



As a Professional Certified Pet and Service Dog Trainer and Family Dog Mediator, one of my jobs is to assist pet guardians in helping their puppies and dogs form positive associations with their environment.

We call this Socialization.

Merriam Webster dictionary defines SOCIALIZATION as the exposure of a young domestic animal to a variety of people, animals and situations to minimize fear and aggression and promote friendliness.

A lot of well meaning people think that taking their dog to the dog park or meeting new people is socializing their dog, but it's really much more than that.

It's about thoughtfully creating positive experiences when:

- Exposing the pup to different sounds, smells, sights and objects
- Experiencing different floor services
- Experiencing different types of body handling
- Visiting new places and environments
- Meeting different adults, children and animals
- Teaching the pup to stay calm and focused on their owner when around different people and animals and much more!

But it comes with a caveat; puppies have a critical socialization period starting the day they are born up to approximately 16 weeks of age. Then that window closes.

During this critical time period they learn communication skills, fear responses, tolerance to handling and many other behaviors they will carry into adulthood.

We also know that pregnant dams face positive and negative stress and their puppies' stress response is no different. Puppies of stressed dams are more prone to be anxious and reactive, while puppies of those dams that have more positive experiences are calmer and more stable.

In my experience working with clients and their dogs, dogs that come from commercial breeders and pet stores have not been socialized and exhibit more behavioral issues than dogs that have been thoughtfully raised and socialized by ethical breeders.

The behavioral issues that I find most common in these puppies and dogs are:

- Human and dog aggression
- Severe separations anxiety
- Toilet training issues
- Noise phobias
- Intolerance to handling, petting and grooming
- Obsessive compulsive behaviors like tail chasing and chewing on their own body parts
- Resource guarding of toys, food, spaces and humans

Our communities don't need more puppies being sold in pet stores as commodities. Our communities need more humane and ethical breeders that will put in the time and effort to help raise quality pet dogs.