

PAWS WITH A CAUSE

Assistance & Facility Dogs



Socialization & Exposure Guidelines

What is Socialization?

A common misconception in the dog world is that socialization means introducing your dog to as many things as possible, whether it's places, people, sights, sounds, or other dogs, so they can get used to those things.

In reality, socialization is really all about making exposure to new experiences positive and productive for them. **Proper socialization is about quality over quantity.**

Puppies are like sponges. They are constantly absorbing new information and experiences and learning from them. So, by ensuring that the things they are absorbing are positive and productive for them, they will be properly socialized!

What can often happen is if you try to introduce your foster puppy to lots of different things as much as possible, they may end up overwhelmed and stressed out. When they are in a state of stress or high arousal, they are not gaining anything good from those experiences. It can cause them to lose confidence in themselves, and it means you'll have to do more work to offset that bad experience.

The best way to socialize your foster puppy is to ease them into the world slowly as they are ready, and use lots of treats. It's a big scary place for puppies, so by keeping their exposure to new things gradual and fun, you're setting your foster puppy up for success. By doing something as simple as allowing your foster puppy to observe new things from a distance and rewarding them for it, you're socializing them!

It's good to be very intentional about where you go with your foster puppy so that you can be in control of what they are exposed to, and aware of what they are feeling and experiencing. If you expose your foster puppy to something and they are scared, don't make a big deal about it! Just give them a treat and move away.

Puppy Cape

Your foster puppy will be eligible to get their puppy cape once they are fully vaccinated, and have attended 2 or more PAWS Foster Puppy Classes. **You do not have to wait for your puppy to be fully vaccinated to start attending class-** we actually prefer that you go to your first class around or before 12 weeks of age.

Once they have their cape, that means that they can accompany you out in public for public access training. But first, it's important to make sure that your puppy gets used to their cape before taking them out in it!

Introducing the Cape

When wearing their cape for the first time, most puppies will be mildly uncomfortable at best. They aren't accustomed to wearing something on their body, so it can feel very weird to them. Because of this, it can be very helpful if you do some practice to help them get used to wearing their cape in the home before going out in public with it.

When putting the cape on your foster puppy, it can be helpful to put it on a certain way so as to not make them uncomfortable or worried about it.

To put the cape on, hold it by the front chest strap so the cape part is hanging down. Put the strap over your puppy's head, so that they are wearing their cape like a bib. You can then rotate the cape so that it's resting on their back before clipping the belly strap. This way, the fabric part of the cape isn't going directly over their head, which many puppies find intimidating or invasive.

Cape Desensitization

In order to teach your foster puppy that the cape is their friend, you can pair the cape with things that they like.

The best way to do this is by putting the cape on for a short period of time, have them do an activity they enjoy, such as eating a meal, playing a game, or doing some obedience practice, and then take the cape off when you're done. By doing this a few times a day, you can help your foster puppy become more comfortable with wearing their cape.

Public Access Practice

For your first few outings with your foster puppy, keep them very brief, positive, and rewarding for the puppy. These first outings should be in very low-distraction environments, such as an empty parking lot, or a quiet corner in a library. The more sights, smells, and people, the more distracting it will be for your foster puppy. Keep these first outings no longer than 20 minutes at most.

Supplies for Public Access

- Plenty of high value treats
- Poop bags
- Paper towel/diaper for messes
- Disinfectant wipes/spray
- PAWS Cape

Here are some good tips to help make sure both you and your foster puppy are set up for a successful outing:

1. Any time you take your puppy out in public, the puppy should be your first priority. If they are not doing well, you need to be able to remove them from that environment.
2. Bring a variety of treats, some of higher value to your puppy, and some of lower value to your puppy. If they are very distracted, higher value treats will help to get their focus back on you.
3. Do not let people pet your foster puppy in public! The purpose of practicing in public is so that your puppy can learn to be neutral and ignore people and things in a public setting, and to focus on you.
4. Finding somewhere stationary at a distance from any excitement and commotion will make things easier for your foster puppy, especially for their first trip to a new place, or if they tend to struggle in public.
5. Always bring a clean up kit in case of an accident no matter the age of your puppy!

Knowing Your Foster Puppy's Emotional State

Being aware of how your foster puppy is feeling is very important, especially when they are having a new experience. Puppies are very impressionable and are learning from every experience they have, whether good or bad. Below is information to help you identify stress levels in your foster puppy that indicate if they are having a positive experience, or a negative experience.

Low Stress: Positive Experience

- Relaxed body posture
- Ears in neutral setting, not fully forward or pinned back
- Normal response time for cues
- Normal level of food drive
- Comfortable remaining in place, no pacing or excessive restlessness
- Tail is neutral and relaxed, not tucked under them or stiff in the air
- Able to offer eye contact
- Can be redirected from distractions with relative ease

High Stress: Negative Experience

- Excessive panting (disproportionate to exercise and weather)
- Vocalization: Barking, whining, or other similar sounds
- Restlessness or pacing
- Decrease in food drive
- Slower response or no response to cues
- Little to no eye contact offered
- Ears fully forward or pinned back
- Tail tucked or stiff in the air (even if wagging)
- Change in on-leash behavior: Lunging/pulling, or not wanting to move

If your foster puppy is exhibiting low stress behavior, you may continue your training. If your puppy is exhibiting one or more high stress behaviors, please end the training and leave as soon as you can, and try again a different day in a calmer, less busy environment.

Ideas for Socialization Based on Age of Foster Puppy

8-10 weeks:

- 🐾 Show them your garage
- 🐾 Place them in your parked car and let them explore
- 🐾 Let them explore a new area of your yard
- 🐾 Show them each room in your house

10-12 weeks

- 🐾 Invite a friend or two over for them to say hello to
- 🐾 Take them for a 5-10 minute car ride
- 🐾 Play a video with new sounds on a speaker for your foster puppy to listen to
- 🐾 Hang out on your driveway and let them watch as people and cars go by
- 🐾 Take them for short walks around your yard or down your driveway
- 🐾 Attend your first PAWS Foster Puppy Class

12-16 weeks:

- 🐾 Go for a short walk up the street and let them sniff a few things along the way
- 🐾 Take a 10-15 minute car ride
- 🐾 Go to an empty parking lot and practice basic obedience

4-6 Months:

- 🐾 Visit a store parking lot, and practice “Look at That” at a distance from people and cars
- 🐾 Go to a quiet corner of a library and practice basic obedience
- 🐾 Bring your foster puppy to visit a friend or family member’s house for a little while
- 🐾 Do a “Sniff Walk” in a new area

6 Months and Beyond:

Past the 6 months point, you know your foster puppy and what they can handle. If they are doing well with distractions and new environments, you can try taking them to different places. If they have an outing or two that is less than ideal or you don't think they can handle somewhere new, try somewhere else with less distractions where they have had success before.

If they are really struggling, it is perfectly okay to take a break from going out in public for a little while!

Feel free to reach out to a PAWS representative for extra help if you feel you need it!