



## SOCIALISATION & A GOOD PUPPY SCHOOL



What is it and why do we do it? The Oxford dictionary says..... **verb 1** mix socially with others. **2** make (someone) behave in a way that is acceptable to society. —  
DERIVATIVES **socialization** noun.

To mix socially with others and to make (someone) behave in a way that is acceptable to society. We send our children to crèches and schools, we ourselves work and mix with other human beings, attend social functions and gatherings and generally get out and about. After all socializing is very important to us. So why is it that when it comes to “man's best friend” the DOG, that he/she is forgotten? Why does that cute puppy end up in the backyard day in and out with nothing to do and no-one to see? Why do we complain bitterly when that dog destroys our backyards, barks all day, jumps all over us and our furniture?

No matter where you buy a puppy from, it comes with an expensive price tag. Along with that tag comes all the puppy gear, the bowls, beds, sparkly collars and leads, puppy food and vet visits. The most crucial of all stages is rarely visited, the puppy pre-school. Puppy pre-school I hear you say, what on earth is that and why should I bother. Just like children, social skills play a huge role in the growth and development of a puppy. How else will they learn about bite inhibition, general manners, coping mechanisms, gain confidence and be outgoing with other dogs and humans. How do they learn to understand a very foreign language – English? How can we guide them unless we delve into their world and learn about their body language and understand the principles behind how dogs learn.

Studies undertaken have shown that learning stages in various breeds of dogs can close early, such as their social skills. This means you can slow down or close the fundamental developing learning stage for your pup, in some cases sealing its fate. \*Dr Ian Dunbar is quoted as saying, within two days of bringing a new pup home; many people have signed their death warrant.

Why wait until your pup has become an active juvenile, stomping all over your furniture, jumping up, tearing up the backyard and creating total havoc before you find either time to look for a dog trainer or another home for your pet. Many dogs are put down each year due to being out of control. Stop blaming the dog, it's not their fault, it's ours! Take control and take responsibility for your pet.

In saying that, a poorly run puppy school **with inadequate trainers** or a school **run by vet nurses is not adequate** unless the vet nurse is also a qualified trainer. After all, if your puppy was sick you would go straight to a professional – your vet – not see a nurse. The same principal applies in training – why would you not seek out qualified help? When looking for a good puppy school, don't be afraid to question the places you call.

Are they using modern positive reinforcement methods to motivate puppies with food, toys and games? Do they talk to you about body language, using a marker such as a clicker sound or the word YES? Do they teach you about your dog's language and how to better communicate with your pet?

-OR are they using traditional old school methods of compulsive training. Are they telling you that check chains, yelling bah and no at your dog will work? Do they talk about being the "alpha" and scruffing the pup? These compulsion methods have worked for years where dogs learn out of fear, but if you want a good strong relationship with your dog, then forcing them to work out of fear or pain is not effective.

-What sort of qualifications do they have, perhaps national such as Delta Society Australia Trainers. Are they willing to take the time to speak to you, can you visit a class situation and have a look at their training methods, talk to their clients and or the veterinarian if that's where classes are held at.

-Be prepared to drive the extra 10-30 minutes once a week if that's where your trainer is, cheap is not always the best.

Above all don't sit there and say it's too late. Schooling is for life and so is your pet. A puppy who has had sufficient early training during puppy hood and on-going guidance during the adolescence years, will grow up to "fit in" to our lives, be polite and a joy to have around. Buyer Beware, find the time to look for a reputable dog trainer, there are classes out there ranging from pre-puppies right up to adult dogs. It's never too late to start.

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