

Socializing Dogs

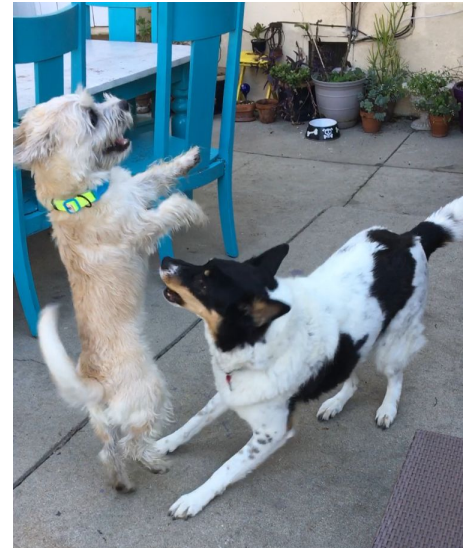
Dogs who are social (= friendly with other dogs) should get to be with other dogs regularly to maintain their social skills. Depending on your dog's sociability level, this can be on walks or playdates with well-matched other dogs, or it can be the free-for-all that is the dog park. If your dog is generally friendly, the way you socialize your dog still matters. Many problems can be avoided if the situations are managed properly.

★ IS MY DOG SOCIAL?

You NEED TO KNOW YOUR DOG before you can allow them to interact with others! It is not fair to take risks with other people's pets, so before you go arrange a playdate or go to the dog park, you *must* be sure your dog will behave appropriately.

Even if you have seen your dog be friendly with other dogs, it doesn't mean they will be friendly with **EVERY** other dog or in **EVERY** situation. **Most dogs are SELECTIVE or TOLERANT**, meaning they like *some* but not all dogs, and can handle *some* but not all situations or types of behavior from other dogs.

It is up to you to ensure the situation and other dogs are right for your dog, and to manage proper introductions and supervise the interactions of your dog with others.



Aggressive	→	Selective	→	Tolerant	→	Social
Gets on with few or no other dogs.		Dislikes some dogs, behaviors, or situations, and may have a short fuse during play.		Indifferent or friendly around dogs. Relaxed in their company, but doesn't actively love them.		Loves the company of dogs, even forgives rude or inappropriate behaviors from other dogs.

SIZE & BREED do matter: with small dogs, arranging a walk and playdate carries far less risk than with big, powerful dogs. We always recommend to go slow, take walks together first, learn about your dog, learn to read their body language, and see what they can handle and enjoy before moving to the next social situation - that goes for all size dogs.

→ **If you are unsure about your dog but would like to socialize them, contact us for an assessment session.**

If your dog *IS* social, the *WAY* you socialise them still matters!

★ HOW TO SOCIALIZE

Proper Introductions

- Even if your dog is social, don't just throw the dogs together and assume it'll be fine. **Introduce new dogs appropriately** (this will vary depending on your dog - check our [INTRODUCING DOGS](#) handout).

Take a Walk Together

- A great way to socialize dogs who are insecure around others OR dogs meeting for the first time would be to take a **walk together, in the same direction**. (Check our [INTRODUCING DOGS video](#) for step-by-step instructions).
- The idea is for the dogs to be near each other, smell each other, relax in each other's company, but to keep moving forward as a pack. It is NOT to meet nose to nose, or get the leashes all tangled, or to play. Just walk together.

Off-Leash Socializing

if your dogs are suitable for socializing and playing off-leash, there are still some basic best-practice dog-friendly techniques to help it go smoothly.

- **Let the dogs play at their own comfort level**
 - Do not "cheerlead" by yelling encouragement or egging them on. It messes with their interaction, and if a dog is not comfortable playing yet, or playing rough, don't try to force them. They have to do it at their own pace.
- **Let them play with each other / Stay out of it**
 - the point of socializing (e.g. dogpark) is so the dogs can interact with others of their species. Don't get involved, petting them or playing. You are only there to supervise (and step in if needed).
- **No toys or balls**
 - Very few dogs enjoy "sharing" toys. More often, they are actually fighting over them (e.g. competing to chase the ball), or guarding them from each other. *It may look like fun and work for a while, but most likely the dogs are not having fun, and you risk creating competition and jealousy and before you know it, the fight is real.*
- **No treats or food**
 - as above. It creates unnecessary excitement, competition, and jealousy.

➤ Supervise

- Sometimes things get a little too wild, scuffles break out, a new dog comes in who is not playing appropriately, or one dog doesn't seem to be enjoying the chase game the way you think they should.
 - You need to keep an eye on the **dogs' body language** and **interrupt if needed**. This takes practice and is a balance of letting the dogs do their thing, but not allowing it to tip over into aggression or bullying...
 - *The more you practice and pay attention, the more you will learn to read the signs.* ☺
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★ CAN A DOG LEARN TO BECOME SOCIAL?

Socializing is an ongoing process. Many people spend a few months actively socializing their puppy (or have their adult dog meet a few others) and then consider them "socialized," but that's not how it works. You must continue to provide your dog with regular opportunities to meet many different friendly dogs as they grow up, including meeting new dogs on a regular basis.

PUPPIES are social butterflies, love everyone and want to play with everyone. But this often begins to change as dogs reach social maturity (8 months - 3 years old).

- ➔ You can increase the chances that your puppy will remain dog-friendly as an adult by providing frequent and ongoing socialization opportunities with well-behaved, well-socialized, friendly dogs.
- ➔ The operative phrase here is "*increase the chances*." Some dogs have a strong genetic predisposition for dog aggression, and for those individuals, nothing you do will *ensure* that they grow up to be dog-friendly adults. But you can and should try to increase the likelihood. ☺
- ➔ **This is especially true/common in breeds that were bred for fighting and have a genetically heightened aggression towards other dogs, such as the pitbulls and staffies** (the "bully breeds" - please see our "Pitbulls In Short" handout).

ADULT DOGS can get more tolerant. A dog-aggressive dog may never like other dogs, and may never be safe to have off-leash with other dogs, however, that doesn't mean they can't become desensitized to their presence, such as on normal walks.

- If you're committed to putting in the necessary effort, they should be able to learn to be near other dogs without lunging or attacking them.
- You will need to provide lots of opportunities for your dog to become desensitized to the presence of other dogs. Such "meetings" should take place on neutral territory (somewhere neither dog has been before), by taking walks in the same direction.
 - Please see our "[Introducing Dogs by Walking](#)" video tutorial for step-by-step instructions.