

The Importance of Socialization for Pets

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Even if your partner or roommate loves you to the moon and back, can you imagine spending your entire life solely in their company? No meeting family and friends. No virtual interactions. No social media connections. You must be thinking: what sort of a bizarre and impossible concept is that? But it is only to underscore the fact that just like humans, pets need to have a social life to be happy and carefree. So, no matter how much love and attention you give your pets, it's crucial never to confine them within the four walls of your home.

In today's guide, you will learn everything about the importance and benefits of pet socialisation. Read till the end to discover various ways to help your pets socialise, with special tips for pet parents in Bengaluru.

First up, what does socialisation mean for pets?

Both dogs and cats have heightened senses and are hard-wired to be cautious of unfamiliar people, animals, or environments as a survival mechanism. So, anything that is out of their usual experiences can make them respond in various ways, such as anxiety, aggression, or withdrawal.

The only way to help them unlearn this instinctive behaviour is by socialising them, which involves exposing them to a range of different experiences in a safe, positive, and progressive manner. This process aims to improve their comfort and confidence for the rest of their lives, ultimately transforming them into well-adjusted and self-assured dogs and cats.

Is there a right age for pet socialisation?

Pets are more receptive to learning and retain information best during their sensitive period, which refers to the early developmental stages. For puppies, this critical period ranges from 3-14 weeks, while for kittens, it spans between 3-9 weeks.

However, does that mean you cannot train adult dogs and cats? While it is a more challenging task, it is certainly not impossible. Similar to humans, our furry friends are capable of learning throughout their lives. If you start slowly, be patient, and use positive reinforcement, you can transform them into well-mannered pets.

What are the many benefits of socialisation for pets?

Have you ever wished for your pet to behave perfectly civilised in public places? Do you want to ensure your pet is not wary of visitors at your house? Is it your dream to travel with your pet without any trouble? It's all possible if you put effort into pet socialisation.

Socialised pets enjoy improved physical and mental well-being, resulting in a higher quality of life than those without socialisation training. Here's a detailed outlook of some of the benefits:

Socialised pets radiate confidence: When your pet has had positive life experiences, they tend to feel confident and comfortable when presented with unexpected or unfamiliar situations, such as meeting a new vet, having a visitor at home, or a loud noise. Instead of extreme reactions such as going into hiding or showing aggression, they display positive behaviours. For dogs, signs of confidence are a straight and tall body posture, wagging tail, relaxed mouth with tongue hanging out, and eagerness to greet people and other pets. For cats, positive body language includes a calm body, approaching strangers comfortably, neutral or raised tail position, and rubbing their body against people.

Socialised pets are well-mannered: Bad behaviours in pet dogs include excessive barking, attacking, and destructive chewing. Pet cats may exhibit undesirable behaviours such as chronic licking, showing aggression, house soiling and scratching objects. Although there could be many contributing factors for their misbehaviour, the primary reasons remain fear and anxiety. Addressing this root cause and ensuring they keep calm and composed in any situation, proper socialising is the most effective way out!

Socialised pets are physically fit: Socialisation reduces fear and anxiety in pets, ensuring they do not have frequent 'fight-or-flight' responses that release stress hormones. In turn, it prevents their risk of stress-related health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney problems, digestive issues, depression, eating disorders, skin conditions, and heart disease. This way, socialisation can help your beloved furry friends enjoy good overall well-being throughout their lives!

Socialised pets are happy and carefree: Socialisation enables pets to enjoy themselves thoroughly and readily adapt to new situations. They will allow people to pet them during walks, warmly greet visitors, enjoy playing with their furry friends, and behave civilised in dog or cat cafes.

Socialised pets keep their owners stress-free: Whether you're arranging a playdate for your pet, taking a road trip together, or leaving them at your friend's house while you're away, you will never think twice in any situation if your canine or feline buddies have gone through socialisation training. Additionally, socialised pets are more cooperative during grooming sessions and vet visits, making it easy to take care of them. Ultimately, healthy and happy pets share a strong bond with their parents!

How do you go about pet socialisation? Tips and tricks to help you get started!

First, let's address what you should get your pet accustomed to. In short, anything and everything you want them to feel at ease! Here's a comprehensive list:

- People of all ages, genders, heights, and weights in different appearances, including clothing, accessories, and professions. For example, bikers, people in wheelchairs, men with long beards, children with umbrellas, older adults with walkers or staff, runners, balloon-sellers, milkmen, delivery men, police officers, letter carriers, and house help.
- Other well-socialised pets
- Animals of species other than their own
- Different objects and sounds such as thunder, fireworks, sirens, traffic, vacuum cleaners, electric mixers, pressure cookers, doorbells, televisions, mobile phones
- Wide-ranging surfaces, including tiles, grass, gravel, sand, concrete, wood, carpets, and stairs
- Multiple experiences like car rides, outdoor walks, beach visits, hiking, swimming, bathing, grooming, playing with toys, vet visits

Now, what is the right way to socialise pets? Note down these tips when you start socialisation training for your fur baby:

- Consider your pet's breed, age, personality, and past experiences when deciding on a socialisation plan.
- When introducing your pet to new experiences, go slow and limit it to one or two at a time.
- If they are feeling scared or uneasy, stop and try again another time.
- Always use positive reinforcement, including treats and praises, when they behave well.
- Never punish them for bad behaviour.
- Connect with professional trainers for help if needed.
- Be patient with your pets and continue training them throughout their lives.

Bonus: Socialisation tips for pet owners in Bengaluru

If you're a proud pet owner in 'Namma Bengaluru', you're lucky because it is one of the most paw-friendly cities in India! Despite the rapid urbanisation, ever-increasing population, and traffic congestion, the city is home to various pet-friendly spaces, presenting a wealth of socialisation opportunities for our furry companions! Need some ideas? We've got you!

- **Pet-friendly parks:** Cubbon Park, Petboro Pet Park, Kaikondrahalli Lake Park, Mac's Dog Park, Sadashivanagar Dog Park, Dog Park at Hullu Kaddi
- **Pet-friendly cafes and restaurants:** Urban Solace, Therpup Cafe, Mighty Paws, Cafe Buzzinga, Snoopy Paws Cafe, The Pet People Cafe, Raasta Cafe, Bohemians Bengaluru, Bistro Claytopia, Toit
- **Pet-friendly activities:** Camp Monk Bannerghatta, Elephant Country Homestay, Shivanasamudra Waterfall, Antargange Hike, Wille's Pet Paradise, Aaksar Pet Resort, Madiwala Lake
- **Pet-friendly stores:** Heads Up For Tails, Vega City Mall
- **Pet meet-up groups:** Join online pet meet-up groups to connect with other pet owners in Bangalore who may organise socialisation events or playdates for dogs and cats.
- **Pet training classes:** Enrol your pets in classes, workshops, or daycare that can help with socialisation and behavioural training.