**Socializing Your Puppy**

The first thing I want to say is don't plan to do much with your pup the first few days after you bring him or her home. Let the puppy settle in, get a feel for his new family and surroundings. After that, start to introduce him to the new things he will need to know as he grows. I understand wanting to show of your new puppy, but first lay a foundation of trust and let him bond to you, and build trust in you to not let him get overwhelmed. That is SO much more important than showing him off right away.

**Some of the most important things you can DO with your puppy include:**

* Teaching him to tolerate restraint, such as for nail trimming, baths and other grooming. Use short sessions and make it fun for the puppy. Don't reward the pup for struggling by stopping, but wait until he relaxes and then give a break. I am firm but pleasant when teaching grooming, meaning I have a "we do need to do this but it can be a pleasant thing, you get rubbed and petted, it's your special time."
* Make vet visits fun and pleasant as well. Ask if you can just stop in when you are running errands, and take the puppy in for a treat and greet, at times when it isn't going to have anything else happen such as a vaccination.
* Socializing him with at least 100 people of all ages and races in the first 16 weeks, but also other dogs, cats and any normal situation he may be exposed to in his life with you. The critical period for socializing ends at 16 weeks of age so it is VERY important to do as much as you can with the puppy before this age. Of course training and socializing must continue beyond this age, but once they are past it, you can't go back and make up for what the puppy lacked during those weeks. Expose the dog to all sorts sights, sounds and events, in a safe manner so as to build confidence. After the puppy has had his second puppy combo vaccination, he can interact with healthy dogs you know. Still avoid strange dogs or places where lots of dogs congregate such as a dog park or dog show until after he has had the last combo vaccination. You can carry special treats with you to give people who want to greet your puppy. That rewards the pup for going up to new people, rather than giving him the chance to become more shy.

If at all possible, attend a reward based training class with your puppy, starting before he is 16 weeks of age. Make sure the trainer is skilled in positive reinforcement, and not one of the "old style" choke chain/correction based trainers. Clicker training works wonders with Aussies. People to attend classes with their pups tend to do a lot better job raising a well-balanced dog, unless an owner has had many years’ experience in training dogs. And nothing can replace the amount of socializing a dog can get in group classes.

Make sure the puppy has plenty of positive interactions with friendly other dogs. It is critical for the development of proper dog social skills. Dogs raised in isolation from other dogs may develop all sorts of behaviors we don't want to see, and these dogs don't reach their full potential. It is critical the dog has some regular play dates with healthy, friendly dogs. By regular I mean at least a few times a week.

Crate train the puppy to keep him safe from dangers while not supervised. But don't use the crate as a place of punishment or leave the puppy in for more than a few hours at a time. Make it fun by feeding special treats, giving special safe chew toys, or feeding meals in the crate. Let the puppy play and potty and when he is tired and ready to nap, THEN put him in the crate. He will learn that it is a comfortable place to sleep and isn't a bad place.

Teach the pup the "watch me" command. Use treats and reward the puppy for looking at your face and holding the gaze. This is a great way to work on focus when a puppy may be distracted by its surroundings, and builds a foundation to work through any stage where the puppy may have strong reactions to various things. See the Training Your Aussie and Socializing Your Aussie pages for more details. I start teaching my pups this from the moment they are born, by talking to them and rewarding for paying attention, as they open their eyes and ears and begin to orient on my voice. I work every day with my pups to teach them a human face and voice has a pleasant meaning, so they pay good attention.

Teach the puppy impulse control. Teaching the puppy to wait for treats, meals and other exciting things so he doesn't think he can just charge through live without control.

**DON'T:**

Play rough and encourage him to jump up or mouth you while playing. These behaviors are hard to break the dog of and can cause him to hurt people once he's bigger. Dogs that do this are at far greater risk of losing their lives for inappropriate behavior, and it's not their fault. It is totally the owner's responsibility to teach the dog good manners.

Don't let kids hug or hang on your dog's neck, or crawl on or lay on your dog. This is not fun for the dog and often does not end well. Hugging or hanging around a dog's neck is not perceived as affection by the dog, rather it is seen as dominance. It is unfair to expect a dog to have to put up with that kind of treatment, and it is unsafe to allow a child to think this is an acceptable way to interact with dogs, their own and especially strange dogs. To me this is no more appropriate than having a stranger touch you anywhere on your body without your permission.