



Puppy socialization starts at birth, says Linda Draper, Eternal Moon Rottweiler breeder. "It is highly important to pick up pups and hold them. You should touch them all over — their feet, nose, ears, and lips."

attention span. Learning is permanent at this age. Training should be structured on an individual basis, and puppies should form good habits, learn boundaries, and the rules of their new life. A stable individualized learning environment is important.

Fear Imprint (8 to 11 weeks): Between 8 and 9 weeks of age, puppies begin to be more cautious, even fearful of loud noises, sudden movements, strangers, and discipline from other dogs or humans. If frightened during this period, it may take weeks to return to normal. In nonsocialized puppies, anything associated with fear at this age will be a fearful stimulus throughout life without extensive desensitization.

Environmental Awareness (9 to 12 weeks): Puppies are starting to learn the right behaviors for the right time, significantly improving their motor skills and paying more attention to humans, and are busy learning about their new world. Behavior can be shaped very differently depending on what the owner expects from the puppy. If almost totally separated from other dogs, the human bond becomes strong. Puppies left with littermates often have trouble with separation anxiety and/or hyperexcitability.

Seniority Classification (13 to 16 weeks): The age of independence, this is when a puppy begins to test dominance and leadership. Critical learning occurs now. Puppies that are allowed to bite,

dominate children or resist activities such as leash training, nail cutting, and removal of food possessions are less likely to develop into a well-behaved dog. Puppy classes are essential, and being handled and trained by a variety of people helps build self-confidence.

In a nutshell, the more puppies experience, the more accepting they become. In reality, socialization lasts the entire life of a dog. It should be consistent, firm but gentle, patient, and loving. It starts during that sliver of time from 5 to 16 weeks of age.

"Socialization requires creativity and must occur during this critical period of development," Hastings says. "There is no substitution for intensive and ongoing socialization for all puppies." ■

¹ Scott JP, Fuller JL. *Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog*. University of Chicago Press. 1998. (Originally published 1965)

² Range F, Virányi Z. Tracking the Evolutionary Origins of Dog-Human Cooperation: The 'Canine Cooperation Hypothesis.' *Frontiers in Psychology*. Jan. 15, 2015. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01582.

³ Fox MW. *Integrative Development of Brain and Behavior in the Dog*. University of Chicago Press. 1971.

Opportunities that are missed during the critical socialization period puts puppies at risk of becoming shy, fearful, defensive adult dogs.