

MEDIA RELEASE

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Good Owner = Good Dog

The number of dogs being put up for re-homing could be significantly reduced if owners paid greater attention to on-going socialisation from an early age, a leading animal behaviourist has claimed.

“The number one reason dogs are surrendered to shelters and pounds is owners who have not put in enough effort so that their dog is well socialised. In fact, the most common age for a dog to be put up for re-homing is around one half to two years of age, which is when they have moved past the cute puppy stage and into the troublesome teen years. Sadly, this is also a common point at which dogs are euthanized because of behavioural problems,” says Dr Kersti Seksel, a leading veterinary specialist in Behavioural Medicine.

“There are many factors that appear to increase the risk of dogs, especially puppies, being surrendered or euthanized. They include incorrect choice of pet, unrealistic expectations of the pet or a lack of knowledge of the time, money and effort required to be a responsible pet owner. Proper socialisation reduces the likelihood of behavioural problems and is necessary for all dogs, no matter how sweet-natured they are as puppies.

“Socialisation is so easy and is great fun for pets and people. It is really just taking part in activities that introduce a puppy to a variety of experiences in a positive and safe environment so they learn how to be a confident and friendly, well behaved member of society,” says Dr Seksel.

Dr Seksel says there are ten priorities for a well-socialised dog.

- **Select your puppy carefully.** It is important to know as much as possible about the parents of any puppy you are considering, as well as the conditions in which it has been raised. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions or inspect the premises where the puppy was raised. Early socialisation occurs between three and 12 weeks of age so by the time you bring your puppy home, it will have learnt many behaviours from its environment – good or bad.
- **Be consistent.** Your puppy depends on you for everything: food, shelter, care and companionship. Puppies also depend on you to show them how to manage situations so make sure you provide clear and consistent leadership at all times.
- **Puppy classes.** Most vets and many private trainers offer socialisation classes for puppies. Well run classes are a great way to positively introduce your puppy to other pets and people and to establish basic obedience.
- **Start early.** Some dogs have a confident, relaxed temperament from day one; others are timid when introduced to something new. Either way, it is important to start to introduce your puppy to new people and situations early on, in a positive and controlled environment.

Talk to your vet about what activity is possible during the period your puppy is being vaccinated.

- **Keep control.** It is important that you have control of the socialisation environment and can avoid situations that may frighten your puppy.
- **Variety is good.** Introduce your puppy to people of all ages, shapes and sizes right from the start. Always supervise any contact between your puppy and other people, especially children, but make sure he or she is introduced to as wide a range of people as possible in a positive environment. If your pup is nervous around other people it is important not to overwhelm the puppy with too many people too soon.
- **Don't force it.** When introducing your puppy or dog to a new experience, allow him or her to explore the situation in their own time. If your pup is nervous around other dogs, ask a friend who has an older gentle dog if you can introduce your puppy. As your puppy becomes used to this contact you can gradually increase the opportunities for your puppy to meet other dogs.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Use every day events as a way of socialising your puppy. For example, a daily on-leash walk might be an opportunity to go past a skateboard park, which will help your puppy to see and hear unfamiliar activities while you provide positive support.
- **Do it in dog time.** A puppy's attention span is short so keep all socialisation and training sessions short and make sure they always end on a positive note so your puppy will be keen to start the next session.
- **Keep at it.** Your dog continues to learn throughout its life so it is important to continue to reinforce their social skills at all times.

"The good news is that recent research shows that pet owners are becoming more responsible about training and managing their pets in public environments. However, all owners can do more so that their dogs are able to be the best dog they can. This means socialisation at an early age and then more socialisation throughout the dog's life," says Dr Seksel.

For more information on socialising and training your dog, go to www.petnet.com.au

(ENDS)

Issued on behalf of the Petcare Information and Advisory Service

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Australia – A nation of pet lovers

Australia is a nation of pet lovers. It is estimated that 63% of Australian households have some type of pet with 53% of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can help improve a person's mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.

The Petcare Information & Advisory Service (PIAS) provides non-commercial information on socially responsible pet ownership. PIAS' website: www.petnet.com.au is suitable for children, although PIAS encourages parents to supervise any online access by their children.

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