

Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG If you have a puppy, you've probably heard that your puppy needs to socialize with other dogs and puppies. What exactly does that mean? And can all puppies socialize with all dogs and puppies? Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today's podcast really grew out of a question that came into our Recallers community.

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And it's a really good question. It's about how much play is enough play or too much play between dogs. So, Xanthe Helsen and Xanthe is not from North America so English isn't her first language. She's got great English though. "I'm training a hunting puppy, very important for impulse control to focus on me and to work together. We've been training very hard the past few months and getting success in more and more distracted environments." Go Recallers!

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"Tonight, my friend asked me to bring a puppy with me when we went visiting. My puppy has their Hot Zone in our home, and he knows that he's supposed to go up in his dog bed. Because he's not allowed to run around the house playing. I thought it would be a good training when keeping his attention on my friend in my friend's house. I did not succeed at anything. The house was full of toys and the other dog wanted to play all the time. I tried to get Hand Targets and Reinforcement Zone and Hot Zone."

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So, these are all Recallers games that help build the layers of that great bond that she was talking about, and nothing worked. So, the bottom line is she included some videos and I'm going to share it with you. "The bottom line is after two hours of running around, I did get 2 Bring Me's." That's a retrieve that we teach. "5 hand touches, 2 rewards in the Hot Zone. These are things that he knows really well." And the question is "Isn't our bond strong enough? Or could I expect this from another dog?"

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So, it's great. It's phenomenal that you've found a puppy to play with your puppy. Puppy socialization is super important. That's where puppies learn the nonverbal language of other puppies and other dogs. And it's just so important because you know, there's so much going on in the world of a dog and the body of a dog. Now here on Shaped by Dog we've talked about [TEMP: tail, ears, eyes, mouth, and posture](#), but there's more to it than just that. There's nonverbal communication that puppies really have to learn if they want to be able to be around dogs and not be worried. Now dogs who never get the chance to learn this have a much higher probability of being fearful.

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And often the fearful dog can turn to the reactive dog. 'I want to keep other dogs away from me because I don't understand how to play with them'. So, socializing your puppy is really good. But does that mean that every puppy should play with every puppy they meet? Absolutely not. Because as our dog's best advocate, we always have to look out for situations that can build our dog's confidence.



Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions

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And guess what, unfortunately just like with kids, some puppies are bullies. And so, we have to be really careful of the puppies that we let our dogs socialize with. I personally would rather a puppy socialize with a really puppy savvy adult than other puppies that are bullies because it could go in the wrong direction.

Now, let's assume you have found somebody that, "Hey this puppy seems like a really good puppy. I've seen him play with other puppies." That's great, but it still shouldn't be a free for all. Number one rule of letting puppies play, it's got to be safe. So, there's two ways that it can be safe. First of all, the environment. I'm going to make sure that if it's an indoor environment and the floors are slippery, I'm going to put down some mats.

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My favorite are the [dirty dog doormats](#). I got to tell you, I have them all over my house when I have a puppy. And then again, I have them all over my house when I have a geriatric dog. It allows dogs that each end stage and the beginning stage of life that they have the ability to get strong purchase up on their feet.

So, there isn't any splaying of the legs. There isn't any 'Fred Flintstone' turns and then they slide into a coffee table and then a lamp comes crashing down. So, number one I want the environment to be safe as possible. Now my house here has got a slate floor and so for the most part it is pretty good for the dogs to get a good purchase on it's not like a polished or a tile floor, but I still like to put mats down just to err on the side of caution.

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So safe is the environment. Now, if they're outside on grass, that could be a great environment. However, when puppies are chasing other puppies, they can be looking back in the wrong direction, and they could end up running into something. And I have heard horror stories of puppies being very, very seriously injured in that kind of situation.

So, if you're letting a puppy play out in the yard make sure that anything that is out there is protected. So, if you have like say a pole in the ground then maybe put some padding around that or chairs around it so the puppy can't go smashing into that. Okay, environment is safe. Number two the puppy is safe.

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And so, we want to work with dogs that will give signals that explain to the other party "I'm about to do something in play." And they are nonverbal signals, obviously because the dog can go [Speaks in Doglish]. They're nonverbal signals, I could do a whole podcast on what that looks like, but the safest thing to do is you know, ask their owner. "Have they played with other puppies? Have they played well with other puppies?" Okay, that's a good sign. Let them have a little play session. And so, what I'm going to do is once I know that it is safe, I'm going to have a short play session that might be two or three minutes, and then I'm going to try to intervene.

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So, number one it needs to be safe. Number two I like to be involved with it. A problem can happen if you just go, "Oh, you got a puppy. [I got a puppy](#). Let's go watch the game and let these puppies rip around for three hours while we're watching the game." Because how could this go wrong? Number one, the puppies could get over tired and when they get over tired just like kids, they could get cranky.



Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions

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And then somebody says something about somebody's army boots and then all of a sudden it might turn a little bit serious. That doesn't have to happen. You can intervene and say, "You guys have played enough. How about we chillax and then we could have a little play session afterwards." So, I personally like to make sure I'm part of the beginning of every play session and I will call my puppy back.

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Now, if your puppy isn't going to call back like that puppy obviously was like, "Woo! This is so much fun! I'm not coming back!" There's things you can do. For example, you could have two dogs playing and you get laying down on the floor and make goofy noises. They're going to go "Ooh, what's going on there?" And when the two puppies come in, each owner can take the puppy and maybe go to a different room, play a couple [easy puppy games](#), and then come on back with the puppies on leash. And here's where the next step comes in because safe involves the word consensual.

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So, we've had a puppy play session. And what I would do is I would look at the puppy who was the biggest aggressor, meaning that they were the one that was maybe on top more or they were the one that was a little bit more rough. And I would withhold that puppy and I would take the other puppy off leash. And before I just take the leash off, I would have them sit or do a simple behavior and then I would say the words "go play". Now, if your puppy doesn't have any simple behaviors, take the leash off, hold them and say the word "go play".

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I'm trying to build classically conditioned, really positive experiences with the phrase 'go play'. It goes through me. If I say "go play" something amazing is about to happen. Now, if your puppy was the one that was a little bit of the more submissive, the one that is a little bit not the aggressor in the puppy play and you say, "go play" and they turn and kind of go behind your back then they're saying, "You know what, I've had enough for tonight. How about we just take a chill pill."

Now, the likelihood is your puppy's going to go, "Okay! You say go play I'm going to see my friend!" And then as soon as the other puppy owner sees that that puppy is going to play then you can quickly release your puppy with the same 'go play'.

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So, puppy play sessions need to be safe number one, they need to be coming through you. And if rolling on the floor isn't enough you might even just take treats. And you know, depending on the age of the puppy put some treats on the floor and say "search" and the puppies are gonna come in and search and then you can give them a cookie, pick them up, move them somewhere else, clip their leash on, move them somewhere else.

So, get them out of the environment so you can break that session up and then bring them back together. I would never have a puppy play session go on for like two hours. For me I like to interrupt, have them go play, interrupt, have them go play. The other big reason I like to do this interrupting is if you just let your puppy play with every puppy they see until they're tired, guess what, when they see dogs on the street they're going to get very "Oh, it's my buddy! We got to go play!" They're going to lose their focus on actually going for a walk with you and it's all about "I love dogs! I love all dogs! I want to see dogs!"



Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions

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Now socialization means we want our dogs to be a hundred percent okay with dogs. They don't have to be every dog's best friend. And quite honestly, I got to tell you that my dogs tolerate other dogs, but they never see another dog on the street and go, "Yeah, I would like to know you better." It's just not who they are. They have so much fun playing with me that there's no need for playing with other dogs. They play with each other, but they don't see strangers on the street and say, "Dude, I'd love to meet you."

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So, we've got, keep it safe before you start, make the fun go through you, intervening so that you break it up. Make sure that the puppies all are consenting to go back to work and make sure when you're breaking those puppies up that you're taking a water break, you know, make sure there's water down. "Do you guys want a drink? Here's a drink." That's something that you can keep the water bowls up every couple of minutes, put them back and it's another great reinforcement that comes through you.

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Now, the final thing is the more people I talk to about puppies the more I have grown to understand one of the biggest mistakes people make with their puppies. Aside from choosing the wrong way to train them and maybe choosing the wrong food to feed them, is they don't give puppies enough time to sleep. Puppies need a lot of sleep and I'm not just talking about two-month-old or three-month-old puppies. Year old puppies, 15-month-old puppies, they still need a lot of sleep.

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They're curious. They want to do what you want to do so you have to be the higher learner and say "Hey guess what? This is going to be your little nap time. You're going to have [several nap times](#) throughout the day. We can catch up later." And it's also really good for that puppy to have time away from you having a nap. So, when your puppies are playing all out with another puppy it's super important that you go "Hey, let's just intervene. We'll put them both up in a crate separately and they can have a little nap, then they can come out."

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And if you're visiting with your friend who has a puppy, you're there for a few hours, then have a focused play session. And then the first one as I said, it might be you come apart, you evaluate, do you want to go back and play? And the lesser aggressors says, "Yeah! I do want to play." So, they might have another puppy session, intervene again, after I don't know, you can tell when there's a low on the action, when they're all out crazed, it's highly unlikely you're going to have success intervening.

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Eventually you are going to get to a place where when your puppy is maybe 3, 4, 5, 6 months old, you just have to say their name, especially if you've taken Recallers. And they're going to say, "Hey yeah, I want what you want." And then you can use the opportunity to play as another reward. So, keep in mind though that I might do, I don't know, no more than 15 minutes total with me intervening. And then I just give everyone a little chill.

Let's all go to our separate corners and then guess what adults get to visit. Maybe have a bevy. Get to have a little chit-chat and then maybe another hour goes by, let the puppies come out again. It's an event, not a way of life at that point. So, the puppies learn how to socialize. They learn the unspoken language of other dogs. You're growing great social skills, but it doesn't become a way of life.



Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions

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We don't want puppies to think their reason for living in life is to seek out all the other dogs in this world and be with them because that makes it much, much more difficult walking down the street. Quite honestly, most puppies grow up and they learn that it's you know, "My family comes first" and "Yeah hey Fred good to see you but don't feel like playing hide and seek today". Keeping that in mind, puppy play can be safe and I want to remind you again not all puppies have the same play style, not all puppies are meant to play with your puppy.

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So, you be your puppy's best advocate and step in and say, "You know, I think we're good. I think we're going to go and play with little Freddy down the road because little Freddy seems a little bit more calm and has the same kind of play style as my dog." Now that's not to say that big dogs can't play with little dogs because big dogs that really understand that unspoken language, they'll learn to curb their way of playing.

So instead of body slamming this little puppy, they probably get down on the floor and let little puppy face bite with them and play that way. Maybe paw each other a little bit. And then if the big dog gets excited, they might run around and then come back. I remember Momentum when she had her litter of puppies, there were these four puppies playing downstairs and Momentum had this burn out and she just went whipping all around the puppies, intentionally not touching one.

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And then she just laid down and started playing with her puppies again. So adult dogs or older dogs or bigger puppies, they know how to curb their style for a smaller dog. So, it isn't necessarily the size of puppy that dictates whether they would be good to play with your dog. It really is their style of play and how they learn to control themselves and curb their enthusiasm based on the partner that they have playing with them today.

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That's it for today. If you'd like to know more about that [unspoken body language](#) and how dogs give these signals that say, "Hey, let's play." just come over to YouTube, leave me a comment. And we can talk again. I love talking about how puppies play. Because guess what, it's wove into all the games that we have as part of our training.

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I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 4: T.E.M.P. \(Tail, Eyes/Ears, Mouth, Posture\)](#)

[Dirty Dog Door Mats](#)

[Podcast Episode 70: Critical Info for Your Puppy's First Day and Night at Home](#)

[Podcast Episode 98: Puppy Home Alone: Are You Creating Chaos or Calm?](#)

[Puppy Training Playlist on YouTube](#)

[Reactive or Aggressive Dogs Playlist on YouTube](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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