

The Importance of Socialisation

- A puppy should be introduced to new things in a systematic manner to give it the best chance possible of developing a sound temperament
- Groom your puppy regularly to make sure it gets used to being handled.
- Teach your puppy to cope with being separated from you

Puppies have a sensitive period of development, often called the 'socialisation period' which occurs at around 3 - 14 weeks. This time is optimum for the formation of positive attachments to other dogs, and humans as well as familiarisation to other stimuli from the environment.

A puppy completely isolated during this period will almost certainly be disturbed for life, with behavioural problems such as increased aggression, abnormal fear responses, lack of sociability and hyperactivity. This response (to treat anything unfamiliar with as potentially dangerous) would have been a useful protective mechanism for wild dogs to, for example, stop them happily approaching a snake or other potential hazard.

A new puppy should be introduced to new things in a systematic manner during this period to give it the best chance possible of developing a sound temperament. The breeder has a lot of responsibility, as it is they who will be the puppy's first human contact. The breeder should ensure adequate contact with the puppies and increase this gradually as they get older. They should also introduce the puppies to both men and women as well as children (provided adequate hygiene and worming protocols for the puppies are in place). Breeders should

also ensure that the puppies get adequate environmental stimuli, e.g. the radio, vacuum cleaner, car sounds etc. Once in their new home, there are several things that can be done to continue the socialisation.

- Introduce your puppy to lots of visitors - both male, female and also children as well as the postman, gardener etc.

the puppy for several minutes.

Teach your puppy to cope with being separated from you. Initially get your puppy used to being in the next room, and then start to leave the house for short periods. Do not make a fuss when leaving or arriving back home. Puppy classes at recognised GSD Federation clubs are an ideal time to socialise puppies with animals of its own age, start teaching



Interaction with other dogs and humans (both male and female) is essential for sound socialisation

- Groom your puppy regularly to make sure it gets used to being handled. Also play 'vet games' - examine ears, eyes and teeth, squeeze paws and check under the tail.

- Make your puppy sit before eating, and get your puppy used to you and other family members adding to its food bowl whilst it is eating. It will start to associate your hand around the food bowl as a positive thing, not a threat, and can prevent the development of food aggression.

- Prevent play-biting by giving a firm 'no' followed by ignoring

basic commands, allowing puppies to interact with different people and environments as well as educating the owner as to the normal behaviour of dogs. In the best interest of your puppy, ensure that all vaccinations are up to date.

A comprehensive socialisation program may not guarantee a perfectly well behaved dog but it will certainly reduce the risk of behavioural problems associated with poor socialisation in the future.