

# AT HOME SOCIALIZATION ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR PUPPY

42 FUN ACTIVITIES TO EXPAND YOUR  
PUPPY'S WORLD



BY JENNIFER SKIBA OF  
NAMASTAY UNIVERSITY

# At home socialization activities for your

# PUPPY



The experiences your puppy has during the first 20 weeks of life lay the foundation for their comfort in the world as an adult dog.











































Puppy adventures outside the house are vital, and you should strive to go on at least three outings a week.

In addition to outings, you should be exposing your puppy to something new and novel EVERY DAY, and you can easily do that at home. Socializing at home is just as important, if not more so, than socializing outside the house because your dog will live most of its life IN your home and should feel safe and secure. Many of these activities will assist your puppy in developing spatial awareness and proprioception.

The activities listed here are in no particular order, but they are designed to get your creative juices flowing.

If your puppy shows fear or hesitancy, slow down, and allow them to approach at their own pace. If they are still fearful, pair it with treats, so they create a positive association with the activity in question and to doing new things with you.

**Remember, the goal is to have fun while learning!**

 PLAY PEEK A BOO	 VACUMN THE HOUSE	 CUSHION CRUISE	 DINNER DATE FISH	 PLAY TUG	 BOX FUN DIGGING	 LAUNDRY BASKET
 WATER LAWN SPRINKLER	 WALK AT DUSK & AT NIGHT	 LAWN MOWER	 LAWN CHAIR OVER & UNDER	 TREAT TRAIL	 DROP A PAN, RUN THE BLENDER	 SPA DAY BRUSH
 BOX FUN PAWS ON BOX	 FLAP A SHEET	 SPA DAY BATH	 PRINCESS & THE PEA	 TAKE A WALK IN THE RAIN / SNOW	 DINNER DATE CHEESE	 DINNER DATE FRUIT
 HIDE N SEEK TOY	 YARD WORK LOUD TOOLS	 SWEEP & MOP THE FLOOR	 DINNER DATE MEAT	 DRESS THE PUPPY	 SPA DAY NAIL FILE	 BOX FUN TUNNEL
 TWO TOY FETCH	 DINNER DATE VEGES	 YARD WORK RAKE, WAGON	 WAIT IN THE CAR ALONE	 HIDE N SEEK PERSON	 WATER POOL	 BOX FUN PUPPY IN BOX
 WATCH THE WORLD GO BY	 HIDE N SEEK IN THE YARD	 BOX FUN SHELL GAME	 FIRE	 WOBBLE	 SMOKE DETECTOR BEEPING	 LADDER ON THE GROUND



# Definitions

Below are more details and goals of activities



- Peek-a-boo - Use a blanket to cover your puppy for a few seconds and then lift the blanket to uncover them. This assists in teaching your puppy it is ok to have things on their heads.
- Vacuum the house - You don't want your puppy to be afraid of this everyday activity. If they charge or bark at the vacuum, turn it off and let them sniff it. Move it back and forth without the sound, let them watch, and reward them for being brave. Then turn it on for a few seconds but don't move it. And reward. Then turn it on and let it run for slightly longer with only a tiny movement and reward. The goal is to slowly build up the duration of the sound and the movement. If your puppy is fearful, go slow and only do a few minutes daily. If you need to clean the house, put your puppy in another part of the house and only bring them out if they are not afraid.
- Cushion Cruise - take a couple of couch cushions or big fluffy pillows, pile them on top of each other, and encourage your puppy to go OVER them instead of around them. Uneven surfaces help them develop coordination.
- Dinner Date - using safe human food, you will discover what they like and don't like, allowing you to find a super special treat. You can use those super special treats for tasks they don't like, for instance, getting their nails filed or as a super special reward for training like being brave with vacuum.
- Play Tug - tug is an excellent game if you play with rules and will help your puppy learn to control their arousal levels.
- Box Fun - Digging - Take an empty box and fill it with crumbled-up paper, cut up water noodles or empty plastic bottles, and scatter kibble or treats on the bottom of the box. Encourage your puppy to find them by scenting them out. If the box is big enough for them to get in and root around for the treats, that is best. Scent games are very tiring, and this game encourages them to use their nose and to be comfortable with items touching their face/muzzles. You may have to cut the edge of the box to make it short enough for your puppy to get in.

- .Laundry Basket - These are overlooked gems hiding in your home. You can put a stuffed kong a bone, or a favorite toy under one. The dog can see the item and has to figure out how to flip the basket over to get to the item. This is a problem-solving game that teaches your pup how to use their body.
- Water - The last thing you want is a dog afraid of water, so you will want to expose your puppy to water in different ways: the sprinkler, a shallow pool, or a lake, if possible. If you don't have a shallow pool, you can put water in a low-sided plastic container and encourage them to walk through it or bob for a favorite floating toy.
- Walk at dusk or night - Walking at different times of the day can make the same path can look entirely different to your dog. So allowing your puppy this experience when they are young helps them be comfortable in unfamiliar surroundings during other times of the day. When you go on vacation and need to potty your dog in a new place at the end of a long day you will be grateful you did this. Trust me.
- Lawn mover - Imagine for a moment that you are your puppy, and you have no idea what that large, loud machine will do. A good majority of pups are terrified of the lawn mower the first time they hear it. Approach it the same way you would the vacuum cleaner. Approach with it off and stationary, move it a bit without turning it on, then put your pup on the patio with a safe person there to comfort them and turn it on. and mow. They are safely away from the loud beast but can watch you.. If they are very afraid please put them inside the house. This is one of the noisiest machines most people own and lays the foundation for comfort with other loud noises.
- Treat Trail - If you have young kids in the house this is a great game for them to play with the puppy. If you don't have kids then you get to play! Have the puppy stationary (in a crate, on a leash or held by an adult) and the child can lay a trail of treats. Think Hansel & Gretel breadcrumbs. Not too far apart and not too close together. This is a fun scenting game and if played with kids also teaches them how to play with the puppy without running. The kids are stationary when the puppy is hunting.
- Box fun - puppy in a box - This is an advanced level of box fun and will help your puppy learn that people ask them to do crazy things! It also makes adorable pictures when they have mastered it.



- Kitchen noise - drop a pan or run the blender - Some people use a blender daily, and some only on special occasions and we rarely drop a pan on the floor but both of these actions can be quite startling if the puppy doesn't hear them early.
- Spa Day - Some breeds require more grooming than others, but all dogs will need some grooming. Brushing, bathing, and nail filing should start early, so they are comfortable with it. Treats or a lickimat can keep the puppy occupied while working and will add a positive association to the process. You can also add your hairdryer for short sessions if your breed will experience this at the groomer.
- Box Fun - paws on the box - make sure the box is large enough to support your dog's weight and encourage them to step onto it. This is harder than you might imagine for lots of dogs. Be patient and go slow. This is a body awareness exercise and relationship building as you learn how to work with your pup.
- Flap a sheet - as silly as this sounds, I have worked with dogs that run when their guardian's flap sheets before folding. Just do this a few times, so your puppy isn't afraid.
- Princess & the pea - another fun scent game that is great for kids or adults. Watch this video for all the details <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gA3dldW8g3U&t=123s>
- Walk in rain or snow - Normalize walking in the rain, so your puppy doesn't hesitate to go potty when it's raining or snowing!
- Hide n seek - toy - Another problem-solving fun game. Don't hide it so hard they can't find it when you start. Eventually, you will be able to hide it harder and harder.
- Yard work - loud tools - Think chainsaw, weed wacker, leaf blower, etc. Walk them through the process just like the vacuum and lawn mower.
- Sweep & mop - If your puppy chases the broom or mop, use a leash to prevent their movement and let them watch you. Soon they will learn not to pursue it, and you won't need to leash them or crate them. They can be free to watch you.
- Dress the puppy - Don't force this, be patient, but putting a shirt or socks on your puppy will prepare them for a harness, backpack, booties, or vet wrap over injuries. I teach you how to do this step by step in my Essential Puppy course.



- Box fun - tunnel - Cut the flaps off both ends of a large box (your puppy should be able to fit through the box) and create a tunnel. This will teach your puppy to enter something that is over their head, which is helpful for tricks as well as body awareness.
- Two toy fetch - This is the foundation of a formal fetch game and prevents dogs from playing "chase me to get it." The toys should be exactly the same, and you will toss one toy, and as the dog approaches with the toy, you will toss the second toy away from you in the other direction. They will drop the first toy to get the second toy. Repeat, and soon your puppy will learn how to drop a toy in anticipation of the second toy being thrown. As an adult dog, you can phase out the second toy, and you will have a dog who brings the toy to you and drops it. This is an excellent game for kids as they aren't pulling the toy out of your dog's mouth or chasing them to get the toy.
- Yard work - rake & wagon - Think about tools that move in the yard. Similar to brooms and mops, you don't want your dog chasing or biting at things that move.
- Wait in the car alone - Only do this when it's not too hot to have your dog in the car. If you want your dog to wait patiently while alone in the car, now is the time to start teaching this, and you can do it in your driveway or garage.
- Hide - n - seek - person - This is a fabulous way to build a strong recall in your puppy. You can hide in the house to start and then progress to hiding in the yard and combine them when your puppy knows how to stay in one place while you hide.
- Watch the world go by - Sitting on your front porch while people go by is a mentally stimulating activity and lays the groundwork for "settle" when visitors are over or you go to an outdoor park or cafe.
- Lawn Chair - Similar to laundry baskets most people have at least one lawn chair and can use it to teach the puppy body awareness. Leave it on the ground folded up and encourage your puppy to go over it. Then open it up and encourage your puppy to go under it.



- Box fun - shell game - For this game, you will need three boxes that all look the same. I like to use the flat rate shipping boxes from the post office. You will put a treat inside one of the boxes with the puppy watching. Let the puppy "find it" first. They need to understand to get the treat out of the box before you start moving the box around. You can have an assistant use a towel in front of their eyes so they can't see you move the boxes.
- Fire - Many people have outdoor fire pits, and having a relaxing evening around the fire pit while your puppy is young is a great way to expose them to fire. Make sure they don't wander too close to the fire, and keep an eye out for embers if it isn't a propane fire.
- Wobble - It's not uncommon to encounter dogs who don't want to walk on things that move - like a suspended bridge. One easy way to prevent that is to play with a wobble board or another moving object like a skateboard when they are pups. You can easily build your wobble board by taking a piece of wood wide enough for your puppy to stand on it and attaching a round object to the bottom. A tree branch or round log will work. When introducing this item, you will want to use your foot to ensure it doesn't move in the beginning. Once they are comfortable standing on the board, you can lift your foot a tiny bit, so it wobbles just slightly. Don't let them walk on it without your foot; if you do, it will bang down and scare them.
- Smoke detector beeping - One of the most annoying things in this world is the beep beep beep of the smoke detector battery alarm! Because this happens so rarely and is such a high frequency it often freaks dogs out. If you intentionally have it beep while your dog is young they are less likely to freak out as adults because they will have heard it before when they are young and impressionable.
- Ladder on the ground - Teaching your puppy to pick up their feet, including their back feet is a worthwhile activity and having them traverse a ladder laying on the ground is an easy way to teach this. Encourage them to walk straight through it with all four feet inside the rungs. Use treats to lure them straight.
- Spa day - nail file - Many people are nervous about clipping their dog's nails, but you can keep them in shape by using a strong nail file. Do one nail at a time each day, and soon you can do a whole paw and then all their feet. Use food to create a positive association.





## *How to Play Tug with your dog*

Tug of war games get a bad rap. They teach your dog to be "aggressive." Hogwash! If the game isn't played correctly with some rules, it CAN teach your dog to become over aroused, so you need to be smart about it. If your dog shows guarding behavior with other toys or growls around bones or food, this is not a good game to play. But, there are other great games to teach them, so don't worry.

If tug is played correctly with rules, it can be a great game to teach your dog to go from 'drive' to 'neutral' and builds a strong neural pathway to resolve arousal and practice self-modulation. It is also a great game to play to bond with your dog. So, if your dog doesn't show guarding behaviors, get tugging!

How to teach your dog to play by the rules.

- Have only one tug toy, and they do not have access to it when you are not playing. They may have their own tug toy for dog/dog tug. When you put the toy away after playing with your dog you are building drive for the toy. "Oh boy! I love it when Mom gets that toy out!"
- The toy should be long so that their teeth are far away from your hands.
- Use a toy that YOU like to hold. The soft fleece tugs are great because they are soft on your hands, and stretch a little so they are easy on your arms and shoulders, and the fleece is gentle on their teeth.
- Have a cue to start the play. "Tug time," "let's fight," etc. The presentation of the toy doesn't start the game - only the cue. You should be able to hold the toy, wave the toy around, etc and your dog should be able to wait for the cue to start the game.
- Your dog must drop on command (reward with a treat in beginning). Wiggle a treat at their nose to get them to drop the toy.
- If they are really resistant to releasing the toy you may have to start with a lower value toy and practice 'take' and 'drop' with them before transitioning to the tug toy. You may also use a higher-value treat to get them to drop the toy.
- If the dog contacts your skin with teeth cue them 'drop' and put the toy away. Contact with our skin immediately ends the game.
- Let dog 'win' the toy too by you letting go.



- Occasionally stop play and ask the dog for known cues, sit, down, touch, etc. If the dog cannot comply then stop the play and let them resolve their arousal.
- Watch the dog for over-arousal. If the dog doesn't drop on the first cue or starts biting the toy higher and higher and is growling more and more it might be time for a break.
- Some vocalization is ok, lots of dogs growl when they play tug and that is ok but if the growling changes from 'fun' to 'not fun' (trust your gut here) then it's time to end the game.
- Make a mental note of this and play for a short time and take more breaks the next time you play.
- If you don't play with rules and take breaks you are leading the dog to an over-aroused state and in that state, they can make bad decisions. This is why it's so important to play, take a break, and then start the play again. It is the break in play that allows their arousal levels to resolve.
- If you find your dog gets really excited with this game and has a hard time letting go keep your sessions short and build the duration of the game slowly.
- If you have small children in the house DO NOT allow them to play this game with the dog. This should be an adult-only game. DO NOT play the game in front of young children either. Why? Because young children often copy adult behavior and this is not a game for young children to play when you are not around. They don't always have the ability to enforce the rules and if the dog becomes over aroused it can lead to trouble. So, if you have young children in the house play this game when they have gone to bed or are at a friend's house.
- Here is a great short video on tug that shows most of the rules.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9mPoWuvnLg>
- Some dogs really love to tug naturally and some dogs are less enthusiastic about it. That's ok, finding the game that you BOTH enjoy is what is important.

