

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Paws for thought

Animal behaviour experts agree that one of the most important aspects of responsible pet ownership is socialising your dog from an early age.

“Socialising is simply a term for activities that introduce your puppy to a variety of experiences in a positive and safe environment so that he or she learns how to be a confident and friendly, well-behaved member of society,” says local veterinary behaviourist Dr Jacqui Ley.

The latest research shows that there has been significant progress in socially responsible pet ownership in the decade between 1994 and 2006<sup>1</sup>. The research surveyed over 1,000 people and shows that pet owners are becoming more responsible in key areas including selecting the right type of pet, socialising and training dogs, health checkups and exercise and being a responsible neighbour.

“Our puppy, Lucy, has just got to the stage where she can meet other dogs and seeing the pleasure she gets from going to the park and playing with other dogs is priceless. We are all more active since Lucy joined the family and the good thing about that, apart from the extra exercise, is that it is helping Lucy to be a happy, well adjusted dog,” says Melbourne mother Jenny Mina.

The Petcare Information and Advisory Service (PIAS) agrees that more people are becoming aware of the importance of socialising a dog from a young age and says if there is one thing the owner of a new puppy, or even an older dog, needs to know it is the importance of exposing your dog to as many new experiences as possible in a positive and safe environment

“A well socialised dog is a pleasure to have as part of the family and it is now quite usual for puppies to attend classes and other activities that help with their socialisation. Unfortunately, under-socialised puppies can grow into adult dogs that are fearful and defensive which can lead to aggressive behaviour,” says Susie Willis from PIAS.

“The most important period for socialising your dog is when they are still very young, between three and 12 weeks, but it remains important throughout their life as a puppy and young dog. Even older dogs benefit from positive exposure to different environments and situations,” says Dr Ley.

She offers the following tips for an owner wanting to start a socialisation program with their puppy.

- Puppies need to complete their vaccination program before they can interact fully with other dogs or be walked in areas where other dogs toilet. However, once the vaccination program has started, it is possible to introduce your puppy to others of a similar age that have also commenced a vaccination program. Older vaccinated dogs, especially ones with a quiet temperament, can also be introduced to your puppy under supervision.
- Your puppy’s socialisation should have started around three weeks – well before you acquired it. Ask the person that you are obtaining the puppy from whether the puppy has had an opportunity to interact with dogs other than littermates, other animals and a variety of humans.

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<sup>1</sup> *Socially Responsible Pet Ownership in Australia: A Decade of Progress*, Professor Bruce Headey.  
Available from [www.petnet.com.au](http://www.petnet.com.au)

- Your puppy should meet a range of people from a young age. This should include children although it is important that the child is old enough to understand what sort of behaviour is appropriate. Interaction between a puppy and children should be supervised by an adult at all times.
- Make sure your puppy is used to being groomed on a daily basis as this will help to make him relaxed with these activities when he is older. When the puppy is tired, gently handle his paws and ears and open his mouth. Run your hands or a brush over his body – he will love the affection and reassurance this provides and it will make visits to the vet easier when he is an adult dog.
- Expose your puppy to a range of different experiences, always making sure that you are helping to make it positive and rewarding. Other animals, unexpected objects on the ground, prams or pushers, rides in the car and loud noises such as skateboards are all new, and potentially scary, experiences to a puppy. They should be associated with rewards such as a food treat or praise from you so that the puppy learns not to be frightened of them.
- Feeding is an important opportunity to reassure your puppy. Praise your puppy when you place his bowl on the floor and, every so often, place an extra treat in his bowl as he is eating as this will help him to learn not to be defensive around food. Once he has learnt to sit, always ask your puppy to sit before feeding him.
- Puppies get tired or overwhelmed easily so break socialisation activities into short periods and keep an eye on him to make sure he is not overwhelmed by the situation.
- There are plenty of opportunities for your puppy to meet other puppies of a similar age. Puppy classes are run at many vets and dog training clubs or ask your friends who own appropriate dogs to help. The internet is also a great way to network with other dog owners. [www.dogtree.com.au](http://www.dogtree.com.au) is a fast-growing, Australian site that provides a free service where you can connect with other dog owners in your area or who have dogs of the same breed.

“Remember, exposing your dog to positive experiences and rewarding good behaviour is the key to having a well-socialised dog. Commitment to working with your dog will result in a happy and confident dog that you can enjoy life with,” says Dr Ley.

For further information on “selecting the right pet”, “how to have a well adjusted dog” and “how to help your pup become man’s best friend” watch PetNet TV on [www.petnet.com.au](http://www.petnet.com.au)

(ENDS)

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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) is funded by Mars Petcare Australia as part of its commitment to socially responsible pet ownership. PIAS’ website: [www.petnet.com.au](http://www.petnet.com.au) provides information on the responsible and enjoyable ownership of pets. The site is suitable for children, although PIAS encourages parents to supervise any online access by their children.