

puppy socialisation and training 101

According to Ray Lord, media officer of RSPCA, in 2004, 4717 dogs were euthanised at RSPCA shelters throughout Victoria. The two fundamental reasons given were that the dogs were either poorly socialised or poorly trained. The tragedy is that these issues are easily rectified when dog owners are well informed about socialisation and how to train their dogs. Through Righteous Pups Bendigo, we hope to create a mini revolution where we empower dog owners with the knowledge and skills to raise and train obedient and well socialised dogs.

- Joanne Baker

socialisation

Socialisation is a fancy term used to describe the process of a dog developing positive social relationships with people, animals, smells and other objects within its environment. Just like kids, puppies have different personalities e.g. some are shy while others are more boisterous. For any pup to grow up confident, psychologically sound and comfortable in changing surroundings, they need to be able to adapt to the many stimulations within the family environment i.e. people, objects, places, noises, smells etc.

All puppies experience a critical learning period from 8-16 weeks, in which they are able to generalise learning from specific situations to general circumstances that are similar in nature. For example, if a puppy during this period has a positive interaction with a larger dog, they will generalise this positive experience to include interactions with all large dogs. Poor socialisation or lack of environmental exposure during this critical period will develop lifelong deficits and dysfunctional behaviours. In addition, the learning that occurs during this socialisation period is permanent and therefore it is necessary that such socialisation experiences are positive.

The best time to start training a dog is about 7-8 weeks of age. Pups are really pliable and training is effective providing it is kept short, (2-3mins), and fun. Start with "sit". Say the word "sit" and then move a treat over the pup's head slowly. At some point your pup will sit - praise them and immediately (within one to one and a half seconds) give a food reward. Repeat this about five times and then have a play with your pup. Do this each day for about a week or two and your dog will develop word association with "sit" and the desired behaviour, (placing their butt on the ground). During the learning of a new skill it is very important to never shout at or punish your dog. It will take about 40 repetitions of associating the word with the desired behaviour, for your dog to begin to see the pattern. Once you are sure your dog understands, make it sit before it gets its meal. You are now on the way to developing a communication channel with your pup.

Please write to us about any issues you might be having with your dog and we will give you some strategies on how you might go about resolving these issues. Write to: Righteous Pups Bendigo at PO Box 429 Golden Square 3555. ■

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