



## Socialization Programs in Your Bond-Centered Practice

There are so many topics to cover with new pet parents during their first veterinary visit and, among the most important, is puppy and kitten socialization. Socialization involves exposure to as many positive experiences, people, and situations as possible. Socialization is important because, when pet parents engage in fun activities with their pets, the human-animal bond is strengthened and enhanced. It's also important because behavior problems are a primary reason that young, healthy animals are surrendered to shelters or euthanized. If your Bond-Centered Practice provides socialization programs, like Kitten Kindergarten and Puppy Parties, you'll create even more frequent and in-depth opportunities to educate pet parents about ways to raise happy and well-adjusted pets.

### Socialization for Dogs

Training happy, well-behaved dogs begins with socialization classes. Socializing puppies of the same age provides them with the tools of communication they will build upon as they mature. Puppies that do not have the opportunity for such socialization may not be able to identify the subtle cues of adult dogs and may be at greater risk of attack or injury in the future. Simply playing with family or friends' pets may not be a good substitute for socialization classes because it is important for young dogs to continue to greet and interact with new and different puppies.

### Socialization for Cats

Training happy, well-adjusted cats also begins with socialization. Socializing young kittens (during the first 3 to 4 months of life) helps them become accustomed to being near people and other animals. Two of the primary goals of kitten socialization are to help them become more tolerant of changes in their environment and allow them to become comfortable with different stimuli before they develop a fear of these things.

As you talk with new pet parents, encourage them to take their dogs with them and include them in their activities as often as they can. Encourage cat owners to handle their kittens often, touching their paws, ears, mouth, and body. You can also suggest that they expose puppies and kittens to unusual sounds, like the roar of the vacuum cleaner. Of course, you should also remind pet parents about proper vaccinations, safety measures and ways they can protect their pets from negative experiences, as well.

Finally, you and your veterinary practice team should be aware that local training facilities may feel threatened by the puppy and kitten socialization classes you offer at your veterinary hospital. Here are three ways your clinic might troubleshoot this potential problem:

- 1) Involve local trainers. Invite representatives from highly-regarded and recommended training facilities to coordinate an activity at one of your clinic's socialization events. This gives your clients the opportunity to meet some of the local trainers and identify the style of training that best fits their needs.
- 2) Offer a training class at your hospital and hire a qualified, local trainer to teach it.
- 3) Offer a New Pet Socialization Day or Open House to impart more information about the importance of further socialization and training. Have a variety of referral brochures, business cards, and handouts from local trainers available.

One of the hallmark traits of a Bond-Centered Practice is the collaborative "continuum of care" you provide for your clients. Trainers and animal behaviorists are crucial members of this referral network but, before you add them to your list, be sure you actually know them! Visit their businesses, attend their classes, and ask about their own professional training and certification. Remember, your clients depend on your informed referrals, as well as your medical expertise, so these investigations are well worth your time!

For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom<sup>®</sup> Resource Center at [www.veterinarywisdom.com](http://www.veterinarywisdom.com)