



Seven Days of Socialization in Place

A lot of people are making the most of their time at home by expanding their family with a new dog or cat. Here's a seven-day primer on how to help the new addition get adjusted – *and* ready for reality once the shelter-in-place order is lifted. While some of these socialization tips are specific to puppies, most apply to dogs and cats of any age.

Day by Day

Day 1: Step on It!



Life is a richly textured experience. Teach your pup to take strange footing in stride with common household items – and plenty of treats!

Ever walked a dog down the street and seen them detour to avoid the grate or manhole cover? Teach your pup how to take a variety of surfaces and textures in stride, using common household items like cardboard, aluminum foil, bubble wrap, bath mats, doormats, cookie sheets, baking molds, kiddie pools (with or without a bit of water), exercise pens laid flat, etc. Spread these items out on the floor or on the back patio, put your dog on a leash, and help them over the surfaces using treats. Some will be easy, and some they may avoid – be patient if they are unsure, and drop treats along the way. Get creative with your footing and see your dog gain confidence as they explore the world at home! Follow the link for a short video with an example: <https://bit.ly/3dDTrNN>

Day 2: Scary Stuff



Help your pet conquer their fear of humans' most nefarious inventions. Bikes, balloons, and even the dreaded vacuum can become familiar with enough training, treats and patience.

Teach your pet not to be afraid of weird-looking things like bikes, skateboards, wheelchairs, walkers, wagons or wheelbarrows, backpacks, suitcases, stepstools, canes, umbrellas, buckets, brooms, balloons, or the dreaded vacuum cleaner. The key is to expose your furry friend to these items while they are stationary and in the least threatening position possible. For example, lay an upright vacuum down on the ground to make it shorter and less intimidating. Drop favorite treats around the vacuum, and

let your puppy explore it while enjoying their snacks. Once they are comfortable with it lying flat, position it up in a normal position and repeat the process. The next step: move the vacuum . . . slowly . . . and give more treats. This process is one of the most effective ways to break down and overcome a dog's fear of objects. Follow the link for a short video: <https://bit.ly/2Ai1LUZ>

Day 3: Fashion Show



Sheltering in place means a much more sheltered existence for your pets. Make sure they know about the full range of human clothes and accessories so they are ready for the future.

One thing our dogs miss out on during stay-at-home periods is being exposed to lots of different people, with lots of different outfits. But you can help fill the void with items in your own closet! Many puppies and dogs are afraid of hats, rain jackets or ponchos (so noisy!), sunglasses, goggles, helmets, long jacket, puffy coats, gardening gloves, overalls, Halloween masks and costumes, etc. Try these unusual items on at home, and teach your dog that they are nothing to get excited about. Talk to them so they know it's you, and drop treats around you so they see this odd outfit actually has a nice person underneath it. Be a Pez dispenser of treats while you are dressed up. If you've got family at home with you, make it a family training session: the kids dress up, and you work with the pup. Limit this

exercise to 10-15 minutes at the most – shorter still for puppies, since this exercise will exhaust them. If your puppy or dog is scared, don't "flood" them with more scary stimuli; stop training before they become overwhelmed. The point of this exercise is not to scare them – it's to help them prepare for the future. Follow the link for a brief video on how to introduce your dog to any kind of object:

<https://bit.ly/3bxXdHj>

Day 4: Soundtrack of Life



Teach your pets about the world by familiarizing them with the everyday sounds of life – both inside and outside the house. The Internet can help!

It is very important to get puppies familiar with a lot of different sounds. Dogs quickly get used to the daily sounds of home and their own family, but we need to expose them to more unusual sounds in order to prepare them for what surely lies in their future: vacuums, blenders, scooting chairs, falling pots, outdoor mowers, any shop machinery you have, big trucks and loud motorcycles, boats, howling dogs, yowling cats, farm animal noises, cheering, loud crowds, thunder, heavy rain, fireworks, etc. (Thank goodness for Google and YouTube!) If you don't have kids at home, make sure you include kids playing, crying and screaming to your play list. Even just playing the sounds as background noise throughout the day can help expose your pet

to noises. If your furry friend seems nervous, stop what you are doing, and see if you can make it quieter or less overwhelming. The more we can prepare our puppies, new dogs and cats for what could come in the future, the less scary these sounds will be for them. (Yes, cats! Socialization is just as important for cats as it is for dogs, and while most of us don't walk our kitties outside, some of us do. This will help prepare them, too.) Follow the link for a brief video on how to introduce your dog to farmed animals: <https://bit.ly/2WpgfuU>

Day 5: Wobbly Walks



The path forward isn't always flat and smoothly carpeted. Train your pets how to handle themselves when the ground gets a little more challenging.

Puppies are often unsure when the ground beneath them isn't stable. At home, they may have hardwood floors, lawn and carpet, but out in the world they'll encounter uneven cement, playground equipment, and shifting pebbles on a hiking trail. Introducing puppies to uneven surfaces in the safety of their homes lets you teach them to be brave and safe. Start with just putting ladders and pipes on the ground to walk over. Then add more unstable surfaces, like big

fluffy cushions or pillows, an air mattress, a basic teeter-totter, balance disc, or stairs. This is another exercise where you can get creative, but you'll need lots of patience and treats. Go back to what you did on Day 1: help them through these strange surfaces with plenty of treats, and don't push them if something is too hard or scary. If they seem overwhelmed, shift to something easier for them, and come back to the more difficult things once your puppy or dog has regained some confidence.

Follow the link for a brief video on how to introduce your dog to uneven surfaces:

<https://bit.ly/35UkbHa>

Day 6: Hands-On Training

One of the best gifts you can give your pet (and yourself!) is to get them comfortable being handled by humans. Here are the key areas to focus on.

It is critically important that our dogs and cats get used to being handled, since they will need regular vet visits, grooming and bathing throughout their lives. The more comfortable your pets are being handled, the less stress everyone will experience – and the cheaper your vet bills will be! (The more comfortable your dogs and cats are with humans touching them, the more your vet can do without sedation or anesthesia.) Ideally, you should start working with your pet on tactile conditioning from the very first day you bring them home, and keep doing it regularly. Some of these training activities are easy to do every day, and many even while you're sitting watching your favorite show: Touch their feet, ears, tummy, and tail. Touch their mouth, rub their gums, and get them used to having their teeth brushed. Have your pup wear a collar or harness, and get used to it going on and off. Brush and comb your pet. Practice picking up each foot, and checking between the toes. Get them in and out of the bathtub or shower, without having the bath (use treats!). Rub them down with a towel. If you have a breed that needs blow drying, get them used to the blow dryer. And, finally, restraint: make sure your dog or cat gets used to being held by you – and once it is safe, by strangers as well.

Day 7: Routines & Safe Spaces

Help pets stay sane by creating a regular routine of activities, and a safe place to be alone. (Structure + down time help keep humans sane, too!)

This advice is as true for new pets as it is for ones you've had for a long time: be as consistent as you can with your routines for them, even though our own routines have changed. Pets need both enrichment and decompression. Give them fun activities to do: puzzle toys, food toys, or take them for a quiet walk just the two of you. Use crates and baby gates to separate them during high stress and activity. A lot is going on at home that used to go on elsewhere, and this is all new to your pets – both new and old. Dogs and cats need a safe place to retreat when they're stressed, and when they just need a break from you or the kids. Whether it's a crate, bedroom, or closet, set aside a place where they can go and be left alone. Dogs and cats need to rest throughout the day, so cover their crates and give them a quiet space. Put on some white noise to muffle the chaos happening throughout the house. Make sure the whole family understands that when the dog or cat is in their safe place, they need to be left alone. Crate training is also a great tool to safely leave your dog home alone while you take a walk or run an essential errand. One disadvantage of us being home all the time is that our pets are spending more time with us now than they will in normal life. It is important that we teach our new pets now that it *is* ok to be left alone. And sometimes, it's bliss.

About Napa Humane

The Humane Society of Napa County and SPCA, known as Napa Humane, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1973. Recognizing that companion animals are an important part of healthy communities, we've grown to consider Napa Humane a community service organization. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of animals – and also to provide support, education, and assistance for all the people who care for and about them.

Napa Humane is a private and independent organization that is supported by private donations by individuals and businesses, bequests, and fees for service. We receive no government funding, tax dollars or funding from national animal welfare organizations.

Our Mission

To promote the welfare of companion animals through protection, advocacy, education, and by example.