Socialization

What Is It?
Socialization is the process of teaching dogs how to interact appropriately with other dogs, people or the environment. The term sociable means all individuals in the environment are having a pleasant experience. In the past many people have confused out of control friendliness with sociable behavior. Yes, the goal in socializing dogs is to help them become friendly to other dogs, people and not afraid of the environment but this friendliness must be displayed in a calm, polite manner. When it comes to obtaining sociable behavior the goal is to have a healthy balance of friendliness towards people, other dog and interest in the environment countered with enough calmness that the dog is comfortable to be around.

Why Is It Important
Studies show:

* Puppies who are enrolled in classes between 7 and 12 weeks of age are more likely to be retained in their original homes when compared to puppies that did not have the advantage of classes when they were young.

* Puppies, who are well-socialized display earlier maturation of the electrical activity of the brain, are less emotional, adapt to new situations more easily, can solve problems more effectively and retain learning better.

* Deprivation of social experiences before 20 weeks of age greatly increases the likelihood of serious antisocial behavior.

When people considering bringing a new dog into their lives they rarely have the goal of having a dog that is anti-social. Through quality socialization dogs learn to be calm, friendly, accepting of change and things that are different.

When Should It Be Done
Between 3 and 16 weeks of age puppies are more accepting, curious about their environment and less cautious. Therefore it is a lot easier to socialize puppies at this age than when they are older. The more positive experiences a puppy has between 3 and 16 weeks of age the less chance that an owner will have to deal with aggression or fear based issues as the dog matures. But 16 weeks does not mark the end of the socialization process. The social behavior of the dog does not plateau until 3 years of age. Continued positive exposure to new environments, people and safe dogs needs to continue as the dog matures to ensure the dog’s social behavior does not regress. Many people do a great job of socializing young puppies but then the get busy and forget to continue the process and the dog develops fear, over excitability or aggression as it matures.
**Key Safe Places Your Clients Can Socialize Their Dog**

For A Diverse Experience - In a training Class

For an Array of People, Sights and Sounds - On a bench outside the grocery store

For exposure to different surfaces - There is a vast array of textures and odd shapes to be experienced at any park that has playground equipment.

Moving Vehicles - Public paths where joggers, bikes and rollerblades will go by

Water – A child’s wading pool serves as a great introduction to water.

A vast array of sights and sounds - If the weather is appropriate, owners should take their dog or puppy on errands. At each errand if they let their dog get out of the car to see the environment their dog will get a vast array of experience.

Your office – Encourage owners to bring their dog or puppy into the office at slow times to help acclimate their dog to the office.

Although the critical socialization period of the dog goes by quickly socialization can and should be continued through at least the 3rd year of life. The more dogs experience, as members of the family the less chance each dog will have social issues.