



HOW CAN I SOCIALISE MY PUPPY DURING LOCKDOWN?

Puppies have a Sensitive Period for Socialisation between about 2 weeks and 4 months, during which time they develop their social behaviour towards other dogs, people and other animals sharing their world, and they learn all about the world around them.



In an ideal world, puppies would complete their vaccinations and be ready to go for walks at about 11-12 weeks old, and attend puppy socialisation classes and so on.

Unfortunately, we are not currently living in an ideal world, and restrictions on our own behaviour may mean that vaccinations are delayed, and make it difficult for you to carry out the normal socialisation which is so important for puppies younger than 4 months.

However, there is still plenty you can do. Your aim is to introduce your puppy to social experiences, new sights, sounds, smells and experiences in a positive way, so they have a nice time.



-  Be there to offer support and reassurance if necessary.
-  Let them get used to new things in their own time.
-  Try not to overwhelm them with too much all at once (remember they get tired and cranky like little children).
-  You can use any rewards – food, play, cuddles and praise – to help them associate new things with good times.

HINTS AND TIPS FOR SOCIALISATION UNDER LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS

-  Take your puppy with you on your daily “exercise” walk – carry them or take them in a buggy. Let them see and hear people, traffic and (if possible) livestock, all at a distance.
-  Interactions with other dogs will not be possible until your puppy is vaccinated and restrictions are lifted, but there is evidence that even passive exposure to stimuli (watching from a distance) can help puppies become used to these stimuli, so try to include these distant observations in your carried “walks” in the early days.
-  Watch the world go by from your windows or driveway; offer your puppy a treat every time they clock someone or something new and different.
-  Use sound clips to introduce them to a variety of noises:
<https://soundcloud.com/dogstrust/sets/sound-therapy-sounds-sociable>.

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- Introduce novel objects in the home and garden to the puppy on a daily basis. This might include children's toys, garden ornaments, noisy equipment such as vacuum cleaners and lawnmowers – at a safe distance! – bikes, garden furniture, cooking equipment, etc.

Let the puppy investigate in their own time, offering support if they are over cautious.



- Take your puppy in the car if you have to go out for groceries or other necessities – a second person will need to come too and wait in the car with the puppy while you run errands.
- Your puppy won't be able to meet and interact with people outside the family just yet, but you can help them to learn about different people by dressing up in wigs, glasses and various outfits.

You can be as inventive with this as your wardrobe permits, but try to include hats, hoods, face coverings, facial hair, sunglasses and hi-vis, as these often seem to worry dogs who haven't learned that they are innocuous.

The point of this is not to trick the puppy – they are likely to realise it's you behind the wig or mask, and this is fine – the learning objective is that big pink hair / hoods / hi-vis / Hulk masks are nothing to worry about, so the puppy is unfazed by these things later on.

- Try to also find ways to introduce your puppy to things people might carry, such as sticks, carrier bags and babies. It's a great idea to practise with a doll if your puppy will be expected to interact with very young children later on – you can accompany the visual appearance of the doll with the "Sounds Soothing" clips available from Dogs Trust:

<https://soundcloud.com/dogstrust/sets/sound-therapy-sounds-soothing>.



Please don't delay introducing your puppy to the world around you, as it really will make a huge difference to their future confidence and resilience.

If you need any help with the basics of reward-based training, all my puppy class training handouts are available from my website.

Although in-person training sessions and home visits are not currently possible, I'm offering live online consultations via various platforms to help with behavioural issues in dogs and cats, and shorter training sessions are also available. To find out more please email lucy@petbehaviourhelp.co.uk or visit my [website](http://www.petbehaviourhelp.co.uk).

Lucy Bingley CCAB is a local Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist working on veterinary referral to help dogs and cats with behavioural disorders.