

### Puppy Socialisation

Just like young children, puppies need an opportunity to learn appropriate behaviour and social skills.

The period of life between 4 and 16 weeks of age is the most important time for socialisation to people outside its immediate family, other dogs, animals and new environments.

A lack of socialisation in this early period can lead to behaviour problems later in life. These include:

- timidity and fearfulness
- aggression towards other dogs or unfamiliar people.

Positive exposure to new and interesting experiences will stimulate the pup's mental development and help to develop confidence.

Because of the risk of infectious diseases, puppy socialisation should occur in safe, controlled environments and your puppy should be vaccinated by your veterinarian.

Puppy socialisation groups at veterinary clinics are an excellent way to socialise your puppy.

Socialisation must continue throughout the puppy's growth. Adult dogs require regular social activity as well.

### Exercise and Play

Providing your dog with enough exercise and play is an important responsibility for dog owners. It is also part of the fun of owning a dog. Exercise is good for your dog's health, and can help prevent some behaviour problems.

At least 15-20 minutes should be set aside for walking, obedience training and play with your dog, every day, rather than just one long walk at the weekend. You might break your daily exercise time into 10 minutes before and after work.

The exercise routine should be varied eg. a walk, some obedience training, a run, a fetch game with a ball and time off the leash in approved dog exercise areas. Vary the times when you exercise your dog.

For young, energetic dogs, sprinting to fetch the ball uses up a lot of excess energy. Older dogs will benefit from gentle walks and swimming.

Dogs need to exercise their minds as well as their bodies. Obedience training is a good way to provide mental stimulation for your dog. When walking the dog, time should be allowed for it to explore and sniff, rather than just concentrating on uninterrupted walking or jogging.

Parents must not let children walk a dog on their own, unless they are confident that the children can control the dog in any situation that may occur.

Riding a bicycle with the dog running alongside is dangerous for the cyclist and the dog.

Throwing a stick for the dog to fetch is not advisable. Many dogs suffer serious injuries from running with sticks in their mouths.

Do not allow your dog to bite or snap during play. It is difficult for the dog to understand that it is OK to bite sometimes, but not other times.

If your dog is very excitable, short periods of play are best. Have sessions of play, then training, so that the dog learns to stop and start play.

## **Obedience Training**

Training helps you to control your dog.

Once your dog has done basic obedience training you will have a set of commands which you can use to help control the dog in difficult situations. For example, you can use "sit/stay" when waiting to cross the street, when the dog is jumping up on visitors or when you are answering the front door.

If you go to obedience classes, your dog will be able to socialise with other dogs and people in a controlled situation. This can help if your dog is timid or aggressive.

Your dog will also learn to follow commands even in the presence of distractions.

You will learn a lot yourself. You can not train a dog to follow commands if you are not sure what to do yourself.

Obedience training can be fun and interesting for both you and your dog.

Small group classes run by experienced obedience instructors will provide the best opportunity for both socialisation and learning.