



Puppy Socialisation Plan Toolkit



ADCH Minimum Welfare and Operational Standards relating to this Toolkit

specific guidance can be found in the Standards Booklet.

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All puppies and kittens shall be adequately and appropriately socialised and habituated to prevent fear behaviour towards animals, situations, environments and people. A daily socialisation programme ensuring this shall be followed.

How to use this Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed to help you create the policies and procedures you will need to meet the ADCH Minimum Standards.

Policies and procedures are personalised for every centre, site and situation and you will need to adapt the generic policy to suit your circumstances and work through the toolkit to create a comprehensive procedure for your team to use.

Further support and ideas can found on the ADCH Website and Member Facebook Group.



General policy for your puppy socialisation plan

All puppies in our care will undertake a documented socialisation programme until at least the age of 8 weeks.

Socialisation is not a one-off event which happens as a puppy, it is a lifelong process which builds the skills and habits a dog needs to lead a happy and successful life. Each individual dog's socialisation needs will be different depending on their experiences and the skills and habits he or she needs to learn.

Introduction

Technically speaking, 'socialisation' is about learning social skills with other living beings, and 'habituation' is about learning to feel safe around and ignore everyday sights, sounds and things a puppy will encounter in its environment.

By helping puppies build positive associations with everyday experiences, it will give them a great start in life. During a typical puppy's socialisation period they will be particularly open and receptive to experiencing novel situations and people during this phase.

True socialisation and habituation requires multiple good experiences with the same or similar things, for example, seeing a man in a hat once does not mean the puppy has learnt that men wearing hats are not scary.

Guidance

Remember never to force an interaction, do not expect the puppy to deal with things for prolonged periods and if the puppy becomes overwhelmed or frightened by something, either stop what you are doing, or move away and try again at a greater distance from the object.

During the puppy's socialization window, they are particularly receptive to new and novel experiences. Using food rewards for all experiences can present a risk that the puppy's interest in the food would 'overshadow' gentle positive exposure. As most puppies will be interested in the food they may focus on the food presented rather than understanding their new experience and make it harder for the handler to assess the puppy's feelings. They may also be inadvertently lured into situations they would not otherwise be comfortable with yet. When puppies are old enough reward based training can be particularly useful for facilitating formal handling, vet handling, rewarding calm behaviour in higher intensity situations.

Below are suggestions for the levels of socialisation and habituation required whether you have a newborn litter of puppies or have an older litter or a single puppy. When working with multiple litters in a rescue environment you must ensure you follow your organisation's infection control protocols.

Template procedure

The following personnel have taken the necessary training to take part in the socialisation programme:	
Our lead/supervisor for socialisation programmes is:	
Our puppies are housed in our centre / foster homes	Foster homes / Our centre
Before carrying out any part of the socialisation programme, appropriate PPE is worn and hands are thoroughly washed to prevent the spread of disease to the litter. The barrier nursing protocol is followed when puppies are housed in centres.	
When introducing the scent of:	[inset scent from table below]
We use:	[insert where scent is taken from]
When introducing other animals:	[inset animal from table below. This must be at a distance with the utmost consideration for the animal's own welfare]
We use:	[insert how suitable animals are found]
We source our volunteers to act as an introduction to people in different scenarios:	

Socialisation and Habituation Schedule

The Puppy Socialisation and Habituation Schedule can be used as a weekly checklist for a puppy's socialisation and habituation experiences and can be tailored to the age of the puppy. Remember that puppies will react differently to things depending on the time of day, the amount of sleep they have had or how they are feeling that day – some days they can be a little more wary of the world than on other days.

Puppies should continue their socialisation programme beyond these initial 8 weeks, until they leave the care of the rescue, and the programme recorded.

Timetable

Weeks 1 – 3

Ensure the mum is familiar with anyone who is going to handle her puppies. Give her plenty of freedom to take care of her puppies and do not do anything that is going to stress her or cause her to worry about her puppies. Do not force her to leave her puppies if she does not want to.

You can provide some positive experiences for the puppies during this time:

- Gentle handling for a few minutes several times a day
- In week 3, introduce small soft toys, other safe novel objects and different surfaces to stimulate the puppies' investigative behaviours
- You can also start to play at low volume a CD with different household and real-life sounds

Weeks 3 – 8

Now the puppies become more active and curious about their littermates and their environment. They will readily approach new things and new people. Play will become a larger part of their daily activity. Puppies still have a strong attachment to their mother but will naturally start the weaning process at 3½ to 4 weeks.

The mother will start to spend longer periods away from her litter but it is important for the puppies to remain with their siblings at this stage. During this period it is also important that the puppies have regular interactions with humans.

Timetable

Always make sure the puppies have plenty of opportunity to rest and sleep during the day.

Positive socialisation and habituation can be provided by:

- Increasing the amount of daily handling which should continue to be gentle and should never frighten the puppy. Handling can now take place away from the litter for short periods of time and can include gentle grooming and examinations. Make use of vet rooms or real life rooms if you have them.
- Providing a variety of toys and enrichment as the puppies begin to play with their siblings and explore their environment. The puppies should also have a variety of textures to experience and include some normal household items and surfaces. If possible bring in some smells which a puppy would experience in the home
- Introducing the puppies to more different people but always in a way that is non-threatening and does not induce fear or avoidance in the pups, so pick your people carefully! The aim is for puppies to learn that people are safe to be around and can be trusted

Week 8 onwards

Most of the puppies will go home at 8 weeks, but do encourage the new owners to continue the socialisation process but always in a pleasant, gradual and non-threatening way.

If you have older puppies in your care, you can provide them with the following to continue their socialisation (especially once vaccinated):

- Meeting different types of people, children, elderly people, people in hats, glasses, hi-viz jackets etc.
- Meeting other dogs who you know will be friendly and gentle with puppies
- Going out in the car and visiting new places
- Experiencing anything that is going to be a regular part of their daily life; traffic, lifts, stairs, horses, trains etc.

PUPPY EXPERIENCE PROGRESS CHART

It is not compulsory for puppies to experience everything – as each centre will have individual-specific facilities and available resources – however the more positive experiences they have then the better prepared they are likely to be.

BEFORE BIRTH ONCE PREGNANCY SUSPECTED AND THEN DIAGNOSED – INITIAL BOX ONCE UNDERTAKEN																																		
Vet check	Dietary management, following veterinary recommendation	Move into whelping kennel	Kennel and all records to be clearly labelled PREGNANT	Where a BMP is in place the centre of behaviour team must be informed of pregnancy	Provide choices of flooring	Provide choices of bedding material	Provide choices of bedding location	Provide choices of places to toilet	Provide feeding choices (puzzle-feeder/scatter-feeding/foraging/bowls) however stressed then scatter feed or use a bowl	Provide opportunities for safe chewing	Regiment regular feeding times	Regiment regular exercise times	Adapt type and amount of exercise as pregnancy develops, following veterinary recommendation	Provide regular social interaction with designated carers	Vet checks PLEASE INITIAL AND DATE BOXES ONCE BITCH HAS BEEN EXAMINED																			
ONCE PUPPIES BORN...																																		
Beginning at a very low level of exposure which is gradually increased over the weeks																																		
Age in weeks (tasks should be undertaken either just once during the week or daily, therefore there are a corresponding number of tickboxes... INITIAL ONE BOX EACH DAY OR WEEK ONCE THE TASK HAS BEEN COMPLETED)																																		
0-11-22-33-44-55-66-77-8																																		
Tactile	Daily inspections - each pup is lifted up and placed on a towel apart from, but within close proximity of the mother and litter, and gently stroked with fingers from nose to tail, lasting just a few seconds (if the pups need to be weighed this should be done in the same manner and a portable scale used within the kennel).																																	
	Each puppy is gently stroked in the kennel with the mother present																																	
	Each puppy's feet are massaged by fingertips for a few seconds																																	
	Different surfaces added to the kennel and rotated daily – vetbed, flat and scrunched newspaper, carpet tiles, linoleum, rubber matting, bristly door mat, for example. Make sure these are safe and supervise initially to be able to prevent chewing/eating.																																	
	Differently textured toys introduced into the kennel																																	
Olfactory	If possible, introduce a blanket that has been in the presence of a cat, and another that smells of horses – if available, staff may be able to facilitate this – into the kennel (change weekly if readily available)															0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8											
	Introduce a baby's blanket or piece of clothing to the kennel (change weekly if readily available)																																	
Auditory	Radio on in the kennel block for periods during the day															0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8											
	Quiet times throughout the day																																	
	Audio books/talk radio played intermittently																																	
	Sounds CDs/downloads played intermittently (babies/vehicles/household appliances/doorbells/fireworks etc...)																																	
Visual	Introduce a cat basket to the kennel															0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8											
	Pushchair placed in visual range of kennel																																	
	Umbrella opened then positioned in visual range of kennel																																	
	Introduce television (can be done when carrying/buggy-ing puppies to visit different areas within centre)																																	
DISEASE TRANSMISSION PREVENTION AND INFECTION CONTROL PROTOCOLS MUST BE IN PLACE WHEN PUPPIES ARE HANDLED	Each puppy weighed (weights recorded)															0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8											
	Social interaction with people – paired with treats and stopped should																																	
	Daily observations/handling to include ears, feet, legs, tail, face and mouth																																	

any puppy shows signs of worry	Puppies to experience a wide variety of people – these should be Canine Carers caring for the mum and litter, volunteers and other Dogs Trust staff – including: all ages/genders/ethnicities/physical abilities/sizes/bearded/wearing glasses/wearing hats/different styles of clothing/carrying umbrellas/using walking sticks/pulling trolleys or buggies/wearing high-vis clothing/being loud and confident/being timid and quiet. Take care to introduce only one type of person at a time to avoid overwhelming!	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8
DISEASE TRANSMISSION PREVENTION AND INFECTION CONTROL PROTOCOLS MUST BE IN PLACE WHEN PUPPIES ARE MOVED AROUND THE CENTRE									
Environmental interaction – to be undertaken regardless of weather conditions as long as safe and puppies/mum showing no signs of distress	Only progress to the next step if the puppy appears confident and relaxed, puppies can be given treats at every stage	In kennel: soft toys, plastic/rubber toys, squeaky toys, rope toys							
		In kennel: cardboard box/tube, tunnel,							
		In kennel: baby toys that move, make noises and light up UNDER SUPERVISION ONLY							
		In kennel: collapsible crate							
	Carry/buggy the whole litter out from the kennel, with mother accompanying, to make visits to different areas of the centre (including grass areas outside if available) STARTING AT MAX 5 MINUTES OUT OF KENNEL (laundry room/kitchen/home room/vet room/office/centre perimeter/car park)								
	Carry/buggy puppies IN PAIRS out of the kennel and around different areas of the centre – leaving the mother and rest of litter in the kennel STARTING AT MAX 5 MINUTES OUT OF KENNEL (laundry room/kitchen/home room/vet room/office/centre perimeter/car park)								
	Carry/buggy puppies INDIVIDUALLY out of the kennel and around different areas of the centre – leaving the mother and rest of litter in the kennel STARTING AT MAX 5 MINUTES OUT OF KENNEL (laundry room/kitchen/home room/vet room/office/centre perimeter/car park)								
	Carry/buggy puppies out of the kennel IN PAIRS to get them used to sitting in a stationary car STARTING AT MAX 5 MINUTES OUT OF KENNEL								
	Carry/buggy puppies out of the kennel INDIVIDUALLY to get them used to sitting in a stationary car with the engine now running STARTING AT MAX 5 MINUTES OUT OF KENNEL								
	Carry/buggy puppies out of the kennel IN PAIRS to get them used to being in a moving car (drive around the car park) STARTING AT MAX 5 MINUTES OUT OF KENNEL								
DISEASE TRANSMISSION PREVENTION AND INFECTION CONTROL PROTOCOLS MUST BE IN PLACE WHEN PUPPIES ARE MOVED AROUND THE CENTRE									
Social interaction	Only progress to the next step if the puppy appears confident and relaxed, puppies can be given treats at every stage	Carry/buggy the whole litter out from the kennel, with mother accompanying, to make visits to different areas of the centre (laundry room/kitchen/home room/vet room/office/reception/centre perimeter/car park) – and to observe other animals such as horses (with or without riders/livestock/cats if available within vicinity of the centre)	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	7-8
		Carry/buggy puppies IN PAIRS out of the kennel to visit different areas of the centre where people are present and engaged in different activities – leaving the mother and rest of litter in the kennel							
		Carry/buggy puppies out of the kennel IN PAIRS to watch other dogs from outside the boundary fencing – outdoor runs/compound							
		Carry/buggy puppies out of the kennel INDIVIDUALLY to watch other dogs – being held by handler within the outdoor run/compound							
		INDIVIDUAL puppies to meet fully vaccinated dogs (of different sizes/ages/breeds/appearances/muzzle-shapes – as much as the centre can facilitate) assessed to be suitable for introducing to other dogs and puppies – this should be within a fully disinfected location, for short periods and ALWAYS under active supervision. Praise for positive interactions and remove if any signs of distress.							
		Handler to play with puppies using toys – initially in the kennel and progressing to outside the kennel							
DISEASE TRANSMISSION PREVENTION AND INFECTION CONTROL PROTOCOLS MUST BE IN PLACE WHEN PUPPIES ARE MOVED AROUND THE CENTRE									
Handling – progressing at each puppy's pace, pairing with treats and stopping with any signs of worry,	One puppy at a time, on the floor within the kennel – each body part is gently held and examined individually for a few seconds at a time and closely examined								
	One puppy at a time, on the floor within the kennel – each body part is gently held and examined individually for a up to approx.10 seconds at a time and closely examined/gently massaged and manipulated								
	One puppy at a time, on the floor within the kennel – each body part is gently held and examined individually for a up to approx.20 seconds at a time and closely examined/gently massaged and manipulated								
	Carer places a hand on each puppy's collar while feeding the puppy a treat, then removes hand – within the kennel								
	Carer slips a finger under each puppy's collar while feeding the puppy a treat, then removes hand – within the kennel. START WITH JUST A SECOND THEN GRADUALLY INCREASE the time that the puppy is held gently by the collar and given treats to approx. 10 seconds.								
Skills for life as a pet dog									
	Nail-filing/clipping to be done while puppy eating treats (stop if any signs of distress) – in kennel with mum present								

