

## Module 1 - Section - 2 A - Canine Development Theory

### 1. Socialization & Habituation

### 2. Location Separation Anxiety

**(Socialization is described as the process whereby an animal learns to recognize and interact with the species with which it cohabits – David Bailey)**

Socialization can simply be described as the process where a dog learns how to interact and be comfortable with the various species it lives and interacts with. This occurs at the early 3-16 week period of development before the 'curtain' closes and it becomes more difficult for the pup to accept new or novel stimuli and experiences.

Habituation, on the other hand, can be described as the process whereby a dog becomes accustomed to other non-threatening people, animals, and situations and learns to accept or ignore them after the 16 week period.

It took people like Ian Dunbar and Michael Fox to show us how critical the first 16 weeks are for pups and how important it was to socialize them to different people, dogs, situations and let them engage in play with other pups as well as playing with their owners. Before Puppy Kindergarten was introduced by Ian Dunbar it was normal for us all to keep our pups in the home until all their inoculations had been done. In addition to Ian Dunbar, Dr. Michael Fox undertook various studies which proved that if pups were not exposed to all the different situations, people, and dogs etc, they would end up growing fearful and less able to cope with the world we require them to live in. Scientific studies state that 54% of families with children under the age of 6 years old gave up their dogs for rooming. What was interesting however is that 99% of puppies who attended puppy socialization classes remained in their homes!

Don't think that the socialization period of a pup only begins when it comes home at eight weeks of age. The socialization of a pup begins with the mother massaging the pup with her tongue to control elimination, and also through sound, body language and smell. The mother will give the pup its first lessons in discipline and it will learn to relate to its litter mates and learn about self while playing and in basic social interaction. The breeder can play a large

part in this socialization, until the pup comes to its new home, by getting them used to the going on in a household in terms of noises, people and other animals.

What is our part as the owner in puppy socialization? This entails introducing and familiarizing a pup to as many new experiences as humanly possible. Dr. Dunbar says that a pup should meet as many as 100 new people before it is 3 months of age. These include people (large, small, fat, thin, black, white, people with hats, people with gloves, people with boots, men, woman, children, babies etc), different places, especially places that it will encounter in its adult life (kennels, vet, grooming parlour, shopping centres, parks etc), different objects (metal stairs, shopping trolleys, vacuum cleaners, large sized dust bins etc), different vehicles (trucks, motor bikes, wheelchairs etc) and very importantly, as many different noises as possible. Also try to include other animals such as other dogs (big, small and as many different breeds as possible) cats, horse and birds at least. Introducing a dog to the above will assist a dog learning how to respond and interact with same without fear.



Socializing your pup and taking it to Puppy Class from 8 to 16 weeks of age has major, lifelong benefits for both the owner and the pup, including a happy, socialised dog, better behaviour, better understanding and communication. Puppy socialization at a puppy class will stimulate all five senses of a young pup and it is the most critical time for shaping the pup's future development, behaviour traits and character. Puppy Class can be likened to early childhood development in human children and the substantial benefits that children gain from attending regular playgroup or nursery school. They learn group dynamics and structure, are mentally stimulated and gain valuable life and communication skills during a critical formative phase.

However, the socialization does not begin and end with puppy class. It is up to the owner to keep on socializing the pups to as many different people, colours, animals, situations and locations at the same time and in fact, throughout its life.

Recent scientific research shows that what a child experiences in the first four years to a large extent determines their abilities in later life. The critical learning period for language, for example, is from birth to 3, and math and logic until 4. In the same way, puppies have a 'window of opportunity' between the ages of 4 and 16 weeks. During this period a puppy can be introduced to, and accept, virtually any situation. After the 'window period closes', the puppy moves into a new phase, during which they become hesitant and/or fearful and so find it harder to accept new experiences and people. This could be compared to the toddler phase in a human child when the baby who happily accepted being passed around from person to person now starts clinging to mum and becomes fearful of people he/she doesn't know.

Roger Abrantes says: -

*"Many young dogs show slight signs of agoraphobia (morbid dread of public places or open spaces) which has a self-preservation effect. Young dogs may show slight signs of agoraphobia in that they prefer sheltered places, rather than wide open spaces. Dogs have to learn to be confident in wide open spaces, in public and amongst strangers" "it is through play that puppies learn to know themselves, the environment and their limits. Through play, puppies learn dog language by connecting with their own and learn about the environment, their own strength and weaknesses."*

There are definite fear periods during the early 16 week period, although the exact period this happens is currently being debated, so avoid scary situations for your pup (being around an aggressive dog for example), being careful to introduce new dogs and people in a positive manner to avoid the pup being traumatized. If the pup does receive a bad fright, this could impact on it for the rest of its life in a detrimental manner. Events such as this are described as One Event Learning.

Although we are talking here about puppy socialization what has to be remembered is that the owners responsibility of socializing the pup does not stop when the puppy socialization period of 16 weeks is over or when puppy school is finished, it needs to be reinforced on a regular basis until the dog is an adult. Research has shown that socialization and habituation can wear off. Research with wolves by J. H. Woolpy showed that even when wolf pups were well socialized, if the socialization was not kept up, the effects of same would dissipate. The same has been seen in dogs, and Michael Fox conducted experiments wherein pups were well socialized up to four months of age and were then placed in a

kennel environment, virtually isolated, and these same pups became shy of strangers and even of the people who cared for them. We can then see why it is important for the owner to take the dog out on a regular basis, especially to dog parks and places where it will encounter children and different people to keep the socialization ongoing.

***“I have always had dogs and have never taken them to puppy class, and they turned out fine, why should I start now?”***

With regard to the above comment that I often hear from owners, here are some of the reasons why we need puppy socialization classes.

Living circumstances have changed dramatically over recent years – and this means that your puppy or dog’s home environment is different to what it was in the past. The stimulation and exposure that characterised your dog’s lifestyle when you were a child, is no longer available (on average) for a number of reasons. Consider the following:

#### **Home perimeters – Fencing/ walling**

Homes in the past were usually fenced with a wire fence, maybe a low wall or often, no barrier at all. This allowed the dogs to see the comings and goings in the street and interact with both people and other dogs. Nowadays, the majority of houses have five to six foot solid walls surrounding them, so blocking any view for a dog beyond the property perimeter. Many behaviourists are of the belief that a dog needs to be able to see outside the gate at least. I am not convinced of this and it really does depend on the dog and the circumstances. I have seen so many dogs where their stress levels have gone sky high and where they have become reactive to both passing dogs and also redirected aggression towards a second dog in the family who is at the gate with it when either a person or another dog walks past. Personally, I would rather that the dog is kept away from the gate due to these circumstance – however dog must receive regular walks.



Common type of walling found in SA today,



Common type of fencing found in SA in years gone by, or no fence at all

### Working Mums

When I was a child we rode our bicycles to and from school and often had friends over to play, which meant that there were always people coming and going. In today's environment, with many mums working, this just does not happen as often. How does that affect our dogs? They get to meet and interact with fewer people of different ages and as such are not used to them. When we do have children over to play or visitors, the dog often gets so excited and uncontrollable that they are shut in a backyard or a separate section of the garden, which raises their frustration levels even more.

Unfortunately, in addition to less interaction, this also means the dog gets less attention from their owner. A working mum has her hands full not only with work, there are children to be taken to and from school, shopping, homework to be checked and supper to be cooked etc. When is there time for the dog? Dogs are often left alone all day long with little or no amusement by way of company, toys and chewies, and often resort to their own devices, with disastrous results. Owners often buy a second dog to keep the original dog company hoping to remedy the situation, but all this achieves is that the new dog starts to mimic the existing dog's behaviour and double trouble ensues.

### Exercise

In times gone by we would take our dogs with us to the local park. Today in SA it is often just not safe to go to your local park, even accompanied by a dog. When I recommend to clients that they take their dogs out for a walk they often say *'why, we have a huge garden for them to run around in?'*

What we fail to realize is that dogs have a sense of smell that is in the region of forty times more developed than humans. A dog needs the stimulation of outside walks not just for the physical stimulation, but also for the mental stimulation it provides. Believe you me; a dog knows every blade of grass and plant in your garden. How would you feel if you spent your life inside four walls and never got to visit the local shops?

What often happens when owners do take a dog that is seldom walked out is that the dog pulls on the lead like the proverbial train. Can you blame him, there is so much to smell and investigate that he is beside himself. This leads to an unpleasant experience for the owner and as such the walks become less frequent. A dog that does not go out often may exhibit behaviours such as digging and destructive behaviour, a bit like us 'climbing the walls' from boredom and frustration. Dogs also suffer from 'cabin fever'.

### Stress

As wondrous and beneficial as progress may have been for the human race over the last 10 to 20 years, it has also had negative effects. We live a much more stressful existence than we did in the past. There is more pressure, more fear due mainly to crime and possible job cuts and less time for R & R. As tension from our body travels down the lead to the dog, so too do the tensions we experience in our everyday lives affect our dogs. For a dog that is kept confined within 4 walls, receives little or no exercise and lacks socialisation, the stress levels skyrocket – the dog is also bored and frustrated – which in turn results in behavioural problems.

### Good Social Graces

We often take the good social behaviour that a dog exhibits for granted when they meet other dogs or people. Rather take advantage of this and praise your dog/puppy for exhibiting good social graces. Reward from the owner by way of praise or a treat after your dog exhibits good social behaviour is more likely to reinforce the good social behaviour.

### What will happen if an owner does not socialize their pup?

As horrible as this may seem, the number one reason why dogs end up in shelters or, even worse, being euthanized, is through a lack of socialization when they were young puppies! Think about what a lack of socialization can do to a pup – it is taught about bite inhibition as it never gets to play with other young dogs. The pup may revert to being fearful or even reactive towards other dogs as it just doesn't know how to interact with them. If the pup was bought from a pet shop or taken away from the mother at 5 to 6 weeks of age, it may not have learnt how to exhibit and received calming signals and will end up as a social outcast. The lack of early socialization can affect a pup emotionally and even with TTouch and behaviour modification where a dog can be taught to cope I doubt that a 100% reversal can be guaranteed.



Praise and reward your dog for good social graces - towards people and other animals. So often we ignore good behaviour

## 2. Location Separation Anxiety

Although much is written about getting pups used to different people, animals and locations – getting your pup used to the vet, the groomer etc, virtually nothing is written about getting your pup used to various locations and staying in them alone.

This salient point came home to me very harshly in 2012. My own dog Brady, a Border Collie spent most of his life as an 'only' dog apart from a few years when our Meggie, another Border Collie adopted us.

As I was very aware of the problems that could occur, much time was spent in getting him socialized to maximum effect and not spending too much time with me at home. I thought we had pretty much covered everything and that he was an extremely well-adjusted dog – used to spending time at home without me, sitting quietly under a tree in the shade while I worked with other dogs, going on holiday in the caravan with us and sitting quietly while we were at a restaurant etc. However, this was not the case – I had not covered it all.

As my husband's work dictated that he would have to spend a minimum of 1 -3 years overseas, we made the decision to pack up and go and live overseas rather than being separated for such a long period. There followed increased Alone Time for Brady, habituation to the crate he would be travelling in and it looked like we were A-OK and ready for our new adventure in life.

As he has a very thick coat I have him shaved on a regular basis and decided to do this a month before we left. My regular groomer who always came to our home to groom him was not available; I decided to pop him into the excellent grooming parlour up the road. I dropped him off and arranged to collect him two hours later.

I was absolutely shattered and mortified to discover that after about 10 minutes of me leaving, my well behaved, well-adjusted dog had literally screamed and barked for the entire

time I was away – come on already – I work with dogs for a living – totally unacceptable.

I realized what had occurred – as well adjusted as he was to being at home, dog school etc, I had never left him alone in a totally strange environment. I then spent the next month before we left getting him used to spending time away from me in different locations so that he would cope with the long trip to Europe – a situation that could have been totally avoided if this part of his training had been undergone when he was a puppy and kept in practice over the ensuing years. I am happy to say that we were successful, and Brady travelled happily both to and from Europe, but this took a full month of work from us both and huge stress on my part.

Therefore, when working with people and their pups, and your own dogs, make sure the following exercises are done:-

1. Pup spends time alone at the vet in a crate. Explain why to the vet and supply the pup with one of two favourite chew toys such as Kongs or Busy Buddies. Continue doing this for longer and longer periods until the pup can spend the day and even the night at the vet with no stress. You may have to pay a fee for this, but the end result will be well worth it.
2. Do the same thing at the groomer, the kennels and if you will have family looking after your pup when you go away, then the same situation applies.
3. The only time the pup will get these special treats is when left alone as above. This will change what could be a stressful event into a rewarding one.
4. If the pups does stress at all, then keep the time period very short and use the Avalon Pure for Dogs Separation Anxiety Spray as per their instructions.



To prevent separation location anxiety it is a good idea that pup learns to spend time at places such as vet and boarding kennel - start with short period of time with a favourite chew toy and gradually build up the time period.