

Things that can be done at home to socialize you new BRT Puppy

Socialization is not about indiscriminately dragging your dog around to new locations or having strangers walk up and invasively pet your dog. Then thinking, after a few weeks, that your dog will be well adjusted and able to cope in every new situation for the rest of his/her life.

Socialization is about exposing your puppy gradually and systematically to different types of people, places, things, surfaces, noises, touch (from you and strangers), other dogs and other species of animals. Socialization is all about setting the dog up for success – introducing them to each new situation in such a manner that they will not be afraid.

Visitors: Accustom your puppy to lots of visitors of both sexes and all ages. This will develop its social experience and help to keep territorial behavior to manageable levels in later life. Ensure your visitors only say "hello". Do not fuss over the puppy until it has got over its initial excitement so as to prevent the development of boisterous greeting behavior. **Your BRT puppy is going to get big so a dog that is 90 to 120 lbs is not fun when it is jumping all over company!!**

Children: Accustom your puppy to being handled by children, but don't let them pester it or treat it as a toy. Remain in a position of supervision. Arrange to meet someone with a baby regularly, especially if you plan to have a family. This will help to overcome the common worries about how the family dog will react to a new baby and toddlers. Kids should NEVER be allowed unsupervised playtime with ANY dog. EVERY dog will bite, if pushed far enough. The key is respect. You HAVE to understand that every dog can bite, and you HAVE to teach your kids that fact. Most bites inflicted on children are either territorial in nature or an act of self-preservation -- if you're not supervising, the kids (or the dog) may decide that they need to take matters into their own hands (mouth).

Feeding: Accustom your puppy to you and other members of your family adding food to its bowl when it is eating. This will teach it that you are not a threat and prevent the development of aggression over food when it is older. Your puppy should let you take toys and food away from him without showing aggression.

Lead Breaking: There are many different methods of lead breaking a puppy. Often times, even members of the same litter will handle the restriction of a lead and collar differently. I tend to use a combination of whatever works. Note: It is best to lead break you puppy in the privacy of you yard where no one else can see you. It avoids the puppy playing his distress up in front of an audience.

I start my puppies with a non-chock show lead, but any type of non-choke collar will work. I also use the buddy system. I will put leads on both the puppy and an older dog, hold both leads in one hand, say a little prayer, and start walking. Ideally, the puppy should start trucking right along with the older dog. You should be giving encouragement to both. Make several turns so that the puppy realizes that there is a limit to his freedom. It does not matter what direction you walk, just make sure that you are choosing the path rather than the puppy. Distribute cookies liberally to reinforce this as a positive experience.

Of course, your puppy may not be so amiable about losing from freedom. He may do the door stop routine, or even worse; he may throw a full blown tantrum. My telling you to

ignore this behavior may sound good here, but when you have your puppy doing back-flips, it is a hard rule to follow. Be strong! The more you react to your puppy's negative behavior, the worse it will become. Simply stand quietly and let your puppy get his bad actions out of his system. When he has settled down, tug lightly on the lead, show him a cookie, and try to encourage him in coming with you. If he has planted himself so deeply that you swear he is growing roots, switch directions and walk with the buddy dog back past him. Use verbal encouragement and cookies to get him interested in moving, but do not touch him as he will equate your touch with praise. Always end on a positive note. Even if that means that you puppy only walked a few feet. Persistence is the key. If you are having trouble lead breaking you puppy, work a little longer each session, several times a day. Eventually, things will get better. Just remember, you will need to be more stubborn than your puppy.

Veterinary Examination: Every day examine your puppy's ears, eyes, and teeth, lift up its feet and check its paws and check under its tail. When your puppy is happy about this, get other people to do it (it makes a good talking point at dinner parties!) The purpose of the exercise is to accustom your puppy to veterinary examination, very important, especially if first-aid ever has to be administered. This is a good time to get your puppy used to having his nails trimmed. Of course you will be bringing your pup in to your vet to introduce him and have an initial exam within 72 hrs. Your vet will set up a vaccination schedule. Its a good idea between those times to visit the vets waiting room, walk in with the pup, let him greet the staff, feed him treats and leave. He should not think every trip to the vet will result in a needle stick.

Domestic sights and sounds: Expose your puppy to domestic stimuli such as the vacuum cleaner, spin drier etc. but don't make an issue of them. The puppy should get used to them gradually without being stressed.

Reinforcing Good Behavior: Puppies want attention. They will do a lot to get that attention -- even if it is negative! Thus, if you scold your puppy for doing things you don't want it to do, and ignore it when it is being good; you are reinforcing the wrong things. Ignore the bad things (or stop it without yelling or scolding) and enthusiastically praise it when its doing what you want, even if it's as simple as sitting and looking at you, or quietly chewing one of its toys. This can be difficult to do, as it is essentially reversing all your normal reactions. But it is very important: you will wind up with a puppy that pays attention to you and is happy to do what you want, if it understands you.

Cats: If you have one introduce you puppy to it. Keep the puppy under control and reward it for not pestering. Be careful not to worry the cat, as it may scratch your puppy. Placing the cat in a cat carrying basket just out of the puppy's reach can be a useful method of introduction with little chance of an unpleasant incident occurring. This can be repeated after a few days so that both puppy and cat learn to become settled in each other's company.

Other dogs at home: If you already have a dog introduce your puppy to it in the garden or on neutral ground. Once the initial acceptance has been made by the older dog, the two should find their own level and settle down without too much intervention from you.

Prevent play-biting: In pack society once puppies become active they play physical games with each other and pester the adults by pulling their ears, tails etc. In the early

days puppies have license to do what they like but as they grow up, adults and litter mates alike become increasingly intolerant, especially of their very sharp teeth. By eighteen weeks puppies learn that hard-mouthing or play-biting is taboo and a reprimand will quickly follow any transgression of the rules. When a puppy is introduced into the family this learning process is normally incomplete. The family must take over where the puppy's mother left off.

How is this done?

Whenever a puppy uses its teeth in play the person concerned should respond with a sharp "No!" and sound as if they have been really hurt. They should then walk off and ignore the puppy for about five minutes. In this way the puppy learns (a) to limit the strength of its bite in both play and for real and (b) that biting is counter-productive as an attention-seeking device.

Going solo: *Socialization is very important, but so is learning to be alone.* Puppies who are not accustomed to being left unattended on a regular basis are much more likely to suffer from separation anxiety (i.e. become anxious when separated from the owner) in adulthood. The three main symptoms of separation anxiety are destructiveness, incessant howling or barking and loss of toilet control.

To help prevent your puppy from suffering from this very common syndrome, you need to leave it unattended (i.e. in the house on its own) for over an hour on most days, preferably in the area that it sleeps in overnight.

For your puppy's safety, to prevent it from toileting in inappropriate places, chewing inappropriate items etc. ensure its area is "chew proof and free from hazards such as electrical cables etc. You may need to construct or buy some purpose-built barriers to make a pen. Indoor kennels and Crates are often used and are readily available. Leave your puppy with some appropriate chew items, such as long lasting chews from the pet shop, and fresh water.

Initially you should accustom your puppy to you sitting in another room, with the door between you open. Over a period of time the routine can be carried out with the door shut. Once your puppy accepts this you can start to leave the house; go next door for a coffee, for example. Gradually extend the time you are away until you are absent for over an hour on a regular basis. Do not go back if you hear your puppy crying. Return when it is quiet. If a puppy thinks it can "call you back " it may never accept being left.

Be very matter of fact about going out and coming home. If you fuss your puppy before leaving you will unsettle it and make it want to be with you every moment you want your absence to be accepted. (There is nothing in dog language for "Bye-bye, see you later. Any interaction means, "Let's go!) Too much fuss on returning home highlights the loneliness of your absence.

Things to do away from home

Go to all the environments you can think of that will help your puppy become "bomb proof. Start in quieter places and gradually find busier ones. Get the puppy off the premises. The amazing part is you only have to do it for 20 minutes a week. For 20 minutes one time a week, take your puppy to some bizarre, crowded, noisy place: flea market, match, little league game, soccer game, car repair shop, shopping malls, etc. A trip once a month to the vet's office doesn't count. A puppy can be king of the mountain at home and a coward the minute it steps onto unfamiliar territory.

The street: Expose your puppy to the sound of traffic and the movement of people. Start in quiet side streets and gradually build up to busy ones.

Places where people congregate: Any environment where people tend to congregate to sit and chat will do, so that they have the time to take interest in and handle your puppy.

Children's play areas: This is obviously a good place to meet lots of children (but consult your veterinary surgeon about the appropriate worming program before bringing your puppy in contact with children). Children should not talk to strangers, so make arrangements with their mothers. Start with just a few children and control their enthusiasm to prevent your puppy from being overwhelmed, which can easily happen.

The car: Plenty of car travel will accustom your puppy to it and help prevent carsickness. Do not let your puppy sit on the front seat or on someone's lap. Accustom it to traveling in the place it will occupy when it is an adult. A crate is the safest way to travel in the car with your pup.

Socializing with other dogs

A lot of breeders and vets recommend puppies must have a certain number of vaccinations before they should be exposed to other canines. Unfortunately, if you wait around for vaccines to override the maternal antibodies, you could be waiting for as long as 6 months. Although there is some element of risk, in most cases the puppies will either still have some maternal antibody protection or will only be in contact with other dogs that are up-to-date on all their shots (such as puppy kindergarten).

Removing a puppy from its dam and littermates at eight weeks is ideal in terms of socializing it with people but its socialization with other dogs stops. As already discussed, socialization will wear off, which means that some steps have to be taken to ensure that the process of learning to interact with others dogs continues if owning a maladjusted puppy is to be avoided. However, socializing with other dogs does not entail allowing your puppy to run amok with other dogs in the park. If they, the other dogs, are not properly socialized with their own, interactive and communication skills may be poor, which can often result in a misunderstanding and aggression. This sort of encounter could result in the puppy learning to be aggressive towards other dogs. If you go to any town park on a Sunday afternoon you will see plenty of dogs not getting on simply because they cannot communicate properly.

If you can get your puppy into a local puppy kindergarten, do so! The puppy kindergartens that follow the Sirius Dog Training method developed by Ian Dunbar or use only motivational methods are great. Even conformation prospects benefit greatly from puppy kindergartens. They learn to interact with other dogs, respond to their owner and generally have a wonderful time. It is also amazing how much they learn and retain at an early age. ***Early (and gentle) training ensures a dog that will be capable of learning its entire life. If there isn't a puppy kindergarten class in your area, you might want to consider starting one.***

Finally, what should you do if a puppy shows fear whilst it is being socialized?

(a) Do not overreact. If you try to reassure a puppy it may reinforce its fear, as it will see your reassurance as your fearful response to the thing that frightened it. As "pack leader" you should appear to be unaffected and unworried so as to "set an example". Don't unintentionally reward the behavior. Many people see a pup spook at something, and they start petting the pup, saying it's ok, good boy, etc. This rewards the pup for acting afraid.

(b) Do not try to pressure a puppy into approaching the item as you will highlight its fear by drawing its attention to it. (Dragging a pup over to something that has just scared it is not a good idea)

(c) Expose the puppy to the type of stimulus that worried it as often as possible, but initially from a distance (i.e. reduce the size of the stimulus) so that the puppy can become desensitized to it. As the puppy's reaction improves you can gradually increase the amount of stimuli.

(d) Reward the puppy every time it does not react to the stimuli, or as soon as it recovers from its fright if it does react.

Your puppy will be an adolescent for two to three years. He may get ugly and obnoxious for a while. Have faith that he'll return to that same, gorgeous, eager, willing canine that he was when you got him

Remember that socialization never ends. Fear periods can recur at any time...and probably will. Dominance episodes will come and go, so don't let them get out of hand. Continually work on separation anxiety. The puppy should be super excited to see you, but not neurotic when you're gone. Keep the learning light, fun and leave the pup wanting more!

And remember that the most important thing that you accomplish during the first few months of life with your new pup is building a strong, trusting relationship.