

ABOUT SOCIALIZATION...

The importance of socialization cannot be over-stressed. To help you understand its importance, consider: Would you want to have to live with a savage? Imagine what that would be like. We take so much for granted. Most people bathe and brush their teeth regularly, wear clothes in public, and do not get into physical fights at the food bar over the last piece of some tasty morsel, etc., all things that a savage might do very differently. We have learned what is or is not acceptable from our parents, peers and/or society – and that process is called socialization. While you may not have given it any thought up to now, your pet(s) also need to be socialized. Socialization for them, like us, is learning what behaviors are or are not acceptable if they are going to live with us. If you want your new kitten or puppy to behave appropriately as a pet, you must teach it what behaviors are or are not acceptable to you and you must start early.

Young animals play very physical games with each other. They pester adult animals by pulling their ears, toes and tails. Adult animals tolerate this behavior from very young but grow increasingly intolerant of such behavior as the young animals mature. By eighteen weeks, most kittens and pups learn that play-biting will not be tolerated. Normally when you obtain a kitten or puppy, this learning process is incomplete so you must not only take over where its mother and litter mates left off, you have to teach it a whole new set of guidelines, i.e., how to live with humans.

Do you see how socialization is more important than any “formal” training you might be considering at some point? Are you confused about what distinguishes socialization from formal training?

Basic obedience is teaching your pet to sit, down, stay, come and heel on command. Socialization includes but is certainly not limited to teaching your pet to remain calm when visitors come to the door, accept anything done around or to its food bowl while it is eating, and not to bite, jump or pounce on you, to accept handling without becoming aggressive. Living with an un-, or under-, socialized pet is much harder than living with an untrained one. An untrained pet will not sit when asked – an un-socialized pet may bite if you do something it does not like.

Of course, like us, young animals need time to be young, to explore their environment, and to learn about the world; however, like us, they must also, at the same time, be learning that certain behaviors are or not acceptable. It is your job to teach them and teaching them may not be so easy because you speak human and your kitten speaks cat or your dog speaks dog. We tend to think that animals think and feel like we do, they don't. In fact, although they may seem to do so, usually they are thinking and feeling something entirely different than we think they are. You should think of your animal as a little alien in furry clothes rather than a little person in furry clothes, that way you won't add an additional hurdle you will have to overcome to the training process. If you assume animals think and feel like you do, you will either unknowingly cause problem behaviors or place an unfair and unrealistic burden on them that they can only fail to meet. Luckily, there is a “universal” language based on learning theory that your animals will understand and it is easy to learn and use! Did you play the “Hot or Cold” game as a child? Someone would say “Hot” and you kept going where you were going or doing something you were doing, or someone would say “Cold” and you knew you were not even close to getting it right? ***The “universal” language is based on these rules:***

“A GOOD THING STARTS” – if and when your pet does what you want it to do you shower it with attention, exercise, food, play, or interesting smells. This will make it more likely to repeat the behavior. Think of it as the “hot” signal.

“A GOOD THING STOPS” - if and when your pet does something you don't want it to do (like bite you), say “AANNGGHH!” in an unpleasant tone and either ignore it or give it a time out. This will make it more likely NOT to repeat the behavior. Think of it as the “cold” signal.

There is only one other thing you need to remember: NEVER, EVER physically punish your pet, as it will only hurt your relationship with your pet. In fact, punishing your pet can, even if it stops one behavior, cause other problem behaviors.

Now that you understand why socialization is important, read **12 STEPS TO A GOOD PET** at www.mypetpro.com for suggestions how to socialize your pet.