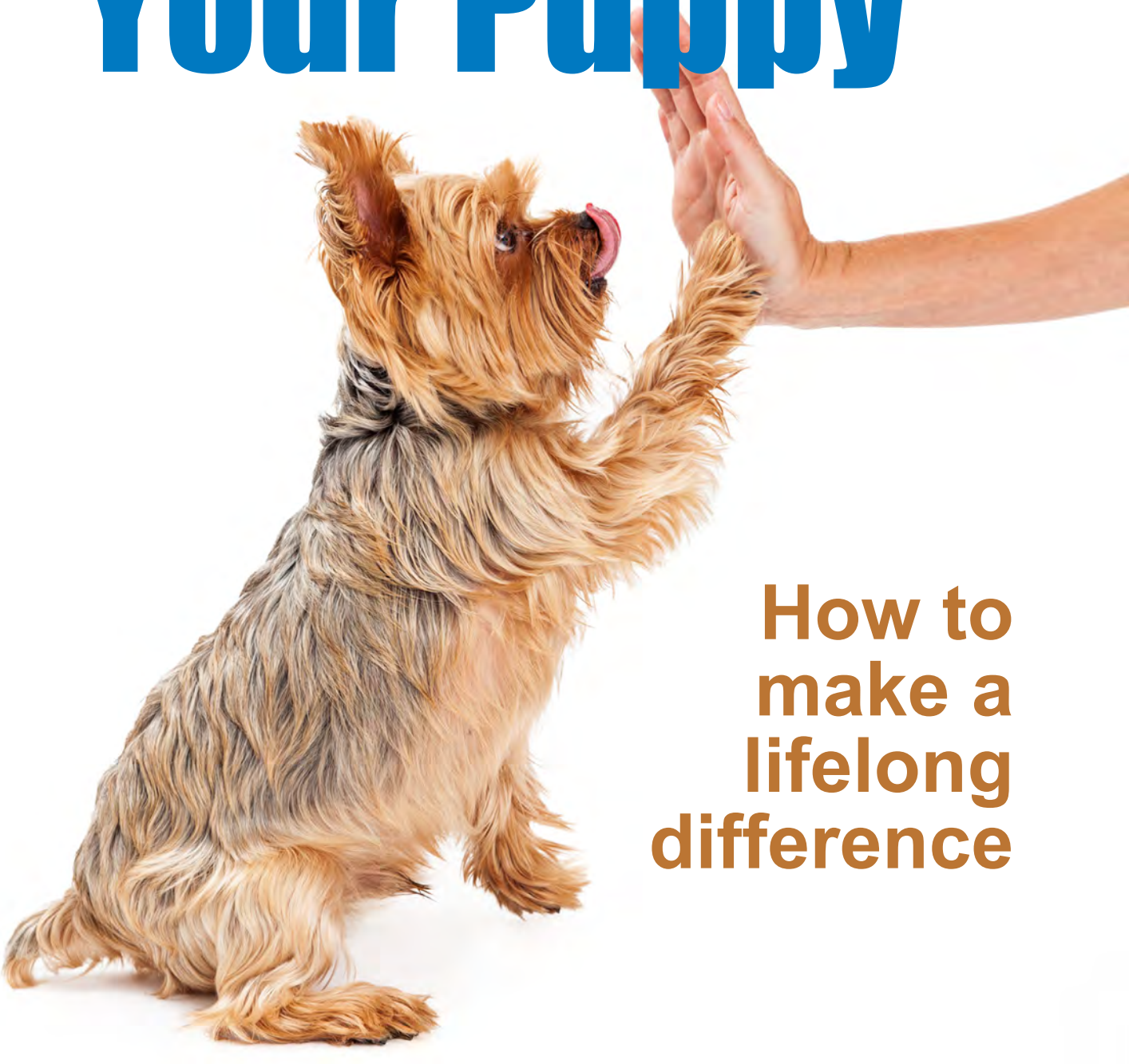
Your complete guide to natural dog care and training
Whole Dog Journal™

Socializing Your Puppy



How to make a lifelong difference

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Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™

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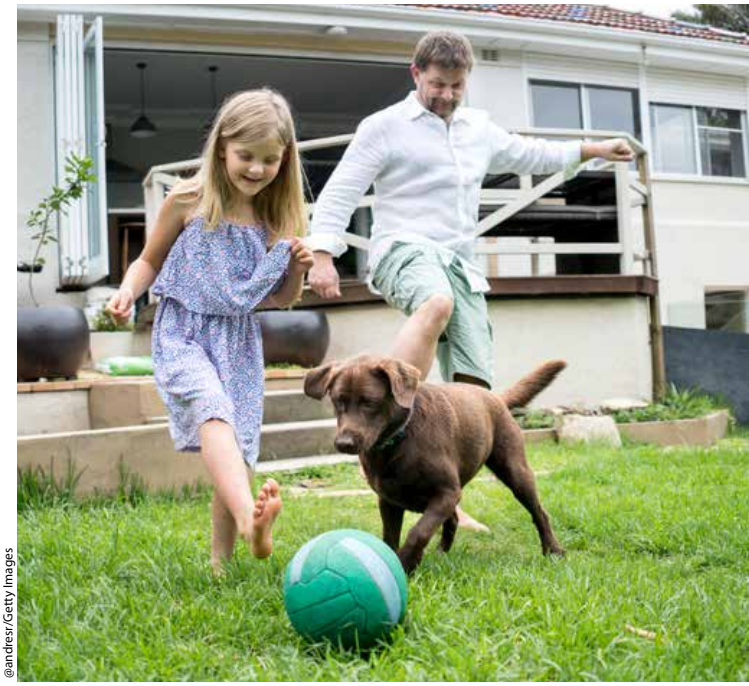
The Importance of Socializing Your New Puppy

It will boost his confidence, make him more reliable, and create a better companion for your family.

There was once a time when you rarely encountered the word "socialization" in dog circles. Today, it's the new training buzzword; if you haven't heard it at least three dozen times by the time your dog is a dozen weeks old, you and your puppy must be living in a cave.

A half-century ago, no one talked about canine socialization because they didn't need to. For the most part dogs wandered freely in their neighborhoods, accompanied kids to the school bus stop, hung out with canine pals all day, and became naturally socialized to their world and the people, dogs, and things they encountered in their daily travels. Sure, they got into occasional scuffles amongst themselves, but they sorted it out. Yes, a kid was bitten every now and then, but it was no big deal. Dogs got hit by cars from time to time, but that was part of life – sad, but one could always find another dog, preferably one who would be smart enough to stay out of the road.

Today, a large segment of our pet-owning population is made up of more responsible canine guardians and caretakers. A nationwide paradigm shift has changed our attitudes about our dogs. No longer just "pets," many of our beloved four-legged family members are kept inside our homes and in safely-fenced yards, supervised closely when around children, and only encounter other dogs under controlled conditions – at training class, maybe during a brief on-leash greeting, during



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Adding a new puppy to your family is a wonderful thing! Just be sure to provide safe and well-rounded experiences so he grows up to be a confident adult dog.

scheduled play dates, and perhaps at the dog park. The thought of our beloved dogs running free in the streets gives us heart palpitations, and we grieve terribly whenever we lose one.

On the plus side, this means our dogs live longer, physically healthier lives. On the minus side, it means they no longer benefit from the natural socialization process that occurred when they were allowed to explore their world and figure out how things work on their own. As a result, we've spawned a whole new behavior problem: under-socialization.

BUILDING A SOCIAL DOG

Socialization is really classical conditioning – creating an association between two stimuli. Behavioral scientists have identified the period from 4 to 14 weeks as the most important window of time for a puppy's social development. After the age of 14 weeks that window starts to close, and it closes pretty quickly. If a pup is super-socialized during this important developmental period he'll most likely believe the world is a safe

and happy place. If he's not well-socialized, he's likely to be neophobic, which means fearful of new things. This is a common condition in dogs rescued from puppy mills and hoarder situations. It is challenging to own and train a dog who is afraid of everything new he encounters; worse, the neophobic canine is also a strong candidate for developing fear-related aggression.

Lack of exposure to new things is one cause of under-socialization; inappropriate exposure is another. If you're not careful during your socialization efforts you may inadvertently set your pup up to create negative associations with parts of the world around him. In that case you can actually sensitize your pup to the things you're introducing him to – that is, you can make him afraid of them – the exact opposite outcome of the one you want.

Think of the well-meaning soccer mom who takes the family's brand-new nine-week old pup to watch her son's team practice. The entire team suddenly spies the adorable fluff ball and charges toward the pup to oogle over him. The terrified puppy screams, pees, and tries to run away when he sees a dozen giant human creatures coming toward him at a dead run. He can't escape; he's trapped by the leash, which panics him even more.

Mom sees the pup flailing at the end of the leash and scoops him up in her arms to calm him so the boys can pet him. Now he's even more trapped! One boy reaches to pat him on the head, and the pup, thinking he may be about to die, as a last resort snaps at the lowering hand that appears poised to grab him. The boy yanks his hand away, and mom smacks the puppy for being "bad."

How much worse could it get? This puppy now has an extreme fear of children, especially boys, thanks to at least three negative classical associations in rapid succession:

- Boys/children are scary; they run toward you in large packs.
- Boys/children are scary; they try to grab your head.
- Boys/children make bad things happen – when they are nearby, mom becomes violent.

If you take him to a place where he's likely to get swarmed by kids, be ready to intervene so he doesn't get overwhelmed by the attention. (The owner can't even see her pup in the middle of this scrum!)

The pup may also have developed negative associations with the collar and leash, wide open fields, being picked up, and mom. In addition, he learned one important operant lesson – snapping is a successful behavioral strategy for making scary hands go away. None of these things are the lessons we want a young pup to learn! And now the puppy is labeled as "not good with children" and a "fear-biter."

We often talk about how long it can take dogs to generalize operantly conditioned behaviors (if I do "x" I can make "y" happen). In contrast, dogs tend to form classically conditioned associations, especially those that produce strong emotions, very quickly.

The good news is that at nine weeks this pup's socialization window is still wide open, and if his owner is smart she has time to repair the damage. Unfortunately, most owners don't realize the importance of taking immediate steps to change a pup's association if he has a bad experience at a young age.

Socialization is the process of giving a puppy positive associations with the people, places, and things in his world. You need to be sure he's having a great time, playing fun games, getting good stuff, and protected from scary stuff while you're teaching him that the world is a safe and happy place.

IN THE EARLY DAYS

If you bring your new pup home when he's 8 weeks old, 4 of his 10 prime socialization weeks are already gone. Since a quarter to a half or more of a pup's most important socialization time has passed by the time he leaves his mother and moves into his forever home, it's vitally important that breeders invest time and energy into socializing their litters.

This includes having the pups walk and play on different substrates (grass, gravel, concrete, carpeting, and vinyl); inviting lots of different kinds of people over to play with and handle the pups; exposing them to household objects and sounds (microwave, telephone, television, vacuum cleaner); and making sure the baby dogs have positive associations with all these things. Sadly, a small minority of breeders do a really good job of it, which contributes significantly to the population of under-socialized dogs in our world. If the breeder of your pup did her part, then your pup is already well-started on his super-socialization program. Now it's your responsibility to keep it up.

If your pup comes to you from a socially impoverished environment, you'll already see the signs of neophobia. You have no time to lose, and you may never be able to make up all the ground he's lost, but you can make him better than he'd be otherwise. Trainers talk about giving pups "100 new (positive) exposures in the first 100 days." If your pup is already showing signs of timidity or fear, triple that to 300 exposures in 100 days. And get busy!

Just as you should be going out of your way to introduce your pup to a variety of people, you should make an effort to expose him to a variety of other animal species. Use a leash or other barrier to keep both parties safe and untraumatized.

PUPPY CLASSES

A well-run puppy class is one of the best places to find lots of positive socialization opportunities. Unfortunately, because of their fear of disease transmission, some veterinarians still caution their clients with puppies to keep their young canines safely at home until fully vaccinated, or at the very least until they have received a minimum of two shots, usually by the age of 12 weeks. Twelve weeks leaves only two weeks of critical socialization time – assuming there's a class starting up immediately after the pup receives his second shot. Not good enough!

We asked longtime positive trainer Gail Fisher of All Dogs Gym & Inn, located in Manchester, New Hampshire, to share her experiences with and thoughts on puppy classes. Here's her response:

"Regarding the question of puppy socialization versus risk of illness: We have been running puppy classes and play sessions for puppies as young as eight weeks since 1976 (which, incidentally, was before parvo!) In all this time, we have had a total of three puppies in our classes who were diagnosed with parvo (or anything worse than canine cough – a mild upper respiratory infection similar to the common cold).

"The first was a five-month-old Rottweiler (a breed known for having immunological issues – and beyond the age of a typical 'puppy' class). The second was a puppy from a breeder that had been in its new home for two weeks and who had received two shots, and the third was a pet shop puppy who had been purchased two days before starting class.

"More importantly, however, is the fact that no other puppies in any of those classes got sick. As soon as we heard from the owners of the sick puppies, we immediately contacted every other puppy owner to tell them to check with their veterinarian for advice on whether to have an

additional inoculation. Some did, some didn't – but no one else got sick.
"So if you're looking for 'odds' – in 33 years, figure (conservatively) 100 puppies a year, more than 3,000 puppies – the odds of a puppy getting sick from a well-run training class is virtually nil (less than 1/100th percent). The risks of illness are, in my opinion, negligible, while on the other hand, the advantages to socialization are unmeasurable. "I hope this helps in your decision to take your puppy to training class!"

PLAYING IN THE GENE POOL

Of course, your dog's genetics also influence his behavior and social tendencies. Behavior is always a combination of genetics and environment. Nature and nurture. Always.

Genes dictate how easily reinforced a dog is for the things the environment tosses at him during his lifetime. Hence a dog who is genetically programmed to be reinforced by chasing things that move becomes a good herding dog, fox hound, or ratter. The difference is the herding dog is (hopefully) not programmed to be reinforced by killing the things he chases, while the hound and the terrier are.

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If you adopted your puppy from a shelter and you know nothing about mom and dad, just try hard to super-socialize him -- regardless of what you think you do or don't know about his genetics.

Pups who are genetically programmed to be reinforced for the consequences of acting behaviorally bold are naturally easier to socialize, even if their first few weeks lacked stimulation, than ones who are genetically programmed to be reinforced for the results of acting timid or fearful. How do you know which behavioral genes your pup has for social behavior? You really don't.

It's useful to see your pup's parents – at least the mother, if at all possible. If Mom is timid or aggressive there's a good chance her pups will be, too. The pups' behavior still can't be attributed solely to genes; pups can learn fearful or aggressive behavior by watching their mother's response to humans and other environmental stimuli, a behavioral phenomenon known as social facilitation. If you've been paying attention you'll remember that genes and environment both play a role in behavior – always.

Don't despair if you adopted your pup from a shelter or rescue group. It's true that if you never see Mom or Dad, you won't get any hints about their behavior. So how do you know how much socialization your pup needs to overcome any genetic weakness in temperament? You don't. But you don't need to. The answer to the genetic mystery is to super-socialize every single puppy, regardless of what you think you know, or don't know, about his genetics. If you do that, you're guaranteed to help your pup be everything he can be, socially speaking.

There's no such thing as overkill when it comes to properly done socialization. You can't do too much. Pups who are super-socialized tend to assume that new things they meet later in life are safe and good until proven otherwise. Dogs who are very well-socialized as pups are least likely to develop aggressive behaviors in their lifetimes. Pups who aren't well-socialized tend to be suspicious and fearful of new things they meet throughout their lives, and are most likely to eventually bite someone. You'd better get out there and get started!

How to Properly Socialize Your Puppy

Your job is very important: to raise a well-adjusted puppy. Here's how.

While curiosity and the ability to learn don't have expiration dates, young puppies have an important behavioral "sweet spot" between the ages of 3 and 14 weeks. During this critical period, your dog builds her impressions and attitudes about what is normal and acceptable. At this time more than any other, positive experiences with the world around her build a solid foundation for the rest of your dog's (we hope) long life.

Back in the day, trainers and owners didn't talk much about puppy socialization. But today, most people know about the importance of making puppies well-rounded little Renaissance hounds. And as they have gotten busy signing up for puppy kindergarten and arranging play dates with the dog next door, a new concern has developed: Fueled more by enthusiasm than knowledge, some people expose puppies to the world in a way that emphasizes its dangers rather than its delights.

Like anything in life, it's all about balance. Here are some tips to help you guide your puppy through this brave new world in a way that will broaden her horizons and build his confidence.

PROOF POSITIVE

Socialization isn't just about exposing your puppy to new things. It's also about carefully monitoring these interactions to ensure they are positive ones. Though puppies can seem precociously unflappable – especially when they are gnawing your ankles – they are sensitive souls who can easily become overwhelmed. Your job is to gauge the tenor of a

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Creating a picture-perfect family dog will require a lot of time spent socializing and training him as a puppy to be an overall good canine citizen.

situation by reading your puppy's body language. "If your puppy clings to you, if she's yawning or turning her head away, she's stressed. Forcing the puppy will just make it worse," says trainer and author Teoti Anderson of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "Puppy emotions can be so fleeting. If more puppy owners paid attention to that, and just let the puppy go at his own pace, they'd avoid a lot of problems."

In the buffet of sensory stimulation, make sure his experience is a quick snack rather than a binge. A visit to your child's soccer game, for instance, can do more harm than good if you are distracted, a pack of kids swarms the cute new puppy, and someone's snarky Schnoodle meanders over to chomp instead of chat. Less really can be more.

"I like lots of frequent, short sessions. Some puppies shouldn't go out every day, especially if you have a puppy that's a little shy," Anderson says. "Instead, find five friends of different ages and ethnicities and have them over for 10 minutes." Your puppy will be exposed to a variety of new, interesting people, "and you've ended it before it can go badly."

Be sure to monitor the humans in this equation, too, especially if they are not very dog savvy: Something as simple as holding a puppy incorrectly – letting his legs dangle without supporting his bottom, for instance – can make him feel unstable and unsafe.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Speaking of the home front, that's often one place that's ignored as people rush out to take their new puppies to Home Depot parking lots and the Petco treat aisles, hoping to imprint them with a zest for the outside world.

"People take their puppies out into the world to socialize them, but they forget to bring other living beings into their home," says trainer and author Pia Silvani. This doesn't just apply to other people and children; be sure to invite some canine guests, too. "Many dogs are just not used to having other dogs coming on their property," Silvani says. "The risk is that they can become territorial in their own home" because they've simply never had the chance to learn how to politely welcome a visitor.

CLASS ACTS

Puppy kindergarten classes are a great way for puppies as young as eight weeks old to meet other dogs and people, provided it is in a controlled environment. A good class will require your puppy to have at least one vaccine, and will disinfect the classroom space before puppies assemble to cut down on the risk of communicable diseases.

While puppy play is a hugely valuable part of a puppy kindergarten gathering, the class should never be a free-for-all. Occasional breaks from the action help calm and re-focus the puppies.

Before plunking down your cash and signing up, visit a session without your puppy. Watch and see how the instructors manage the class. Are they watching out for different breed-specific playing styles? (Pairing a mouthy retriever with a chase-motivated herder might not end well.) Are they intervening and redirecting behavior that might escalate to something unpleasant?

Above all, these classes should not be a no-holds-barred romper room. Even if they don't know it, when human kindergarteners play, they are being taught important social concepts like self-control and respect for others, and it should be the same with their furry counterparts.

"Some people have the misconception that they're going to bring their puppy into class and it will be an hour of playtime. And they believe if they don't have that their puppy is not getting socialized," Silvani says. "But socialization can mean sitting next to another dog in a calm fashion – it doesn't have to entail wild, frenzied play. That's a part of it, so they learn to read body language – but it's a minor part."

Veterinarian, trainer, and author Sophia Yin, DVM, reminds that avoiding inappropriate friends is just as important for four-leggers, too. "People just think all play is fine because that's a dog being a dog," she says. "But if you had a child, you wouldn't let him play with a bunch of kids who are swearing and hitting each other. Puppies can learn all kinds of unwanted behaviors" – and start morphing into the canine version of a schoolyard bully.

"For dogs who are having fun, one of the worst things they can learn is to play too roughly and have no impulse control," Dr. Yin continues. "By letting them play in an ugly way, they get more and more practice being overly aroused. Over-arousal and aggression are on a continuum. If dogs learn to have no self-control and react without thinking, they can become aggressive."

The lesson that Dr. Yin wants puppies to walk (or bounce!) away with is that calming down has

tangible benefits. "I want dogs to be able to come when called, focus on me, and the reward is that they can go play again. It teaches the dog that, 'Hey, it's not that I can't have these things. I just have to have a little self-control and be polite about it.'"

Anderson adds that while puppy kindergarten shouldn't be a mosh pit, it shouldn't be "a glorified obedience class," either. "Obedience is the easy part," she says. "But the time for that puppy foundation is finite." Baby puppies should be learning more general life skills, she says, like how to accept handling and grooming (including the oft-dreaded nail cutting or grinding), and bite inhibition.

SOCIALIZING WITH ADULT DOGS

As their name suggests, puppy kindergarten classes are full of, well, puppies. But trainer and author Trish King of Marin County, California, points out that even more than playing with their peers, youngsters need positive interactions with older dogs who will help them understand and respect boundaries. "Sometimes it's really hard to find appropriate adults for puppies to play with," she says. As a result, "many puppies have trouble learning how to play appropriately, show deference to adults, and back off."

At all costs, avoid play dates with Cujo wannabes, which sounds easier than it actually is. Some people are utterly clueless about their dog's social graces, or lack thereof. "You have to screen the other dog and be realistic," Anderson reminds. "If the adult has a history of not liking other dogs, introducing him to a puppy will not miraculously make it better." After asking how social the potential playmate is with other dogs, it's also important to inquire about his play style. "Does he play roughly? Is he mouthy? Is he a chaser?" asks Silvani, adding that breed-specific temperament differences, as well as size differential, are important, too.

Finally, absolutely, positively no dog parks, which can be magnets for undersocialized dogs of all ages and their benignly, but dangerously clueless, owners.

SOCIALIZATION AND VACCINES

One of the biggest obstacles to proper puppy

An adult dog who able to play gently but firmly with a puppy is worth his weight in gold. Ideally, he will tolerate a certain amount of puppy hijinks, but won't allow the pup to push him around.

socialization can come from a seemingly unlikely source: veterinarians. While no veterinarian wants to see a carefree puppy develop into a growling hermit, his or her primary focus is making sure that your puppy is not being exposed to infectious disease. As a result, many vets insist that their clients not take puppies out into the world until their booster vaccine series is complete and they are fully immunized, which is typically at 16 weeks – two weeks after the vitally important socialization window has closed.

Veterinary objections to even a nuanced approach to puppy socialization – arranging play dates with known, healthy dogs, and avoiding well-trafficked areas such as parks – are "huge," Silvani says. "A lot of times I hear vets in Manhattan saying, 'Don't let your puppy hit the ground until he's six months old'" – leaving legions of urbanites to paper-train large-breed puppies in postage-stamp-sized bathrooms or terraces. In private, she continues, many vets will acknowledge the importance of socialization, but will also voice concerns that they will be liable if something does go wrong.

King understands why many vets are so cautious in this regard, but points out that they could be unwittingly creating a situation that is just as life threatening: "The number-one reason dogs are surrendered to shelters is behavioral problems." In other words, the odds are greater that a dog might be euthanized for a serious behavioral issue than coming down with parvovirus or kennel cough.

Dr. Yin says many of her veterinary colleagues also don't realize that the science doesn't support their concerns. She points to a study published in the

Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association that found puppies who had been vaccinated once and attended socialization classes were at no greater risk of parvovirus infection than vaccinated puppies who did not attend those classes.

Of course, says Dr. Yin, be sure the class follows good sanitary protocols: She knows of one that uses a steam cleaner on its floor several times a week to kill bacteria and other nasties. Requiring that puppies have at least one vaccination and be free from illness are other basic requirements.

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior already has a position statement on the same topic, which concludes that the risk of contagious disease is the lesser of two evils compared to the effects of inadequate socialization. "During [the first three months of life] puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing overstimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior," the AVSAB paper says. "For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated."

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The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior concludes that the risk of contagious disease is the lesser of two evils as compared to the effects of inadequate socialization.

Despite these welcome changes in attitude about the importance of socializing puppies, you might very well encounter resistance from your veterinarian. In the end, it's up to you to weigh the pros and cons, sort out your level of comfort, and make the best decision for you and your puppy.

When it comes to your veterinarian, don't forget to socialize your puppy to that office, and its strange smells and sights, when you have no other reason to go there! Do Happy Vet Visits, too! "Don't go there only when your puppy needs his shots," Anderson advises. "Have the vet techs give him a cookie and leave." To make bona-fide visits go smoother, Anderson suggests accustoming your puppy to stand on a mat at home – a rubber-backed bath mat is fine – so you can transfer that surface to the vet's office. Placing it on the scale or exam table will reduce your puppy's anxiety, "like Linus with his blanket."

VARIETY SHOW

Socialization isn't just about exposure to new people and places; it's also about acclimating a puppy to all sorts of experiences: loud noises like hairdryers and fire trucks; things that move oddly, like people on crutches or skates; strange surfaces such as manhole covers, deep sand, and wooden bridges; and all types of weather. The list goes on and on.

Anderson remembers babysitting a dog who would eliminate only on pine straw, because the only walks she had ever taken were in conifer-covered woods. "I had this huge, fenced-in backyard," but her canine visitor insisted on pottying right next to the house – the only part of the property that had pine trees near it. Similarly, dogs who are accustomed to doing their business only on grass will be stymied when visiting a city and encountering blocks of pavement and blacktop.

Silvani makes sure to expose her dogs to cats and wildlife, taking puppies outside to watch a nearby herd of deer, and rewarding them for their calm behavior and attentiveness to her. "It creates a positive association with wildlife," she explains.

"This way you don't have a dog who's out there chasing chipmunks and squirrels, which can be a real danger."

Conversely, make sure they are introduced to modern conveniences, especially those that involve movement, such as elevators and automatic doors. If you live in a rural setting, find safe and controlled ways to expose your puppy to traffic and the noise of suburban and urban settings – sirens, horn honks, rattling trucks. If you don't have easy access to the real thing, invest in a CD of city sounds. And while you're at it, you might pick up a recording of thunderstorms, another behavioral bugaboo that you can defuse with a positive association, such as feeding your puppy dinner while the recording plays.

LEAVE FLOODING TO NOAH

Almost inevitably, your puppy will eventually encounter a situation or person that frightens him. The answer is not to force the puppy to "deal with it," but rather to give him the space to come to terms with his fear on his own. "If a puppy is running from a tall man wearing a hat, don't put the puppy in the man's lap and say, 'He has to get over it.' That's overwhelming," Anderson says. "But if you put the puppy on the ground, and the puppy chooses to go over and say hello," that's a better tactic. (Having the behatted man sit on the floor, with a pocket full of juicy treats, would nudge that encounter in the right direction.)

When a puppy is startled or concerned, some trainers advocate ignoring the fearful behavior and not comforting the puppy, lest you reinforce the reaction. Knowledgable behavior professionals know that kind of thinking is misguided – and that it misses the larger point. You can't reinforce emotionsl, but you can encourage the pup to enjoy the experience. "It doesn't do any harm to console, but I think it doesn't do any good, either," says King. "You want to switch over the brain, so he's not thinking about how afraid he is, but rather how much fun he's having."

KEEP THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY AJAR

While three- to fourteen-week-old puppies are at the prime age for socialization, their ability to soak up new experiences doesn't shut off like a faucet once they pass that landmark. "Probably the most critical factor to me is, don't stop after puppy class," Silvani says. "Continue on in the first year" – especially into adolescence, when percolating hormones can create new behavioral challenges. "It's going to benefit the dog for the rest of his life."

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You should expose your puppy to cats and wildlife, rewarding him for his calm behavior and attentiveness to you.

Conversely, King notes that many people believe dogs can be socialized indefinitely, but at some point, it becomes an issue of reprogramming instead of programming, and changing habits is more difficult and time-consuming than preventing or short-circuiting them in the first place.

"The brain continues to grow for a while and then it stops – new connections aren't made as fast," she says. "Older dogs don't learn as fast or take in as much." By the time a dog is three or so, the odds of teaching him a new world view are not as favorable as they would have been when he was younger.

JUST DO IT!

We've arguably never lived in more dog-friendly times, which should make socializing new puppies a snap. But it's that very same modern lifestyle – with its competing demands and time-starved schedules – that can derail the best intentions. "Puppies are so much work, and I think we are creatures of 'there's always time later,'" Anderson says. "People come home, and the next thing you know, it's a six-month-old dog."

The Rules of Proper Puppy Preparation

How to practice the art and science of optimizing baby canine brains.

Cute is not the first word you reach for when describing newborn puppies. Born unable to hear or see, with smushed-in faces and twitchy little bodies, they look for all the world like diminutive aliens. Detached and distant visitors from another planet, they are in their own orbit, apparently seeking only warmth, milk, and the rough caress of their mother's tongue. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth.

From the time they are born, puppies are gathering, processing, and synthesizing huge amounts of information from the world around them. And although it is pretty well accepted that puppies need intense socialization when they leave their human caretakers for their forever homes, relatively little is said about the importance of thoughtful, consistent exposure to new stimuli in their first eight weeks of life.

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Some forward-thinking breeders have concluded that while temperament is certainly hereditary, early experience can dramatically modify brain development, stress tolerance, stability, and reactivity. The goal is to end up with really good pets!

Some forward-thinking breeders, however, have concluded that while temperament is certainly hereditary, early experience can dramatically modify brain development, stress tolerance, stability, and reactivity. Even the fundamentals of potty training, attentiveness to a handler, and a recall can be programmed at what some might consider an absurdly young age.

Longtime judge, breeder, and lecturer Pat Hastings of Aloha, Oregon, author of *Another Piece of the Puzzle: Puppy Development*, has seen firsthand the power that environment can exert over genetics. "I believe very strongly that you are born with your temperament, but you can modify behavior," she says. "I really believe that with puppies, nurture is much more important than nature. I just see so much of it."

Hastings is sought after for her puppy evaluations, in which she assesses whole litters of eight-week-olds, not just for conformation (physical structure) but also temperament. A case in point is a litter of Parson Russell Terriers she recently evaluated for a breeder who spends a great deal of effort interacting with and socializing her puppies.

In addition to her eight puppies, the breeder also brought one along that was three days older and had all the genetic background to be identical to her other puppies: The breeder had bred the puppy's mother, and the sire was all her pedigree, too. But the puppy had been whelped and reared by someone else, and hadn't been exposed to the same handling or socialization that her well-adjusted puppies had. "You would think it was a different breed," Hastings says.

While reputable breeders breed with a specific goal in mind – their next great show dog or brood bitch, that future master hunter or agility star – an overarching priority should be producing stable, tractable temperaments, regardless of a puppy's final destination. "It's very important to end up with really good pets," Hastings says.
To that end, here are some of the techniques

progressive breeders use to help maximize the neurological and behavioral development of their little explorers in fur suits. They share this common philosophy: Providing safe and fun experiences for puppies – to expand their horizons, stretch their bodies and minds, and learn that novelty brings good things – is the best investment breeders can make in their pups' first eight weeks.

NEVER TOO EARLY

Many breeders enthusiastically recommend a program of early neurological stimulation based on the "Bio Sensor" or "Super Dog" program developed by the United States military in the 1970s. (There are differing opinions about the success of the military program, and even who came up with the guidelines, but nonetheless, many breeders swear by them.) Daily from the ages of 3 to 16 days, puppies are exposed to these five exercises for three to five seconds each. All the exercises are intended to safely and briefly expose the puppy to a period of physical stress from which he can easily recover.

◆ Holding the puppy in one hand, the handler gently tickles between the pup's toes with a cotton-tipped swab.

◆ Grasping the puppy with both hands, the handler holds the puppy perpendicular to the ground (that is, with his head held upward, directly above his tail).

◆ Again holding the puppy with both hands, the handler holds the puppy upside down, with his head pointing toward the ground.

◆ The handler holds the puppy on his back in the palm of both hands, so he is permitted to sleep.

◆ Finally, the handler puts the puppy, feet down, on a damp towel that has been refrigerated for at least five minutes, but does not restrain the puppy from moving.

Breeders who do this early neurological stimulation say their puppies are better adjusted, with greater stress tolerance and reduced frustration levels when confronted with obstacles. "I have seen unbelievable results with it," Hastings adds.

This litter of Weimaraner puppies was moved into this large pen full of stimulating toys and other objects at 26 days old.

"I probably know 40 breeders who have done it to half their litter to see what the difference was – and the difference was mind-boggling."

Hastings points to her own breed, the Doberman Pinscher, as an example. "Dobes are working dogs, but they don't work in bad weather – they don't do cold or rain," she laughs. "But I have never seen a Dobe puppy whose breeder did early stimulation that had any issue with weather."

Hastings stresses, however, that breeders should not go overboard. "Too much stress can have a negative effect," she warns. If breeders embark on early neurological stimulation, it should be done only once a day, and no longer than the three to five seconds recommended.

Lise Pratt of Huntington Station, New York – a longtime agility instructor, Golden Retriever breeder, and co-founder of Avidog, a company that offers puppy coaching, among other services – advocates allowing puppies to solve their own problems, even as early as a few days old. But that can feel counterintuitive to many breeders, whose first instinct is to help newborns get to the warmth and food they need as quickly as possible.

While intervention is certainly critical for puppies who are not thriving, Pratt suggests that healthy, vigorous puppies should be given the opportunity to find a solution for themselves.

"If you think about puppies in a whelping box, and you see a puppy who isn't where he wants to be, most breeders will pick the puppy up," and place him near a nipple or the warmth of his mother, she says. "At that point, the puppy is already learning. So unless that puppy isn't well and doesn't need to burn the calories, let him learn at five days old."

Similarly, when a puppy is older and finds himself stuck in a doorway or stumped by a set of steps, resist the urge to "rescue" him, unless he is in obvious danger. Instead, Pratt recommends, give him the opportunity to solve the problem on his own – and build his confidence along the way. Some behavior professionals would argue, however, in favor of rescuing the puppy if he appears significantly stressed by his entrapment.

COMMON SENSES

In a smell-saturated variation of early neurological stimulation, at three days Pratt starts exposing her puppies to a new scent every day – tree bark, grass, herbs, fruits, spices, and training items like tennis balls and pheasant wings.

Kids who have good self-control and an interest in dogs make terrific puppy socializers. They tend to move and speak in novel and unpredictable ways, which can be both interesting and rewarding.

Linda Hartheimer of Grayhart Weimaraners in Saddle River, New Jersey, says exposing her puppies to scent this early primes them for the hunt tests in which they will eventually participate. Digging into her refrigerator for frozen duck and pheasant wings, she is amazed at how her puppies respond. "At three days old, their chests are heaving with the scent of duck," she says.

When puppies begin to hear, Pratt starts capitalizing on that sense, too, working to create a recall literally from the moment the ears open at 10 or so days old.

"When mom gets in the whelping box, we say, 'Puppy, puppy,' in a high, happy voice, or blow a whistle," she says. "When they leave us, they have a rock solid recall to both, because we start at an age when they never forget it."

Exposure to new noises is important as well: the banging of pots and pans, the whoosh of a car on a nearby street, the whine of a landscaper's leaf blower, and, of course, the roar of the vacuum.

Puppies that are raised in cathedral quiet are almost fated to startle when they encounter these sounds in their everyday lives. As background noise, Pratt plays sound-desensitization CDs from a variety of situations that the puppies will encounter later in life, such as the din of agility and obedience trials, or the sound of gunshots in the field. Commercial recordings of thunderstorms, fireworks, and city street sounds are also available.

KID POWER

Chris Walkowicz, judge, author of *Successful Dog Breeding*, and a former breeder of German Shepherd Dogs and Bearded Collies, notes that puppies and kids can be a perfect combination, especially from a breeder's point of view.

"I think everyone who breeds dogs should have kids, or rent them," she says, half-jokingly. Most children are not only interested in spending large quantities of time in the whelping box – always supervised, of course – but also inspired in their imaginative play with the puppies. Dog-savvy kids can accustom puppies to being jostled, moved, restrained, and held in all kinds of interesting posi-

tions. Children also condition their playmates to quick motions and shrill voices, provided that the interaction is always monitored and positive.

The biggest problem with children is that they inevitably grow up. In Walkowicz's case, there was a decade span between her first two children and her last two, so by the time her younger children left for college, her older ones began having grandchildren to start the cycle again. Breeders who don't have children or are empty-nesters can recruit neighborhood kids or nieces and nephews to come for frequent visits.

Another advantage to having children in the household is that their cast-off toys can be great hand-me-downs for puppies. "My kids had a plastic toddler slide that was two feet long," Walkowicz remembers. "I put that in the puppy pen, and they all loved it."

NO FLAT EARTH SOCIETY

As Walkowicz's puppies demonstrated, puppies love to climb and clamber over all kinds of obstacles. (And that includes, frustratingly for breeders, the sides of the whelping box and exercise pens used to contain them.) These verticality-craving puppies aren't mischievous – they are literally building new neural connections and wiring their brains to solve problems and be unafraid of novel things.

"I think it's really important that puppies are never raised on a flat surface," Hastings says. "We know that challenges in a puppy's environment activate a part of the brain that deals with coordination."

When puppies are very small, rolled-up towels can create obstacles that puppies learn to crawl over. Once the puppies are older and more mobile, breeders can add objects that move or shift, such as a toddler-sized seesaw or a balance board. (You can make your own board by screwing a piece of wood to a section of PVC pipe, or stapling a tennis ball inside a sock to the board.) The more stuff the better, Hastings says, so the pen becomes a "jungle" of stimuli.

In a similar effort to "literally grow puppy brains,"

A litter of Golden Retriever puppies explores an Adventure Box, a safe but stimulating puppy playground developed by Lisa Pratt and Marcy Burke of Avidog.

Avidog's Lise Pratt and her sister Marcy Burke developed the Adventure Box (see photo on this page), a 30-inch-square frame that has a variety of interesting and interactive objects dangling from it.

"I wanted to get puppies to be bold and go through something, so I made a wall of noodles," says Pratt, referring to the popular foam pool toys. Walks through the aisles of Home Depot inspired some interesting additions: empty metal paint cans, sections of garden hose, plastic funnels, and – popular among agility folks who aspire to future weave-pole stars – lengths of PVC pipe. Pratt exposes her puppies to the Adventure Box almost as soon as they can walk, depending on the individual litter.

THE RULES OF SEVEN

Pat Schaap, a Shetland Sheepdog breeder in Clarksville, Maryland, is credited for this list of experiences, people, and things that each puppy should have been exposed to by the time she reaches seven weeks old:

- **Seven different types of surfaces:** Carpet, concrete, wood, vinyl, grass, dirt, gravel, wood chips.

- **Seven different types of play objects:** Big balls, small balls, soft fabric toys, fuzzy toys, squeaky toys, paper or cardboard items, metal items, sticks or hose pieces.

◆ **Seven different locations:** Front yard, backyard, basement, kitchen, car, garage, laundry room, bathroom.

◆ **Seven new people:** Children and older adults, a person with a cane, someone in a wheelchair or walker.

◆ **Seven challenges:** Climb on a box, climb off a box, go through a tunnel, climb steps, go down steps, climb over obstacles, play hide and seek, go in and out of a doorway with a step up or down, run around a fence.

◆ **Seven different types of food containers:** Metal, plastic, cardboard, paper, china, pie plate, frying pan.

◆ **Seven different eating locations:** Crate, yard, kitchen, basement, laundry room, living room, bathroom.

Of course, seven shouldn't be a limiting number. Pratt says she exposes her Golden Retriever puppies to 100 different people before they leave at 8 1/2 weeks. But the number is probably not as important as the concept: Positively exposing puppies to novelty as early and often as possible will expand their horizons and make them more willing – eager, even – to accept change.

A key part of Pratt's socialization process for her puppies is what she calls "woods walks." At about six weeks, "when the instinct to follow starts to kick in," she and her co-breeder, Gayle Watkins, take their puppies on long walks in a nearby land trust. These jaunts not only increase proprioception – the puppies' sense of their own bodies in the larger world – but also set the groundwork for problem-solving: If a log is in the way, the humans step over it, the dam either jumps it or goes around, and the puppies are left to figure out how to follow.

"Most people have never let their dog take the responsibility of figuring out where you are," Pratt explains. "The dog never learns to make the choice." She sees this frequently in the agility ring, where dogs will take off from their handlers, with no sense of connection. By the time her puppies leave, by contrast, they are walking in the woods for an hour and a half, learning how to follow every step of the way.

POTTY TALK

Breeders can make great inroads into priming their puppies for successful housetraining long before they leave for their new homes. Step one is to ditch the newspaper and piddle pads. They're not only messy and inefficient (there is nothing grosser than a lasagna of soiled New York Times from a day's puppy pooping), but they do not teach puppies to use a designated area to relieve themselves.

"Puppies would like to be clean, and if you give them the opportunity to be, they are clean," Hastings says. "Among the easiest puppies to housebreak are those that are litter-box trained, because from day one they have always been taught to go somewhere else to pee and poop."

A popular substrate for puppy litter boxes are wood pellets, either the kind sold for use in wood-burning stoves, or as horse bedding. The compressed-wood pellets are the size of a pill capsule, chemical free, and when wet disintegrate into sawdust. If placed on the pellets every time they pee or poop, most puppies will soon associate the feel of the pellets beneath their feet with those bodily functions, and begin to seek the pellets out every time they need to eliminate. Saturated pellets and feces can be easily removed with a small plastic sand shovel, keeping odor and mess to a minimum.

THE FINAL ANALYSIS

Like breeding, raising puppies is as much art as science. It's important to amass as much knowledge as possible, and then improvise.

"After every litter, I re-evaluate and see what worked, and what needs tweaking," says Hartheimer, a special-education teacher who is fascinated by how the environment she creates literally grows and wires her impressionable puppies' brains. Then, after the puppies leave her home and venture out into the world, it's up to their new caretakers to continue the next phase of their education.

Socializing the Shy Dog

Socializing the pathologically shy dog is a challenge (but it can be worth it).

Somewhere at this very moment, perhaps at a shelter near you, a frightened dog huddles in the back of her kennel, trembling, terrified by a chaotic overload of sensory stimuli: sights, smells, and sounds that are far beyond her ability to cope. Somewhere, today, a warmhearted person is going to feel sorry for this dog – or one similar – believing that love will be enough to rehabilitate the frightened canine. Sometimes, it is. More often, though, the compassionate adopter finds herself with a much larger project than she bargained for.

While shelters can be a prime source for frightened and shy dogs, they are certainly not the only source. Pet stores, puppy mills, rescue groups, and irresponsible breeders (even some who breed top quality show dogs) can all be guilty of foisting off temperamentally unsound (due to genetics/nature) or under-socialized (due to environment/nurture) puppies and adult dogs on unprepared adopters.

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Adopt your shy pup as young as you can. The benefits of staying with his litter until eight weeks of age are outweighed by the benefits of getting started as early as possible with socialization.

This is not to say that no one should adopt a dog with fear-related behaviors. Rather, the point is that if an organization or individual is going to re-home dogs who are timid, shy, or fearful, they have a responsibility to ensure that the adopter knows how large a project she may be facing. And if you are thinking of adopting a fearful canine – or already have – you need to have access to good information to help you make a wise and informed decision, and to provide the best quality of life possible for the dog.

SENSITIVE SOUL OR SHY GUY?

In the past, I volunteered to assess dogs for adoption at our local shelter one day a week. When we got the list of dogs for the day, the first thing I did was walk through the kennels and take a quick glance at the ones we'd be working with, to get a first impression. I made a mental note of those who appeared shy, frightened, or aggressive.

Some of these we wouldn't even take out of their kennels, if we felt a dog's level of aggression or fearfulness was such that it was too great a risk to the safety of the assessor. However, I always liked to give the frightened ones an extra chance. I'd go in and sit on the kennel floor, and coax them to trust me enough to say hi. If I could safely leash them, we took them out.

A surprising percentage of these frightened dogs make a miraculous turnaround as soon as we got them outside. These were simply very sensitive dogs who were traumatized by the cacophony that can exist in any kennel environment, be it shelter, vet hospital, or boarding kennel. I like sensitive dogs; they tend to develop close relationships with their humans, make excellent companions, and do exceptionally well in training. They just don't do well in chaos. Assuming they pass the rest of the assessment process, these sensitive souls are good candidates for adoption.
If they have to sit in the shelter adoption kennels

waiting for a home, however, they won't show well – and will probably wait in that difficult environment for an excruciatingly long time. Under the constant stress of the shelter, their health and behavior are likely to deteriorate until they are no longer suitable adoption candidates. If they can be adopted quickly, or go to a foster home or rescue group where they don't have to be kenneled in chaos, their prospects for finding a lifelong loving home and leading a normal life are bright.

Far more challenging are the dogs who are truly shy due to lack of adequate socialization, poor breeding, or both. Simply taking them outside or to the relative calm of the assessment room does little to assuage their fear. Unless a shelter or rescue group has considerable resources to devote to behavior modification, or turns a blind eye and allows them to be adopted by an unsuspecting soft-hearted public, these frightened dogs are often euthanized. As long as there are far more dogs than there are homes, triage tragically dictates that the most promising adoption prospects get dibs on the available kennel space and foster homes.

FIXING THE FEAR

Not all fearful dogs are euthanized. Judging from my own clientele and discussions with my peers, plenty of shy dogs find their way to loving homes, with owners who want to give them happier lives. Caution and common sense aside, it's human nature to want to rescue the doggie in distress – the pup who shrinks away from human contact and looks at the world with fear in his eyes. If you are the rescuer type, you have my respect and admiration. Whether you came by your timid dog through a shelter, rescue, breeder, Craig's list, or rescued a frightened homeless dog off the street yourself – or are still contemplating such an adoption – rest assured that in all but the most extreme cases, you can help your dog have a reasonably normal life. Some will turn around quickly, some require a long-term commitment to management and modification, and a sad, small percentage may never be rehabilitated.

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With patience, you will likely be able to provide your shy dog with a reasonably normal life.

If you have a timid dog who is not very comfortable with you, and won't take treats easily enough for you to be able to do counter-conditioning and engage him in training, you're really starting at square one. You'll need lots of patience and very realistic expectations as you work to repair the damage caused by lack of socialization or by outright abuse. (By the way, abuse is a less-common cause of severe fearful behavior than you might think; lack of early socialization is much more common.)

You may need to spend a lot of time just sitting quietly in your dog's presence, reading a book, being as nonthreatening as possible. Keep him in a quiet room in your house. This will be a safe haven for him, so he doesn't have to deal with all the scary activity in the rest of your home.

Spend as much time as you can sitting on the floor in his room, avoiding eye contact, while keeping your body language relaxed and loose. Scatter bits of high-value treats (chicken, roast beef) on the floor around you, far enough away that your dog might be comfortable eating them while keeping a wary eye on you.

Gradually shrink the circle of treats so he comes nearer to you to get them. Sprinkle some on your pant legs when you think he's ready to come that close. Finally, rest your hand on your knee, palm up, with treats in them. Be sure not to move your hand as he's reaching for them, you'll scare him off! Sometimes while you're doing the treats-on-the-floor routine, talk to your dog in a calm, low voice,

so he becomes accustomed to hearing your voice, and associates it with tasty stuff. Gradually add more normal human behavior to the interactions. Briefly make eye contact. Move your hand a tiny bit as he's nibbling treats from it. Increase slight body movements in his vicinity. Try sitting in a chair for the scattered treat routine.

Work up to normal human behavior, always trying to avoid causing a big fear reaction in him as you increase the intensity of your presence as fear-causing stimulus. If you can, keep your interactions "sub-threshold" – below the intensity at which your dog reacts negatively. When he will take food from you, start hand-feeding all his meals.

When he's reasonably comfortable in your presence, try the umbilical cord method of relationship-building. Attach a leash to his collar and keep him with you as much as possible when you are home, as you move around the house. Until he is braver, return him to his sanctuary if you have guests over, or during periods of high family activity, but bring him out as soon as things settle down.

Try to anticipate when something will be too much for him, so you can prevent a negative reaction, instead of waiting for the reaction to tell you that it's been too much – but at the same time keep looking for ways to expand his horizons and help him become as normal - and brave - as he's capable of being.

In the end, it's all about quality of life - your dog's and yours. Perhaps you can help your shy dog become completely comfortable in the real world and lead a normal life. Perhaps you'll always be making some accommodations to help him be happy by keeping him safe at home most or all of the time. As long as you can find a way to bring light to his life, so he's not in a continual state of fear and anxiety and you're not constantly stressed by his stress, you will have done a very, very good thing.

IF YOU HAVEN'T ADOPTED YET

Here are some tips for those of you who are thinking about that shy youngster you saw at the shelter the other day, or who suspect your heart will someday be captured by the challenge of an unsocialized pup.

◆ **Get your pup as young as you can.** The benefits of staying with his litter until eight weeks of age are outweighed by the benefits of getting started as early as possible with socialization.

◆ Or, give him the best of both worlds: **Take the entire litter,** or at least several of the pups, and start them all on the road to a happier life. Then be sure to find capable, knowledgeable adopters who will continue with remedial socialization for his siblings.

◆ **Avoid the temptation to keep more than one pup.** They are likely to bond to each other more closely than to you, which makes your socialization challenge many times more difficult. Even well-socialized littermates or same-age pals can have separation problems if raised together.

◆ **Know that love is not enough.** Many well-meaning rescuers think that giving a psychologically neglected pup a home filled with love will be enough to "fix" the problem. Don't fool yourself. Love is an important part of the equation, but it will take a lot of work as well.

TRAINING TIPS FOR TIMID DOGS

Here are some tips for those who have already adopted a shy guy.

◆ **Locate a qualified positive behavior professional who can work with you** to help your dog become more comfortable in his world. Try the Pet Professional Guild (petprofessionalguild.com) or the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (iaabc.org) or Truly Dog Friendly (trulydogfriendly.com).

◆ **Have a solid understanding of counter-conditioning and desensitization** (CC&D), and make a strong commitment to practice this with your dog every single day.

◆ **Read about the Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) procedure** and consult with your behavior professional to determine if this procedure might be a useful behavior modification tool in your dog's program.

◆ **Teach your dog to target** (to touch his nose to a designated target on cue). Dogs get confident

about targeting (most love it!), and you can use the behavior to help him be more confident in situations where he's mildly to moderately fearful.

◆ **Assertively protect your dog from unwanted advances** by well-meaning strangers who want to pet your dog. You must not let people pet or harass him until he is socialized enough to tolerate petting and harassment.

◆ **Be prepared for heartache.** Some poorly socialized dogs respond well to remedial socialization and grow into reasonably well socialized adult dogs. Others don't.

If you don't succeed in enhancing your dog's social skills, are you prepared to live with a fearful dog who may be at high risk for biting – you, visitors, children, or others? To implement a strict management program to protect him from unwelcome human attention and protect humans from his defensive aggression? Perhaps even make the difficult decision to euthanize, if you decide at some point that his life is too stress-filled to be humane?

MANAGEMENT FOR SHY GUYS

Remember, training is important, but it's not the only way to solve dog behavior problems. Consider some of the following dog-management plans:

◆ Manage your dog's environment to minimize his exposure to stressors until he's ready and able to handle them.

◆ Try Comfort Zone (containing "dog appeasing pheromones") to see if it helps ease his anxiety. If it seems to, keep a Comfort Zone dispenser plugged into a wall socket in your dog's sanctuary room – out of his reach if he's a chewer – and use the spray on a bandana around his neck when you take him out of his safe zone.

◆

◆ Consider trying an Anxiety Wrap, a snug-fitting garment designed to give your dog that calming "swaddled" feeling. Or try the economic alternative, fitting him with a snug T-shirt. See "It's a Wrap!"

◆ Try a Calming Cap when you must expose your dog to super-threshold visual stimuli. Similar to the hood that falconers use to keep their birds from being overstimulated, the cap is made of a sheer nylon that allows dogs to see shapes but not detail, thus reducing the intensity of visual stimuli. Premier Pet Products (premier.com) makes the Calming Cap.

◆ Use your hands to help your dog relax through the use of TTouch or other calming massage. For more information on TTouch, see lindatellington-jones.com.

◆ Consider the use of aromatherapy in conjunction with TTouch or massage. If you use a lavender aromatherapy product while you massage your dog, you can then use the scent of lavender in other potentially stressful situations to help your dog maintain his cool. His association between the scent and being calm can transfer to other places.

◆ Ask your veterinarian about the use of other agents such as calming herbs to help your dog deal with difficult situations, or even the possibility of medication. Manty fearful dogs can benefit greaty from prescription anti-anxiety medications. If your vet is not behaviorally knowledgable, ask him or her to consult with a veterinary behaviorist for help in selectiong the right medication(s) and correct dosages.

The Realities of Doggy Daycare

It can be a wonderful experience, but is it appropriate for every dog?

The term "doggie daycare" has become a panacea in recent years for all manner of canine behavioral ills. Does your dog engage in destructive chewing? Nuisance barking? Rude greetings? Poor canine social skills? Mouthing and biting? Separation anxiety? Just send him to doggie daycare, and all will be well. You hope.

I'll admit I'm as guilty as the next trainer of suggesting a daycare solution for a huge percentage of my behavior consult clients. The fact is, many of today's canine companions suffer from a significant lack of exercise, stimulation, and social time with their own kind. A good daycare provider can go a long way toward meeting those needs. But daycare is not the one-size-fits-all answer that we would like it to be; there are many factors to take into consideration before enrolling your dog in your friendly neighborhood doggie hangout.

WHO SHOULDN'T GO TO DAYCARE

Unfortunately, not all dogs are appropriate daycare candidates. Just because they are a social species doesn't mean all dogs get along with each other. Humans are a social species and we certainly don't all get along! It's important that you honestly evaluate your dog's personality and behavior to determine if he has the potential to do well at daycare. If he plays well with others, is comfortable and confident in public, and doesn't mind being separated from you, then daycare may be a fine choice. If any of those are questionable, you will need to proceed with care.

If your dog doesn't enjoy interacting with other dogs, he'll likely find daycare a very unpleasant experience, and his dislike of dogs will probably get worse.

When the planets are aligned just so – with a well-managed, highly trained staff and a perfect set of playmates – some dogs who are mildly fearful of other dogs may develop greater social skills and ease around their own kind. But many a dog-fearful dog has become reactive-aggressive as a result of being forced into proximity with other canines. Total immersion in dogdom is not an appropriate behavior modification or management plan for a dog who is intimidated by his own kind. Many dogs simply become less dog-playful as they mature, and a day at doggie daycare is not the fun party for them we imagine it is. Of course, geriatric dogs and those with medical conditions should not be asked to endure the rough-and-tumble play of dogs at a daycare center.

Play groups should be comprised of dogs who are compatible in size, age, and play style, and all the dogs should appear to enjoy themselves.

Undersocialized dogs who are environmentally fearful and/or afraid of humans also do not belong at puppy playschool. While a dog who was rescued from a puppy mill or a hoarder may feel more comfortable in the presence of a group of dogs because that's what he knows, he can be difficult, perhaps even dangerous, for staff to handle. If something should happen – he escapes, or is injured and in need of treatment – the situation goes from bad to worse. The escapee will be impossible to catch, and is likely to head out in a beeline for parts unknown. A fearful dog who must be cornered and restrained by strangers for treatment in an already high-stress environment is very likely to bite, perhaps with alarming ferocity as he struggles to protect himself from what he may perceive as his impending death.

A canine bully or any dog who is otherwise offensively aggressive toward other dogs is also not an appropriate daycare attendee. Don't think sending him to daycare will teach him how to play well with others. It's more likely to do the exact opposite! He'll find it quite reinforcing to have the opportunity to practice his inappropriate bullying or aggressive behavior – and behaviors that are reinforced invariably increase and strengthen.

While other pups frisk and play during a socialization session, this fearful youngster plants himself as close to the exit as he can manage, and averts his eyes from the other puppies and people – signs that he needs extra work on socialization.

Finally, dogs who suffer from separation anxiety are often horrible candidates for daycare. Owners of dogs with separation anxiety often hope their dogs will relax in the company of other dogs and humans, and trainers often suggest daycare as a solution for the dog who is vocal or destructive when left alone. But if your dog is at the extreme end of the separation-distress/anxiety continuum, sending him to daycare doesn't make him any happier, and only makes those who have to spend the day with him (canine and human) stressed as well. True separation anxiety – in which the dog has a panic attack if separated from the one human he has super-bonded to – is not eased by the presence of other dogs or humans.

Less severe manifestations of isolation/separation distress may be alleviated by a daycare provider. Be honest with your prospective provider about your dog's separation-related behavior, and see if she's willing to give it a try. Be ready to celebrate if it works, and look for another solution if it doesn't.

PERFECT CANDIDATES

In contrast, if your dog loves to play with others, doesn't have significant medical problems that would preclude active play, and has energy to spare, he's the ideal candidate for doggie daycare. This professional service, offered by a high-quality provider, is the perfect answer to many a dog owner's prayers.

Perhaps you have a friendly, active young dog, and you just don't have the time you would like to devote to his exercise and social exposure. You come home exhausted from a grueling day at work and he greets you with a huge grin on his face, his wagging tail clearly begging for a hike in the woods or an extended session of ball-retrieve. If you don't exercise him you risk the emergence of inappropriate behaviors such as chewing, but you are just too tired, and you have to work on

a project, due tomorrow. Daycare, even one or two times a week, can be the perfect outlet for his boundless energy, give him the social and dog-play time he covets, and relieve you of the oppressive guilt of not being able to take him for that hike.

You may not know whether your dog is an appropriate daycare candidate until you show up for your interview and the staff assesses your dog. Note: if the facility you're considering accepts your dog without an assessment, look for another provider. Even if your dog passes the assessment, daycare staff may advise you after a visit or two that your dog is stressed and not enjoying his play experience there. If that's the case, you remove him from daycare, and/or inquire about possible behavior modification programs to help him have more fun at dog play.

BE CHOOSY

One of the pitfalls of suggesting daycare to clients is the dearth of high-quality providers in most areas. If you are considering sending your canine pal off to a professional dog-sitting facility for the day, you want to be confident that he'll be as safe and happy in their hands as he is in yours. You should see each prospective provider's facility (preferably when dogs are present), and talk to its manager and staff.

You may need to make an appointment in order to get the best tour of a daycare facility. There are times (especially in the morning during peak drop-off hours and in the afternoon during peak pick-up hours) when it will be extremely difficult to spare a staff member to show you around. Call ahead and ask when it would be best to see the facility.

As you visit facilities and interview managers and staff, observe the dogs that are present in the daycare centers. They should appear happy, not stressed. Staff should also appear happy, not stressed, and be interacting with the dogs. The environment should be calm and controlled, not chaotic, and your take-away impression should be one of professional competence as well as genuine caring for dogs. Trust your instincts. If anything doesn't seem right, don't leave your dog

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Be sure to find out the daycare's vaccination protocol to be sure your puppy won't be exposed to unvaccinated dogs.

there. If staff says you cannot observe the dogs, we suggest walking away.

One of the most important things to ask about is the dog to staff ratio. This can range from 10 dogs or fewer per staff person to as many as 20 or more dogs per caretaker. "Obviously, the fewer dogs per person, the more closely supervised your dog is likely to be, and the less likely any canines are to get into trouble," says Robin Bennett, one-time co-owner of All About Dogs Daycare in Woodbridge, Virginia.

Cost is also an important factor, but don't select your provider by cost alone; neither the lowest-priced nor the highest-priced facility may be suitable for your dog. Depending on where you live and the specifics of the facility, cost per day can range from a few dollars to $40 or more per day. Facility specifics vary. "The daycare may be operated out of a private home or a multi-staffed, full-service facility," says Bennett. "Multi-staffed facilities are naturally costlier, but can offer a much wider range of services to meet the needs of individual dogs."

Speaking of services: In a full-service facility,

@Mladen Sladojevic/Getty Images

If the daycare is going to offer your dog any treats, be sure to ask what kind and how often.

trained staff members keep the dogs busy with indoor or outdoor play, or even, in some cases, happily munching snacks and watching movies made just for the entertainment of dogs. Activities might include hide and seek, tag, or anything that canine minds can come up with. Many facilities provide a variety of toys and balls to enjoy, and some even have swimming pools! Some also offer training, from good manners to agility and more. Good daycare centers also include rest time so dogs don't get over-stimulated by having too much fun. Other things to ask about include:

◆ What is the assessment process? If they don't assess, run away fast. If they do, be sure you're comfortable with the things they tell you they will be doing with your dog, before you let them do it.

◆ What vaccinations do they require? Make sure you're comfortable with the requirements. Don't compromise your dog's physical health by over-vaccinating or administering unnecessary shots just to satisfy daycare. If they ask for vaccinations you'd prefer not to give your dog, see if they'll accept a letter from your veterinarian stating that in her opinion your dog is adequately protected.

◆ How do they determine appropriate play groups? Your Maltese should not be in a play group with a Great Dane, or vice versa. Nor should a body-slamming adult Labrador be playing with a space-sensitive Border Collie puppy. If you get the proper answer (play style, size, and age) make sure your observations of the groups playing support their answer.

"To minimize risk of injury, dogs should be separated based on play style, size, and age," says Bennett. "Keep in mind that accidents and injuries can happen in all facilities. Dog daycare is like a child's playground, and by allowing dogs to play together there is a risk of injury. Collars can present a hazard during dog play, but dogs without collars have no visible identification. Discuss this conundrum with your potential provider to see how they handle it, and be sure you are comfortable that escape risks are minimal at the facility. You should see multiple doors within the facility to the playrooms and secure high fences around outdoor play yards."

◆ Do they feed the dogs treats? If so, are the treats a type and quality that is compatible with your dog's diet – especially if he has allergies or you are committed to high quality foods? Can you provide your own treats to give him, and if you do, can they ensure he gets your treat and not the others? If you ask them to refrain from feeding treats, or limit the amount, will they?

◆ What kind of dog handling and behavior training does the staff receive? What training books and authors do they recommend? What tools do they use? Staff members should be reading books by the growing list of positive, science-based author-trainers. If dominance-based television celebrities are held in high regard, run away fast.

◆ How frequent are serious incidents, requiring staff intervention, of inappropriate behavior between dogs? These should be rare. If they happen more than a few times a year, the facility has a serious problem.

◆ How do they deal with incidents involving inappropriate behavior between dogs? Incidents

should be defused by separating dogs calmly, only using physical tools such as water, loud noises, blankets, and boards if absolutely necessary. Squirt bottles and noise aversives should not be routine management tools. Verbal and physical punishments, including shock collars, are totally and completely unacceptable. There should be planned debriefings after an incident occurs to determine what went wrong and prevent a recurrence. Solutions include putting dogs in different play groups, or asking offenders not to return unless and until adequate behavior modification has been implemented.

◆ What if a dog is injured? Do they have a regular consulting veterinarian who is available during all daycare business hours? If not, is there an emergency clinic available? Will they transport to your veterinarian if that's your preference? Who pays the vet bill?

The provider should notify you immediately if your dog is seriously injured, either by another dog or some other physical mishap, and honor your preference for veterinary care if at all possible. There are reasonable arguments on both sides of the "who pays" question, but you should be aware in advance of their policies so you're not surprised.

◆ Has a dog ever escaped? If so, how did it happen, and what have they done to prevent future escapes?

◆ Has any staff ever been bitten by a dog? If so, what were the circumstances? Was the bite reported to authorities? (In many jurisdictions, all dog bites are technically required to be reported, but often are not unless they are serious enough to require medical attention.) If your dog bites and is reported, he will likely have to be quarantined for a period of time (often 10 days) and the incident may trigger "dangerous dog" legal proceedings. Bites can happen. But if the facility you're considering has a history of lots of dog bites, there's a serious problem.

LIMITED OPTIONS IN YOUR AREA?

If you don't live in a relatively affluent urban area, daycare providers can be hard to find. Word of mouth is a powerful tool; ask all your dog-owning friends and your dog-care professionals if they can refer you to a good facility. Search the Internet, starting with the website for the Pet Care Services Association at petcareservices.org or (877) 570-7788. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau and your local Animal Control agency, to see if there have been complaints or problems with the providers you're considering. If choices in your community are limited, you're better off passing up the daycare opportunity than choosing to leave your dog in the hands of a sub-standard care-provider.

Other alternatives to professional daycare include arranging play dates with dogs your dog already knows and loves; using social media to connect with other owners in your area who may be looking for dog-play opportunities; asking your dog-care professionals (trainer, vet, groomer) if they have clients who may be interested in having their dogs play with yours; and asking friends, family members, and neighbors who have dogs of their own if they might be up for small-scale daycare duty.

The benefits of dog play are numerous, and it's well worth the effort to find a professional facility that can help your dog be as happy, well-rounded, and well-exercised as he deserves to be. If no daycare facilities exist in your area and you happen to have the skills and interest, you could think about starting one yourself!

Building Up Your Dog's Confidence

How to help your timid puppy or dog find courage.

There are a lot of things in our world that have the potential to frighten our dogs. How is it that some dogs deal with these stimuli without batting an eye, while others cower behind their owners with little or no apparent provocation? The Cowardly Lion in the Wizard of Oz seems to say it all in one simple word: "Courage!" But it's really not so simple. Why do some dogs seem to be consistently brave, while others are timid? Even more important, absent Dorothy and a wizard, how does one go about helping their timid dog get brave?

We've written (a lot!) in the past about using counter-conditioning and desensitization to help dogs change their association with fear-causing stimuli in order to change their emotional response. That's still good information, and I urge you to review the article to refresh your understanding of that important behavior modification protocol. This article, however, is going to introduce you to several other complementary exercises you can do in addition to counter-conditioning, to help your timid dog learn to cope with a scary world.

This Aussie – hiding behind his owner, ears back, worried expression on his face – could benefit from some confidence building. Giving him something easy and fun to do would help distract him from what's making him anxious.

Some of the exercises that follow we've introduced in other training contexts. Some come in the "change behavior to change emotional response" category by doing fun stuff your dog loves; some have more to do with management; and some do both. If you've already taught some of these to your dog it will be easy to apply them in situations where he's acting fearful. If you haven't already taught them, there's no time like the present!

BASIC GOOD MANNERS TRAINING

You don't have to do a lot of fancy stuff to help your dog become more confident in his world. Simply teaching him basic good manners – to respond appropriately to your cues – will make his environment more predictable. It builds confidence to understand what you're asking of him, and to understand the consequences of his behavior. Of course it goes without saying that you will use positive reinforcement-based training with him so the consequences are happy ones. Nothing can destroy a timid dog's confidence faster than the application of verbal or physical punishment; this will convince him he's right to think the world is a scary and unpredictable place.

Combine his positive reinforcement good manners training with structure in his routine and stability in his life and you will have taken a large step toward increasing his confidence. But of course, you want to do more to help your dog get brave. Happily, you can do that simply by doing fun stuff with him, such as:

■ TARGETING

Targeting means teaching your dog to touch a designated body part to a designated target. That description doesn't do it justice; targeting is tons of fun! Many dogs love targeting, partly because it's easy to do, and partly because it pays off well – "push the button (the target spot), get a treat."

Offer your hand, then click and treat when the dog sniffs it. Targeting is a useful exercise to teach to keep your dog happy and focused on you in the presence of a scary stimulus.

Since dogs naturally explore the world with their noses and paws, nose and foot targeting are the two easiest. Nose-targeting draws your dog's eye-contact and attention from a worrisome stimulus to a pleasant one, so that's the one I find most useful for timid dogs, although foot-targeting can work too.

It's an embarrassingly simple behavior to teach. Hold out your hand in front of your dog, at nose level or below. When he sniffs it (because he's curious!), click your clicker (or use a verbal marker, such as a mouth click or a word) and feed him a treat. Remove your hand, then offer it again. Each time he sniffs, click and treat. If he stops sniffing (boring – I've already sniffed that!), rub a little tasty treat on your palm, to make your hand smell intriguing, and try again.

You're looking for that wonderful "light bulb" moment – when he realizes he can make you click and treat by bumping his nose into your hand. His "touch" behavior becomes deliberate, rather than incidental to sniffing your hand. When you see him deliberately bumping his nose into your hand, add the "Touch!" cue as you offer your hand to him. Encourage him with praise and high-value treats. Make it a game, so he thinks it's the most fun in the world. You want to see his eyes light up when you say "Touch," and you want him to "bonk" his nose into your hand, hard! Start offering your hand in different places so he has to move to touch it, climb on something to touch it, jump up to touch it.

When he loves the touch game, occasionally ask him to touch twice; tell him he's a good dog after the first one, and click and treat only the second one. Gradually decrease your rate of reinforcement, until he'll touch several times before he gets his click and treat. Then click and treat several in a row. Mix it up, so he never knows when the click will happen – but the click and treat always happen eventually!

Now try playing touch when your dog is a little bit nervous about something. Scary man with a beard and sunglasses passing by on the sidewalk? Hold out your hand and say "Touch!" so that your dog takes his eyes – and his brain – away from the scary thing and happily bonks his nose into your hand. Click and treat. He can't be afraid of the man and happy about touching your hand at the same time. He also can't look at the target and stare at the scary man at the same time.

Ask him to touch several more times, until the man has passed, and then continue on your walk. If you do this every time he sees a scary man, he'll decide that men with beards and sunglasses are good because they make the touch game happen! By changing your dog's behavior – having him do something he loves rather than acting fearful – you can manage a scary encounter, and eventually change his emotional response to and association with something previously scary to him.

FIND IT!

Like targeting, "Find it" is a behavior many dogs learn to love, and another game you can play to change your dog's behavior in the presence of a fear-causing stimulus, eventually changing his emotional response. This is also another ridiculously easy and delightful game that any dog can play.

Start with your dog in front of you, and a handful of tasty treats behind your back. Say "Find it!" in a cheerful tone of voice and toss one treat a few feet to your left. When your dog gets to the treat, click

Say "Find it!" Toss a treat. Your dog eats it. Training doesn't get any easier than this. Don't dismiss the exercise as too simplistic. Imagine if someone was tossing $20 bills; you'd enjoy that game!

just before he eats it. When he comes back to you say "Find it!" again and toss a second treat a few feet to your right. Click – and he eats the treat. Do this back and forth, until your dog is easily moving from one "find it" treat to the other. Then toss them farther each time until your dog happily runs back and forth.

Now if a scary skateboarder appears while you're walking your dog around the block, play the find it game, keeping the tossed treats close to you. Your dog will take his eyes off the scary thing and switch into happy-treat mode. You've changed his emotions by changing his behavior.

Targeting and find it can also work to walk your timid dog past a scary, stationary object, like a manhole cover, or a noisy air-conditioning unit. Play touch and treat as you walk past, or toss find it treats on the ground ahead of you and slightly away from the scary thing, to keep him moving happily forward.

EMERGENCY ESCAPE

An emergency escape game gives you a "run away" strategy when you know an approaching stimulus will be too much for your worried dog. However, because you've taught it to your dog as a fun game, he's not running away in panic; he's just playing one of his favorite "get brave" games that just happens to move him farther away from the scary thing.

Teach this game to your dog in a safe, comfortable environment when he's not being afraid of something. As you are walking with him on-leash, say your "Run away!" cue, then turn around and run fast, encouraging your dog to romp with you for a squeaky toy, a ball, a handful of high value treats at the end of the run, or a rousing game of tug – whatever your dog loves most. The key to success with this exercise is convincing your dog that the "run away" cue is the predictor of wonderful fun and games. Again, you're teaching him a new, fun behavior – "Run away!" – that you can use to change his emotional response in a scary moment.

PLAY

You can use any behavior your dog already loves – a trick, a toy, a game, anything that lights up his face – to convince him that good things happen in the presence of something scary. If he loves to roll over, ask him to do that. If he delights in snagging tossed treats out of the air, do that. High five? Crawl? Do those.

The key to making any of these games work to help your dog be brave is to be sure you keep him far enough away from the scary thing, at first, that his brain is able to click in to "play" mode. You will always be more successful if you start the games when you see low levels of stress, rather than waiting until he's in full meltdown.

If he's too stressed or fearful, he won't be able to play. If he'll start to play with you while the scary thing is at a distance, you'll be able to move closer. If he stops playing and shuts down, you've come too close. Depending on your dog and how fearful he is, you may find some of these play-strategies work well enough to walk him past scary stimuli the first time you try, or you may have to work up to it.

GET BEHIND

"Get behind" is more of a management strategy. Timid dogs often try to hide when they're afraid. If you teach your dog a cue that means "hide behind me," your "body shield" can help him get through scary moments. To teach this behavior:

(1) Have your dog in front of you, with an ample

Your dog's happy association with the "run away fast" game gives you a great emergency-escape tool to use when you need to make a fast, graceful exit!

supply of small, high-value treats in your treat pouch, or in a bowl on a nearby table.
(2) Say "Get behind!" and lure your dog behind you and into a sit. Click and treat.
(3) Repeat several times, until he lures easily into position.
(4) Now say the cue and pause, to give him a chance to think about it and respond. If he moves even slightly, click, lure him into position, and treat. A tentative movement is sometimes a question to you – "Is this what you want?" If you answer with a hearty "Click (Yes!!)" and treat, you can move the training forward more quickly.
(5) Keep repeating the cue/pause, gradually reducing how much you lure, until he's moving into position on his own when you give the cue.

Alternatively, you can shape the "get behind" behavior by clicking and treating small movements toward your final goal.

You can start applying this strategy in real-life situations early on in the training, even if before your dog fully grasps the concept, simply by luring him into his safe position as the scary thing passes.

TREAT AND RETREAT

"Treat and retreat" is a procedure to help timid dogs get brave. Its development is attributed to two well-known trainers: Dr. Ian Dunbar, veterinary behaviorist and founder of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers, of Berkeley, California; and Suzanne Clothier, who trains in St. Johnsville, New York. While Dr. Dunbar claims credit for introducing the concept, Clothier is generally credited with popularizing the procedure under the "Treat and Retreat" appellation.

To use treat and retreat, start with your dog a safe distance from a person who worries him. Have that person toss a piece of low-value kibble over your dog's head. Your dog will turn and walk away to get the kibble, then turn back to look at the scary person. When he turns back, have the person toss a high-value treat in front of the dog, in the approximate place the dog was originally. (You may want to use some kind of marker to help your tossing-person's aim.)

When the dog comes forward and eats the high-value treat, have the person toss another low-value treat behind the dog, then another high-value treat in the original spot. As your dog gets more relaxed about coming forward for the high-value treat, have the tosser gradually decrease the distance, so the dog is going closer to the scary person to eat the treat. If you see increased signs

Thanks to Sarah Richardson, CPDT-KA, CDBC, of The Caninfor demonstrating these games with foster dog, Charlie.

The "get behind" game establishes you as a human safety shield for your dog. It's good to use when you are unable to escape the proximity of something that might otherwise scare your dog.

of reluctance with the decreased distance, you've decreased the distance too quickly. Go as slowly as necessary to keep your dog happy about this game; you want him moving toward the person tossing the treats happily and voluntarily.

ALPHABET SOUP: CAT/BAT/IAT

In addition to counter-conditioning, there are other well-developed protocols available to help timid dogs gain confidence. We've written about the Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) at length.

CAT, developed by Kellie Snider and Dr. Jesus Rosales Ruiz at the University of North Texas, uses operant conditioning and shaping (dog does deliberate behavior to operate on his environment) to convince a dog that his old behavior, in this case acting fearful, no longer works to make a scary thing go away. In the presence of a scary stimulus, the smallest sign of relaxation or confidence now makes the scary thing go away – until the dog learns that acting confident (and becoming confident as a result) is a better behavior strategy.

BAT is similar to CAT in some ways, but focuses on having your dog move away from the scary stimulus rather than having the scary thing move away from the dog. Developed by Grisha Stewart, CPDT-KA, CTP, of Seattle, Washington, BAT uses desensitization together with a functional reward for calm behavior. You begin at a distance where your dog can see the fear-causing stimulus (scary man with beard) without reacting to it. When your dog offers any form of calm body language you move away from the bearded man as the functional reward.

BAT defines "functional reward," as "what your dog wants to happen in that moment." In the case of a fearful dog, what the dog wants is for the scary thing to be farther away. According to Stewart, a good functional reward for a dog's calm behavior can be to move away from the scary thing. Similar to CAT, if you teach your dog that calm behavior makes scary things get farther away, your dog will learn to be calm, confident, and not fearful in the presence of those things.

A newer version of BAT simply has you keep your dog on a long leash at a sub-threshold distance from the stimulus until he habituates to its presence, then gradually move closer as his behavior and body language tell you he ready to do so.

LAT stands for "Look At That" – a protocol developed by Leslie McDevitt, CPDT-KA, CDBC, author of Control Unleashed, at her training center outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In LAT, the key is to keep your dog below threshold (quiet and calm) while teaching him to look at a scary stimulus, then rewarding him for looking at it. To train LAT, click and reward your dog the second he looks at the bearded man, as long your dog doesn't react adversely. If your dog is too close to threshold with the scary stimulus at any distance, start with a neutral target and click as soon as he looks at it. When your dog is offering a quick glance toward the target, name it "Look!"

Your dog will quickly start to look at his scary triggers when you give the "Look!" cue, and turn back to you for a reward. If your dog does not turn quickly, he's probably too close to or over his threshold. Increase the distance between you and the bearded man and try again. Gradually decrease distance as your dog learns to do the "Look!" game with things that are worrisome to him.

Many of the above games and strategies are compatible with each other. CAT and BAT tend to be mutually exclusive because one moves the dog away from the scary thing, while the other moves the scary thing away from the dog. Other than that, the more of the above strategies you apply, the more tools you'll have at your disposal to help your dog cope with fear-causing stimuli in his world, and the more confident he'll become.

Bully For You!

What you should do when faced with a canine bully.

Bullying – an inappropriate canine behavior – is often misidentified as "dominance." Much has been discussed in the dog world about dominance, but the short version of the discussion is that, while dominance is a correct term for a very narrow selection of *appropriate* social behaviors, it is *not* a correct term for a wide range of *inappropriate* social behaviors that include bullying and aggression.

Although the "bully" term isn't found in most behavior literature, in her excellent book, *Fight!,* trainer and author Jean Donaldson defines bullying dogs – not to be confused with "Pit Bull-type dogs" – as those dogs for whom "roughness and harassment of non-consenting dogs is quite obviously reinforcing." Like the human bully on the school playground, the bully dog gets a kick out of tormenting less-assertive members of his playgroup. Donaldson says, "They engage at it full tilt, with escalating frequency, and almost always direct it at designated target dogs."

Target dogs are most likely to be those who are non-assertive and quickly offer exaggerated appeasement signals. Appeasement signals are meant to cut off another dog's overly assertive behavior, but with bullies, it just seems to egg on the bullying behavior.

Like all behavior, bullying is a combination of genetics and environment. A dog who becomes a bully is born with a genetic predisposition to be reinforced by another dog's appeasing response to his socially overbearing behavior, just as a Border Collie finds it reinforcing to chase things that move, or a Lab is reinforced by holding things in his mouth.

If a pup or a young dog has an opportunity to test a bully behavior strategy on another pup or dog who offers a satisfyingly appeasing response,

@Ivan Marjanovic/Getty Images

It can be hard for some people to differentiate between dogs playing and dogs fighting.

the behavior has been reinforced and the bully-to-be is more likely to attempt the behavior again, perhaps more forcefully (inappropriately) the next time. If, however, his early attempts at bullying are ignored, or squashed by a more assertive response from his intended targets, the bully behavior may never develop. Hence, bullying, like other undesirable behaviors, is easiest to modify early on, before the dog has a long reinforcement history for the behavior.

PLAYING VS. BULLYING

It can be difficult for some owners to differentiate between appropriate rough play and bullying. Some may think that perfectly acceptable play behavior is bullying because it involves growling, biting, and apparently pinning the playmate to the ground. Appropriate play can look and sound quite ferocious. The difference is in the response of the playmate.

If *both* dogs appear to be having a good time and no one's getting hurt, it's usually fine to allow the play to continue. Thwarting your dog's need to play by stopping him every time he engages another dog in rough-but-mutually-agreeable play, can lead to other behavior problems, including aggression, from the frustration of not being able to fulfill his desire for social interaction.

I recently saw a couple for a private consult who

had added a third dog to their happy family, and now everyone was miserable. The wife was stressed because she thought the dogs were playing too roughly; the husband was stressed because he thought the dogs should be allowed to play together; the senior dog (10 years old) was stressed because he didn't like the new young upstart (1 year old) playing with *his* canine pal (5 years old); and the two younger dogs were stressed because they weren't being allowed to play together.

I watched the two younger dogs interact while the husband kept the elder out of the mix. Their play was lovely to watch. Rough, yes, with lots of "chew-face," growling, and body-slamming, but perfectly appropriate. Both dogs were fully engaged in play, and each chose to come back and re-engage. After a full 90 minutes of non-stop play, they finally ended the session of their own accord and lay happily panting on the floor, at which point the senior dog, who was indeed very tense about the high-energy play session, was also able to relax. So was the wife.

I reassured the couple that there was no bullying happening here, and that they were fortunate the two younger dogs would be able to play together regularly. What a great way to provide exercise for the young, energetic dogs! Over time, the intensity of their play would likely diminish somewhat, as they were allowed to "get it out of their system." A bigger challenge was the senior

ROUGH PLAY DOES NOT EQUAL BULLYING

Looks fearsome and terrible, doesn't it? It's actually not. These two young dogs are having a great (and reciprocal) game of bite-face.

Here's a clue: *Both* dogs take their turn at the bottom of the pile, flinging themselves down on the ground and inviting the other to "attack."

More clues: When one dog starts to lose interest in the game, the other dog actively tries to re-engage the tired or bored one, who says . . .

If there is a size or age disparity, it may appear that one dog is getting bullied, but if she repeatedly initiates play, she's probably fine.

BE ALERT FOR SIGNS OF BULLYING

Otto played nicely with the dog above, so we won't worry about him with this puppy, right? Wrong. Different play partners can trigger different behaviors and play styles.

The puppy initially wanted to play, though she apparently thought it prudent to take an appeasing posture on her back. To his credit, Otto is biting her *very* gently.

The puppy soon wilts under Otto's intense attention. Her flicking tongue and rolling eyes signal her distress. He may be gentle, but his intensity is too much for her.

The puppy keeps trying to appease Otto with a lowered posture and averted eyes. Without intervention, even these mild experiences could make her fearful of big dogs.

dog. They would need to remove him from the play area when the other two were playing, and/or implement a behavior modification counter-conditioning program to help the elder dog become comfortable with the younger dogs' play.

MODIFYING BULLY BEHAVIOR

If you do have a dog who is bullying others, you may be able to successfully modify the behavior, especially if you start young. If not, you will need to always manage his behavior by selecting playmates for him who don't fall into the "target" category. Successful modification of bullying behavior requires:

- Skilled application of intervention tools and techniques: Use leashes, long lines, "no-reward markers" (NRMs), and time-outs to prevent and remove reinforcement for inappropriate play behavior.
- Excellent timing of intervention: Prompt application of NRMs and time-outs will let your dog know exactly what behavior makes the fun stop.
- Reinforcement for appropriate behavior: Allow play to continue or resume when the bullying dog is calm and can play nice.
- Selection of appropriate play partners: Dogs who are not intimidated or traumatized by bullying behavior, and who don't take offense by fighting back, may be appropriate playmates for bullies.

The most appropriate human intervention for bullying is the use of negative punishment, in which the dog's behavior makes a good thing go away. Negative punishment, in this case a time-out, works best for bullying behavior in conjunction with a "no-reward maker" (NRM) or "punishment" marker.

The opposite of the clicker (or other reward marker, such as the word "Yes!"), the NRM tells the dog, "*That* behavior made the good stuff go away!" With bullying, the good stuff is the opportunity to play with the other dog. Just as the clicker or other reward marker *always* means a treat is coming, the NRM *always* means the good stuff goes away; it's *not* to be used repeatedly as a threat or warning!

My preferred NRM, the one I teach and use if/when necessary, is the word "Oops!" rather than the word "No!" The word "No!" is often used by dog owners to deliberately shut down behavior. It's also usually delivered firmly or harshly – and unfortunately, often followed by physical punishment. In contrast, "Oops!" simply means, "You made a wrong behavior choice; the good stuff is going away." Deliver your NRM in a cheerful or neutral, non-punitive tone of voice; your intent is not to intimidate your dog with the no-reward marker. Thus my choice of "Oops!" – it's almost impossible to say the word harshly. Try it!

Timing is just as important with your NRM as it is with your reward marker. It says, "Whatever you were doing the exact instant you heard the 'Oops!' is what earned the time-out." You'll use it the *instant* your dog starts bullying. Then grasp his leash or drag-line (a long, light line attached to his collar) and calmly remove him from play. Don't repeat the NRM. Give him at least 20 seconds to calm down, more if he needs it, then release him to go play again. If several time-outs don't dampen the behavior even slightly, make them longer and make sure he's calm prior to returning to play. If a half-dozen time-outs have absolutely no effect, end the play session for the day. If the NRM *does* stop the bullying, thank your dog for responding, and allow him to continue playing under direct supervision as his reward.

Another approach to bully modification requires access to an appropriate "neutral dog" who is confident enough to withstand the bully's assault without being traumatized or responding with inappropriate aggression in return. A flash of the pearly whites as a warning is fine. A full-out dogfight is not. It's important to watch closely during interactions with the bully. Any sign the neutral dog is becoming unduly stressed by the encounters should bring the session to a halt.

A neutral dog may be able to modify your bully's behavior, and have it transfer to other dogs – or not. If not, you may be able to find one or two sturdy, neutral dogs who can be your dog's play companions, and leave the softer dogs to gentler playpals. Not all dogs get along with all other dogs – and that's perfectly normal.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR DOG IS THE VICTIM OF A BULLY

So, what should you do if your dog is the victim of a canine bully? Intervene, by all means. Here are some of the signs to look for that tell you that you need to step in and break up the interaction. Your dog:

- ✔ **tries to get away or hides behind you, or behind chairs;**
- ✔ **offers appeasement behaviors (ears back, squinty eyes, lowered body posture, rolls on her back, urinates) to signal the other dog to back off;**
- ✔ **snaps at the other dog when his appeasement signals are ignored;**
- ✔ **doesn't offer to re-engage if there is a pause in the action;**
- ✔ **just doesn't look like he's enjoying himself.**

If you see any of these signs when your dog is interacting with another, step in and separate the dogs. Give both dogs a time-out to let arousal levels settle. If your dog was enjoying himself for a while but then became overwhelmed, you might try letting them play again. Watch closely. If the other dog starts to become inappropriate again, stop the play before your dog shows signs of discomfort. Give both dogs another time out, and try again.

Over time, the bully may learn that play stops every time he gets too rough, and start to self-inhibit his play. Alternatively, you can ask the bully dog's owner to redirect her dog's behavior to a different activity that will keep your dog safe, as we did with Lucy.

If your dog was intensely bullied from the start of the interaction, a serious fight erupted, you can't redirect the bully dog's behavior to another activity, or you're not interested in risking your dog's safety in the interest of modifying the other dog's behavior, you're better off ending the session after the first intervention.

The Husky pup is not playing very roughly, but it's a little more than the Lab pup is ready for. What should you do?

A time-out is called for. You don't want the Husky to learn to enjoy being a bully, or the Lab to fear playtime with others.