

Socialization

This is a word that gets an awful lot of play in the training world, and it's definition has come to mean an awful lot of things. Many of which, are incredibly counter-productive, if not downright dangerous.

So let's see if we can't clarify a few things.

Socialization isn't:

- About letting your dog freely interact with dogs at the dog park, day care, or with friends dogs.
- About allowing your dog to meet other dogs on-leash.
- About allowing all manner of people, in all manner of mental/emotional states interact/pet/pressure your dog.
- About exposing your dog to the sights and sounds of cars, buses, motorcycles, bikes, skateboards, joggers...and allowing them to freak out, panic, aggress, hide, bark etc.
- About exposing your dog to the sights and sounds of dogs, cats, and other animals, and allowing them to freak out, aggress, lunge, bark, growl etc.

Socialization is:

- About teaching your dog the proper responses to dogs. What is and isn't appropriate behavior, and correcting the unwanted when it appears.
- About teaching your dog to walk by the barking, lunging dog(s) on walks and ignore them, completely. Correcting if necessary to achieve this result.
- About advocating for your dog and ensuring people aren't allowed to pressure your dog, by touching, crouching down, attempting "kisses" etc. That means being a big boy or girl, and stopping others from engaging in unwanted, uninvited interactions.
- About exposing your dog to all manner of daily life "things" and ensuring a proper response. If aggression/arousal is present, it's corrected, if fear/arousal is present (and causes an overreaction/fleeing etc.) it's corrected. Ask your dog to learn to ignore and not care about these "life" distractions/concerns/temptations. Teach them to listen to the training, not the world around them.
- About teaching your dog to leave other creatures alone. The cat, the bird, the cow, the goat, the other dog, is simply none of their business. If they decide those things are their business, it's your job to correct and clarify what is and isn't their business for them.

Socialization has become a ridiculously simplified, dumbed down, all-encompassing idea. Free interaction and exposure have been presented as a panacea, the magic gateway to a balanced dog. That's a whole lot of B.S. you've been sold, by a lot of people full of B.S. ?

Socialization is all about teaching your dog how to behave and exist in the world...properly. People have a belief that only interactions create a well socialized dog. They don't understand that existence is almost always preferable, and more valuable than actual interaction. Yes exposure is critical, but exposure without 100% clear guidance, and corrections for poor choices, isn't socialization, it's chaos, and it's not teaching your dog what's right, what's wrong, and that you'll keep them safe, so they don't have to.

A well socialized dog isn't fazed by the world around them. And that doesn't come from simple exposure and interactions without guidance. Ironically, that's precisely how you create anti-social dogs.

Think on that for a minute.