

A golden retriever puppy is sitting on a large, weathered log in a grassy field. The puppy is looking towards the camera with its mouth slightly open, appearing happy. The background is a lush green lawn under bright sunlight.

# **Socialisation Escapades**

**From Your Puppy's  
Point of View**

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# Socialisation Needn't be Daunting

Hello! I'm Carla

I do love a good socialisation escapade with a puppy.

But I understand from the owners I've worked with over the years, that the task of socialising our pups can be stressful at times!

So as I've raised puppies myself, or worked with new puppy owners & their pups, I've made note of what I think are the important guidelines for success.

The thing to remember is that each puppy is an individual.

So whilst a particular approach might have worked for the 'expert' at your local dog park, this is YOUR puppy.

And most importantly, it's YOUR relationship with your puppy.

Good socialisation helps our puppies develop a strong bond with us, so we become the person they turn to when they're unsure about something.

Bad social experiences might still happen of course. But as long as the good outweighs the bad, we're setting our pups off on the right paw for a long and happy life with us.

Congratulations on your new puppy - and enjoy this time together as they grow up way to fast.

*Carla O'Donnell*





# Socialisation Reference Manual

When we get a puppy, we have a 'socialisation Reference Manual' to set up.

By which I mean our puppy will store new experiences in the 'socialisation Reference Manual' in their brain – and we're responsible for the notes included there.

Every time my puppy has an experience they will file it away in the appropriate chapter. It's like a memory bank of their journey through the world.

Each section will contain different notes depending on the household and lifestyle that you and your family provide your puppy.

So some puppies will have information to note about living with babies, toddlers, older children or teenagers. Others might have frequent young visitors in the form of grand-children.

If you entertain a lot and enjoy spending time with family and friends, then your puppy will have a host of information to note about different types of people.

These may include elderly family members who might use walking aids to get about, so your puppy might have a section for 'People with walking sticks/ frames/ mobility scooters'.

You might have existing pets, perhaps older dogs or resident cats. And they might not feel quite so excited about the newcomer as you do – after all, they didn't get a vote!

So careful introductions there are essential so that the information for the notes about other family pets is positive from the outset.

My aim is that each of these chapters has lots of positive memories and happy events, so that on the odd occasion they encounter something negative, the positive ones outnumber the bad

# The Great Outdoors!

And what we've discussed so far is just information for the sections on arriving in their new home!

When we set out into the wider world with our puppy, then there's a whole new chapter in the reference manual for outside adventures.

And try and imagine the world from your puppy's point of view. They are like toddlers and young children experiencing everything for the first time.

So be conscious of the different senses that you're engaging when you take your puppy out.

## Taste | Sight | Touch | Smell | Sound

Bear in mind that sight is not a dog's primary source of information – they are much more likely to use their nose and ears to get their bearings.

So whilst you might walk past a flapping flag on a pole without thinking about it, it might be quite a big deal for your puppy as they try to locate the sound and figure out what it's all about.

You are your puppy's safe space. So as they navigate and explore the outside world, stay close to them so they can return to you if they feel overwhelmed or slightly out of their depth.

Come down to their level so that your legs offer some shelter from the big, wide world.





# 1, 2, 3 - Rule

## BEST PRACTICE

Protect your puppy's confidence by carefully managing meets & greets with people & other dogs.

Start by asking your puppy to Sit.

It's likely they know this quite well by now.

And if they're too excited to Sit, then I'd move away a bit further. Not being able to Sit is important information.

If they can't, they're likely too excited at the thought of saying 'Hi'. Which means the person they want to reach, is likely to end up wearing them!

If that's the case, I'd just move my puppy further away and look to settle them down instead of saying hello.

Assuming they can Sit, then you can give them permission to greet.

Employ the 1, 2,3-rule - give your puppy permission to greet people with a cheerful

"Go say Hi" as they toddle off to say hello.

But have a tasty treat ready to pop on the end of their nose and guide them out with it after counting to 3 seconds.

As you're luring them away, you can call their name or use a phrase such as "With Me!".



# Shielding Confidence

Obviously sometimes the general public are harder to control than our puppies, so don't panic if you can't always put this into practice.

But as much as possible, try to follow this protocol so that your puppy learns to ask your permission before rushing off to see people/dogs, and learns how to exit when you call them.

Contrary to popular belief, it is NOT good for puppies to be told off by older unknown dogs. They rarely learn that it is their behaviour which caused the older dog to react in that fashion, and are more likely to learn that other dogs are scary and unpredictable.



**“Shielding your puppy’s confidence from the start, is much easier than overcoming fearful behaviour later on”**



# Making A Judgement Call

Much better to ask other owners if their dogs are good with puppies, and also to use your own judgement.

Some owners can be unaware that their adult dog is uncomfortable around puppies/other dogs, so beware of owners directing phrases such as "Be Nice!" to their dogs.

Those are NOT dogs that you wish to have your impressionable puppy interact with as they could well have a detrimental effect on their confidence.

Whilst I don't set out to offend anyone, I'd rather do that than let my puppy have a bad experience. I live with and am responsible for them, not the people/ dogs we bump into out and about.

## WHAT IS SOCIALISATION?

Socialisation is learning how to interact socially with other living creatures.

People - babies, children, adults. We want 'people orientated' dogs who want to be with us rather than run off to other dogs all the time when they're older.

But of course we also want to socialise our pups with other puppies, adolescents & older dogs.

And of course the other family pets you share your life with too



# Habituation

Habituation is learning to ignore stimuli that have no consequence. In order for our puppies to share our busy, noisy lives, they must learn to ignore stimuli that have no consequences for them.

Learning to ignore the environment - vacuum cleaner/ washing machine/ traffic/ other animals etc.

We don't want our dogs socialised to these things, we just want them to learn to ignore them and be comfortable around them.



## Quality Not Quantity

Each puppy is a unique individual, and their socialisation needs will be different.

It's important that socialisation experiences are about QUALITY not QUANTITY.

For example far better that our puppy enjoys 2-3 good experiences in a day, rather than feeling overwhelmed by experiencing 9-10.



# Socialisation & Habituation Ideas

I do love a good brainstorm!

Grab a piece of paper and your family members, and start jotting down socialisation ideas.

Categories to consider include:

- People (different ages, varying levels of mobility, unusual attire - uniforms for example)
- Animals (those the puppy might live with, those they might meet out walking, livestock, wildlife)
- Town & country (quiet places, busy places, light/ heavy traffic, village areas, town centres)
- Places to visit (bunnings, pet shops, veterinary surgeries, care/ nursing homes,
- outside schools, family/ friends gardens.

Don't limit yourself to this list - think about your family life, and the things that are specific to you.

Also consider how you want to spend time with your puppy in the future. What do you want to be able to do with your adult dog (camping/ hotels/ cafés etc..) - and how can you create smaller versions of these experiences to help your puppy feel good about them



# Avoiding Overwhelmed Puppies

As you get to know your puppy, you will start to know what their 'normal' looks like.

Our goal is that something new causes our puppy to be curious and interested, rather than shying away or looking anxious.

Rather than a rigid checklist, consider what your puppy might need to know about as an adult dog. Start there. Think about ways to introduce people/ environments/ experiences in a small way.

For example - a puppy who will need regular grooming as an adult dog. Practise a short enjoyable grooming session daily. If you are going to take your dog to the groomer - Ring around local groomers and find out if they do puppy packages which involve a short grooming experience to get your puppy familiar with what it involves.

If in doubt, seek the help of a qualified dog training professional or behaviourist sooner rather than later.

Much easier to avoid problems by setting off on the right foot now.







# MORE HELP & RESOURCES

I've helped lots of new puppy owners with advice and practical solutions that work in the real world.

Here are some ways I can help you with your new puppy:

- Join the GRCWA's [Drop In Training Classes](#)
- Purchase our [Puppy Training Book](#)
- View the free resources on [GRCWA website](#)
- Join my [Online training class](#)

Don't struggle alone.

Puppy raising is a tiring business!

Here to help if you need me.

Happy training

*Carla O'Donnell*