



## Exposure Guidelines: Building Confidence through Puppy Socialization

**Socialization is the process of preparing a dog to enjoy interactions and be comfortable with other animals, people, places and activities.**

Within the first eight weeks of life, puppies are developing physically and neurologically. It is important to take steps to introduce the pups to meaningful experiences that will help them develop into confident adults. At The Seeing Eye Breeding Station, the pups begin their socialization by being introduced to a variety of sights, sounds, surfaces, and humans to experience their new world and prepare them to make a smooth transition to puppy raisers' homes with self-confidence.

There are **individual variations** on how puppies develop. **As the raiser introduces the pup to new experiences, it will be important to observe the puppy's confidence level, the degree of stress it exhibits, and how the pup deals with stress.** Does the puppy show some concern initially by stopping in its tracks or backing away slightly, then shows interest to explore further? Does the puppy show a deep concern by pulling away strongly and will not move forward even after a moment to observe? How a pup responds to objects and new situations will steer how the raiser handles the puppy and future experiences.

The **home environment** also plays a role in how a pup responds to new situations. A puppy living in a city will likely gain more traffic experience much earlier than a pup living in a rural or suburban setting. A raiser living in a quieter area will need to find areas to give the pup the necessary traffic socialization to build confidence around vehicles.

### How do puppies show stress?

There are several signs that a dog may show if it feels uncomfortable or stressed in a situation, but the raiser has to remember to **look at the puppy's body language, the context of the situation, and the individual dog.**

- Quick licks of the lip or nose when no food is present
- "Shaking off" (when not wet)
- Scratching or licking while in the middle of doing something else
- Sniffing the ground when someone or something appears
- Turns head away or offers its back
- Yawning
- Ears pinned back, tail low / tucked, panting, drooling
- Nervous barking, jumping

**\*\*On the Puppy Development Resource page view the information session: How Dog Language Impacts Outings.** Go to The Seeing Eye website <https://puppyraisers.seeingeye.org/> Login to the family profile and go to "Resources".

### How much stress is too much stress?

When a pup is put into a new situation, it may experience some stress. How and if a raiser responds to the puppy depends on how the pup reacts. **Some mild stress is ok** because the puppy learns how to recover from something that is uncomfortable. The puppy needs time to figure out for itself whether it needs to continue to be concerned or the pup realizes the object, sound or situation is nothing it needs to worry about and can move on with the adventure. This is why brief, early, and frequent experiences that are appropriate for the confidence level of a puppy are so important while raising a puppy to become a confident Seeing Eye dog.

## **Fear Periods**

During a puppy's development, it will experience **"fear periods"** between 8-11 weeks and 6-14 months of age. These are normal episodes when a puppy may become more sensitive and aware to the things around it. Objects and experiences the puppy was once comfortable with may start to concern the pup.

During these periods, the raiser will continue to socialize the puppy, but carefully select outings. The handler should be mindful of stress signals from the pup and support the pup appropriately. Remember – no coddling. If the pup is feeling uncomfortable, it should be given a break from the experience and let it observe from a comfortable distance. The pup should explore at its own comfort level and not be forced into situations where it is obviously concerned. The Area Coordinator should be contacted for recommendations.

## **Socialization Tips**

### **People and Objects**

The puppy should be exposed to people of all ages, sizes, and variety. Other experiences include objects people often possess, such as umbrellas, canes, various types of hats/helmets, wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, etc.

### **Livestock**

For safety a leashed pup should be separated from livestock by a fence. Exposure should always be supervised closely. It is also very important to keep the pup away from the urine and excrement of farm animals.

### **Public Places**

Short indoor visits are helpful with young puppies that are not fully housebroken. The pup's **confidence level, age, and prior experiences** should be kept in mind as outings are gradually increased. A younger pup likely won't have the experience and stamina for long trips. **It is ok to leave an outing early if the pup shows stress and is unable to recover.**

**\*\*NEVER** take the puppy to the places below. **They are not approved by The Seeing Eye and must be avoided.**

- Wild animal parks, zoos, or aquariums
- Escalators, moving sidewalks, revolving doors
- Amusement park rides (exposure to the park is permitted)
- Dog Parks (including any off-leash areas)
- Inside grocery stores (or the grocery section of other stores)
- Airline travel
- Dog shows (unless specifically for Seeing Eye puppies)
- Commercial dog expos

**The Area Coordinator's approval is REQUIRED before taking a puppy to school or work for a full day / part of a day and taking a puppy to restaurants.**

### **\*\*Puppies 12 Weeks and Older\*\***

Puppies' confidence levels excel at different rates. If a raiser has given a puppy many early, individual experiences and the pup shows significant confidence, the raiser may take the puppy on more advanced outings such as an airport tour, a large city trip and attending professional sporting and concert events.

**\*\*Confident pups between 12-16 weeks of age may attend these outings only if the raiser has provided ample socialization experiences and has the approval of the Area Coordinator.**

Outings include:

- |                                             |                  |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|
| - Airport Tours                             | - Movie Theaters |
| - Large City Trips                          | - Large Malls    |
| - Professional Sporting Events and Concerts | - Pet Stores     |

**\*\*If at any time the puppy is lacking confidence in any situation, contact the Area Coordinator.**



The Seeing Eye  
Puppy Arrives!

Let the Adventures  
Begin!



\*Home  
& Yard

\*Car Rides

\*Club Meetings

\*Neighborhood &  
Friends' Homes

\*Stairs (regular, open-back)

\*Side Streets with light traffic

\*Other Animals

Healthy, Fully Vaccinated Dogs,  
Cats, Small Animals,  
Livestock (use caution)

\*Objects

Crate - Household Appliances - Vacuum  
Ceiling Fans - Bikes - Skateboards - Strollers  
Rolling Garbage Cans  
Lawn Equipment - Lawn Decorations  
Windblown Flags / Tarps / Garbage Bags  
Sidewalk / Street Grates  
(walk near grates, but not on the grates)

\*Public Places

Libraries - Banks - Places of Worship - Small Stores  
Shopping Carts - Strip Malls - Slippery & Patterned Floors  
Parks & Beaches - Small Group Presentations  
Elevators (Careful of Doors)  
(No Pet Stores until after 12 Weeks of Age)

\*From a Distance OBSERVE

Moderate Traffic, Transportation (Trains, Buses, Large Trucks)

Walk in Areas with More Crowds, Towns with Moderate Traffic (OBSERVE Heavy Traffic)

Malls, Larger Stores / Box Stores (Target, Walmart, Home Depot, Lowes, BJ's, etc.)

If Confident Observing the Arrival of a Train/Bus, then Take a Ride!

If the puppy has been consistently confident in all of the situations above, then the pup is  
ready to be introduced to a Large City, Airport Tour and Professional Sporting Events and Concerts.

\*\* If pup is between 12-16 weeks of age, consult with your Area Coordinator.\*\*

Is Puppy  
Confident?

NO



Keep outings simple  
Contact:  
Area Coordinator

YES!



Add new outings and  
observe confidence

