

Puppies, Puppies, Puppies!

Objective: Review the special accommodations/considerations in caring for your youngest furry friends, puppies!

Content: OK, let's all admit it... One of the reasons we love this business is that we get to play with puppies! These little balls of fur are super fun but need to be handled with extreme care.

Scientific studies confirm that dogs go through specific stages of physical and social development when they are young. Experiences during these critical periods in puppy development can affect the temperament of the dog as an adult. During critical periods, a seemingly insignificant experience may have a great impact on later behavior. For example, a young pup that greets an impatient adult dog and gets nipped may fear meeting new dogs in the future. One bad experience can truly have long term affects.

The Dog Gurus recommend puppies be viewed in a "safety bubble". We recommend social interaction for the puppies as young as 8 weeks of age, but all social experiences need to be positive. This Lunch & Learn will help everyone in your center understand the stages of development and how their actions either help or harm the long-term emotional well-being of the puppy.

***Tip to Owners/Managers:** *This is a fantastic Lunch & Learn to delegate to a team member to plan and present!*

Prior to Lunch & Learn Session:

- In preparation for leading the group discussion, the leader should review the supporting document section to determine what information will be presented.
- Add or remove information that you feel is critical to proper care of puppies at your pet care center.
- Print a handout or create poster boards with the information on Key Social Stages to present during the lunch and learn. Signage can be posted in the break room for additional reference.
- If possible, try to have a puppy available to bring in at the end of the lunch & learn to reward the team and have a bit of fun!

During Lunch & Learn Session:

- Open with why this topic is so important. You can take key points from the Content section above.
- Present the Key Social Stages of Development. Have the team follow along on your handout or utilize the poster boards that were created.
- Have a group discussion on where the team is excelling in puppy care and where the opportunities for improvement are.
- At the end, bring in the puppy and have a little fun!

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Supporting Education Articles/Tools: The information below provides additional guidance on the topic and should be reviewed prior to and during the meeting:

Key Social Stages of Development

**The ages outlined below are not exact, as breed and size of dog will affect the timeframe. There are also additional key developments in each stage, however, we are focused on the ones that professional providers can either help or harm.*

Human Socialization (2-3 months)

Key Development: Fear response to strangers

Center Actions:

- Make meeting new people positive and fun using verbal praise & treats
- Observe puppy body language to confirm puppy is comfortable prior to greeting and initiating interaction
- Begin positive puppy training
- Focus on puppy bonding and responding to people as a priority over social play with other dogs
- Puppy socialization in small groups with properly matched puppy & adult dog playmates
- Keep play sessions very short and force breaks during play with fun people play and interactions

Fear Impact Period 1 (2-3 months)

Key Development: Any traumatic experience may have a lasting impression

Center Actions:

- Introduce to new experiences in a non-threatening manner
- Observe puppy body language and go at a pace where puppy is comfortable
- Focus on ensuring the puppy feels safe
- All social interactions remain fun & positive from viewpoint of individual puppy
- Short play periods with other well-matched puppies and puppy-tolerant adult dogs
- Continue human bonding exercise to ensure puppy is attentive to people when in presence of other dogs
- Provide frequent rest periods so puppy gains confidence being alone and learns to rest quietly

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Seniority Classification (3-4 months)

Key Development: Chewing & biting behaviors as permanent teeth grow; confident puppies may begin to experiment with some aggressive behaviors

Center Actions:

- Discourage all biting behaviors
- Consistent enforcement of rules & boundaries with a lot of patience and positive reinforcement
- Playgroups with other well-matched puppies and puppy-tolerant adult dogs
- Experienced leaders with excellent management skills that reinforce positive play skills and quickly intervene when inappropriate behaviors are observed
- Continue rest periods and if chewing is an issue utilize Kongs and other chew items that are safe for puppy to consume without direct supervision

Flight Instinct (4-8 months)

Key Development: Dog's natural instinct to explore new territory is evident; may ignore "come" cue & see human chasing them as a game; teething & chewing behaviors continue

Center Actions:

- ALWAYS reward "come"; be sure no negatives or discipline are given when a puppy comes
- Help puppy learn that "come" is a safe cue to follow
- Playgroups with properly matched playmates including adult dogs that play at an appropriate intensity (e.g., avoid high intensity body-slamming adult playgroups)
- Reduce length of rest periods, but continue giving puppy more rest than adult dogs

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