puppy's future life will be like. If you were working away from home 5 days a week and leaving in the morning to come back at night, you need to recreate these conditions once in a while so that your puppy will be better prepared for the changes in your routine.

You can practice your morning routine and leave the house for 1-2 hours to mimic what a pre-COVID morning routine looked like. Wake up at the time you would normally do, get ready, eat, place your puppy in a crate (if applicable), and leave the house.

Ensure that you also leave your puppy at home by themselves to mimic the time you would be away if you were to go out to restaurants or run errands. It is important to get everyone out of the house at the same time.

The more you do this during the pandemic, the better your puppy will be prepared and the less problems you will encounter when things resume to normal (fingers crossed!!)





Handling of your puppy

The socialization checklist provided has a section on handling which is another essential part of raising a puppy. It is important that your dog can be handled by yourself, the veterinarian, the groomer, friends, family and KIDS! Having a dog who is fearful or bites when

being touched is difficult to deal with. Once the dog has reached maturity, this fear can lead to more serious consequences and damage. It is in this moment (now!) to make sure you do everything in your power to teach your puppy to accept handling and to become an overall calmer and relaxed puppy and future adult.³

Handling your puppy's body parts and pairing this with a positive association (treats) is the best way to get them used to it. When handling your puppy, make sure you are first gentle but eventually increase the intensity and duration of handling a specific body part. Here is an example for you:

Handling your dog ears

Day one

Simply pet the dogs ear 1 or 2 times. Repeat 5 to 10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat after each repetition!)

Day two

Flip the ear up and down and give your puppy a treat. Repeat 5 to 10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat at each repetition!)

Day three

Hold your puppy's ear in you hand for 2 seconds and give your puppy a treat. Repeat 5 to 10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat after each repetition!)

Day four

Put your finger into your dogs ear and leave it there for 2 seconds. Repeat 5 to 10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat after each repetition!)

Day five

Gently pinch your dogs ear for 1-2 seconds (enough for him to feel pressure but not whelp! Repeat 5-10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat after each repetition!)

Day six

Gently pull on your dogs dog ear for 1-2 seconds (enough for him to feel pressure but not whelp! Repeat 5-10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat after each repetition!)

Day seven

Massage your dogs ear for 5 seconds. Repeat 5-10 times for each ear (and give a piece of a treat after each repetition!)

The example provided should be repeated and adapted on all body parts of your puppy. ALL members of the family should be practicing this at home. If people unknown to your puppy can also practice this with them, this will be extremely helpful to you in the future.

Please note that if you are having trouble handling your puppy, this should be taken seriously and making an appointment quickly with your veterinary team should be high on your priority list.

YOU'VE got this!

Do not hesitate to reach out to your veterinary team for more guidance

Your veterinarian information is :

References

1. Battaglia CL. Periods of development and the effects of stimulation and social experiences in the canine. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*. 2009; 4: 203-210
1. Duxbury MM, Jackson JA, Line SW, Anderson RK. Evaluation of association between retention in the home and attendance at puppy socialization classes. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*. 2003; 223:61-66
2. Gazzano A, Mariti C, Notari L, Sighieri C, McBride EA. Effects of early gentling and early environment on emotional development of puppies. *Apply Anim Behav Sci*. 2008;110 :294-304
3. Landsberg G, Hunthausen W, Ackermann L. *Handbook of Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat*. 2013. Third Ed. Saunders, London, UK