"I SAID SIT!"
SCHOOL FOR DOGS

AVSAB Position Statement On Puppy Socialization

American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior
www.AVSABonline.org

The primary and most important time for puppy socialization is the first three months of life. During this time puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing overstimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior. For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated.

Because the first three months are the period when sociability outweighs fear, this is the primary window of opportunity for puppies to adapt to new people, animals, and experiences. Incomplete or improper socialization during this important time can increase the risk of behavioral problems later in life including fear, avoidance, and/or aggression. Behavioral problems are the greatest threat to the owner-dog bond. In fact, behavioral problems are the number one cause of relinquishment to shelters. Behavioral issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age.

While puppies' immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behavior problem.

Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every safe opportunity to expose young puppies to the great variety of stimuli that they will experience in their lives. Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socializing puppies in an environment where risk of illness can be minimized.

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In general, puppies can start puppy socialization classes as early as 7-8 weeks of age. Puppies should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days prior to the first class and a first de-worming. They should be kept up-to-date on vaccines throughout the class.

To view the statement in its entirety, go to www.avsabonline.org then click on Position Statements.