

Socializing your winter puppy

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Now that the Christmas season has come to an end and the Maine brutal winter season has begun, it might seem overwhelming to get outside to socialize your new puppy. But it doesn't have to be. Socializing your puppy doesn't mean you need to spend long cold agonizing hours in a park! A quick introduction to something new is all that is needed. The most important thing to remember is to keep it positive.

Here are a few things to keep in mind while socializing during the winter months:

Safety First

- Dress your puppy in something warm when going on a field trip. Unless you have a northern breed puppy, it's a good idea to put a fleece coat or sweater on a puppy when venturing out on a cold day.
- Salt on sidewalks and roads can burn and cause irritation to your puppies feet. Pad protection ointments like 'Mushers Secret' can be purchased at most pet stores.
- Make sure your puppy has had her first set of puppy vaccines
- Like all babies, puppies get tired easily. Keep your field trips to no more than an hour long.

Hello...nice to meet you.

Outdoor socializing

- The old port in Portland or downtown Freeport offer many great socializing opportunities. Many stores & banks will allow puppies, just ask before entering
- Make sure you have pocketful of soft treats.
- Start your visit by sitting on a bench near a busy area and observe your puppy. Reward her generously for being calm but curious.
- If your puppy appears fearful then calmly move away from what she is fearful of. Reward and praise generously for small acts of braveness. Laugh and smile at your puppy as she will not be sure how to respond to certain things (like strollers), and by being relaxed yourself, your showing her its 'ok', so she will be allowed to relax too.
- If someone wants to pet your puppy ask the person to give her a treat, while they are patting her.
- With each field trip, change your location and choose a different store to visit.

Indoor socializing

- Plan a 'socializing party' at home and invite friends of all ages to come over and meet your puppy. Have your friends wear silly hats (like a work-mans hat, party hat, cowboy hat) sunglasses, fake beards etc. Ask your guests to reward for your puppy for calm behavior.
- Walking on a new floor surface can be stressful to many puppies. You can introduce her to a new floor surface by stretching a plastic bag or tarp across the floor and rewarding for any interaction she has with the item. Start by rewarding with a soft treats for just looking or sniffing the new surface. Build up to big rewards when she chooses to walk on the item.

What about other dogs?

Dog parks are NOT good places to socialize a puppy. Many adult dogs do not like puppies, and may go out of their way to bully a youngster. Also, your puppy should not be around 'unknown' dogs or dog feces until they are completely up to date on vaccines. However, even if your puppy sees another dog while on a leash and is rewarded for calm behavior they are still being properly socialized.

What about puppy 'play groups'?

Most puppy classes will allow some 'play time' during class. Although its fun to watch puppies play, this is a time for owners to learn how to observe what appropriate play is and isn't, understanding play styles and when to step in. Finish Forward Dogs offers puppy kindergarten classes which cover not only socializing, but also baby obedience lessons, house manners & body handling. Please feel free to call us with any questions.

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