

Puppy Socialization Chart + Weekly Game Plan

A vaccine-aware, real-world system owners will actually follow (with just enough humor to keep everyone alive).

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Quick truth: Socialization is not “go meet everything.” It’s “learn the world is normal.” Neutral and curious beats hyped and terrified every time.

Veterinary behavior position: The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) notes the **first three months** are the primary window when sociability outweighs fear, and supports safe socialization **before puppies are fully vaccinated**.

The Big Picture Timeline

Age	What the brain is doing	Your mission (in plain English)
0–2 wks	Wiring basics	Gentle handling (breeder), warmth, safety
2–3 wks	Senses coming online	Soft sounds, textures, calm human contact
3–8 wks	Critical window opens	People variety + surfaces + sounds + handling (breeder heavy)
8–12 wks	Learning goes turbo; fear begins forming	Safe exposures + confidence games + routine
12–14 wks	Fear imprint spike	Short wins only; avoid overwhelm; end on a good note
14–18 wks	Confidence returns; testing begins	Structured outings + leash skills + polite greetings
18 wks–6 mo	Adolescence starts knocking	Repeat exposures; proof calm; don’t “free-range” the world

Vaccine-Aware Safety Rules

- **Safe before full vaccines:** carry your puppy, sit on benches, watch traffic, visit friends’ homes, meet calm vaccinated dogs, see the world from a safe bubble.
- **Not safe:** dog parks, pet-store floors, shared bowls, unknown dogs, high-traffic dog areas.
- **Reality check:** Germ exposure is not socialization. And “overwhelmed” is not “brave.”

Weekly Socialization Game Plan (8–16 Weeks)

This is the “do this during these weeks” version. Keep sessions short (2–10 minutes). Two calm wins a day beats one chaotic field trip.

Week 8: Home base + gentle novelty

- Name game + treat magnet
- Crate = snack bar (short, happy)
- Collar/harness on-off
- Handle paws/ears/mouth 10 seconds, then pay
- New surface inside: tile, mat, wobble cushion (supported)

Week 9: People variety (safe bubble)

- Meet 5–10 new humans (one at a time)
- Hats, beards, sunglasses, hoodies
- Calm kid observation (no dog-pile)
- Wheel/equipment: stroller, cart, suitcase (at distance)
- Doorbell/knock paired with treats

Week 10: Sounds + movement

- Vacuum/dryer/blender (low volume + treats)
- Traffic sounds from parking lot
- Umbrella open/close
- Joggers/bikes observed from distance
- Short car rides = snacks, not nausea

Week 11: Body handling + “mini vet” practice

- Touch collar, clip leash, reward
- Brush 30 seconds
- Towel wipe, reward
- Look in ears, reward
- Stand on scale (at home) = jackpot

Week 12: Stairs + textures (confidence building)

- One stair at a time, treat each step
- Metal grates/manhole covers (observe first)

- Gravel/rocks/sand exposure (short)
- Elevator practice (if available) from distance to inside
- Short leash walks in low-dog areas

Week 13: Fear imprint week: protect confidence

- Repeat easy wins
- New place, but SHORT (2–5 min)
- “Look at that” + treat for scary things
- No forced greetings
- End early when puppy is still happy

Week 14: Polite greetings + controlled dogs

- Greeting routine: sit, say hi, leave
- Watch dogs behind fences without reacting
- Vet clinic hello visit (ask first) + treats
- Car wash sounds from distance
- Place training (bed = off switch)

Week 15: Public life skills

- Outdoor café settle (on mat)
- Shopping cart noises (at distance)
- Grooming table/raised surface practice (supported)
- Loose leash in quiet spots
- Brief alone time drills (30–120 seconds, build)

Week 16: Graduation week: proof calm

- Busier environment but controlled
- Novel objects: skateboard, rolling cooler
- Different building entrances: automatic doors, steps, ramps
- Longer settle (2–5 min)
- Begin a clean puppy class if vaccines/vet ok

Exposure Checklist (What puppies should be socialized to)

Use this as your master list. You don't need to do it all in a week. You just want your puppy to file these under: "normal."

People Variety

- Men, women, kids (observing counts)
- People with hats, helmets, hoods
- Beards, masks, sunglasses
- People using canes, walkers, wheelchairs
- Delivery drivers / uniforms
- Calm strangers vs. friends

Dogs + Animals

- Calm vaccinated adult dogs
- Dogs behind fences at a distance
- Dogs of different sizes/breeds
- Cats (controlled, safe)
- Livestock sounds/smells (distance)
- Wildlife sighting (neutral observation)

Places

- Friend's home
- Parking lots
- Outdoor café
- Vet clinic hello visit
- Training facility (clean)
- Car ride destinations that end in snacks

Surfaces

- Tile, wood, carpet, rugs
- Grass, dirt, gravel, sand
- Metal plates/grates (slow)
- Stairs (one step at a time)

- Ramps
- Wet surfaces (brief, safe)

Sounds

- Vacuum, blender, dryer
- Doorbell/knock
- Traffic + sirens (distance)
- Kids playing (distance)
- Clanging (pots, bins)
- Thunder/fireworks audio (low volume)

Handling + Grooming

- Paws, nails, ears, mouth
- Brushing
- Bath sounds + towel dry
- Collar grabs (paired with treats)
- Being gently held
- Standing still for 5–10 seconds

Gear + Life Skills

- Collar/harness
- Leash pressure (gentle)
- Crate (short happy reps)
- Car entry/exit
- Being on a mat in public
- Alone time (tiny reps, build)

What NOT To Do (a.k.a. How to accidentally raise a nervous dog)

- **Don't wait until "all shots" to show your puppy the world.** The main socialization window is early; do it safely, not never.
- **Don't confuse socialization with forced greetings.** Your puppy doesn't need to be the Mayor of Pettington.
- **Don't do the dog park.** It's like dropping your toddler into a mosh pit.
- **Don't flood.** If your puppy is freezing, hiding, shaking, or trying to escape, you're teaching "the world is scary."
- **Don't let strangers swarm your puppy.** One calm person beats five grabby humans.
- **Don't reward fear accidentally.** Comfort is fine; panic parties are not. Create distance, then reinforce calm.
- **Don't skip handling.** If you can't touch paws/ears/mouth calmly now, the groomer/vet later will be... spicy.

Goal: a dog who can walk through real life and say: "Cool. Whatever. Where's my snack?"

Client Handout (One Page Version)

Your job: teach your puppy that the world is normal.

- **Neutral beats excited.** Watching is a win.
- **Short reps.** 2–10 minutes. Quit while you're ahead.
- **One new thing per session.** Not 17 new things and a marching band.
- **Safety first.** Carry your puppy in high-dog areas until your vet clears more.

The 7–7–7 starter goal (by 12–16 weeks): 7 new people, 7 new places, 7 new experiences — done safely and calmly.

Pro tip: film a **60-second** clip each week of what you practiced and send it to your trainer.