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Why you absolutely CAN socialise your dog during lockdown

Just because you can't meet with friends or attend in-person classes, you can still effectively socialise your puppy, or maintain the current level of socialisation in your adult dog.

Socialisation is not about play dates, rough and tumble games with other dogs or getting lots of fuss from strangers. In fact, that kind of socialisation is actively detrimental in most cases. Effective socialising is done from a distance regardless.

The distance you should be from the thing you want your puppy to get accustomed to should be great enough that your dog can observe but not react. If your pup is jumping up, lunging or barking you are way too close, so move back. Your pup should look, air scent, receive a treat and then either sit or move on calmly. THAT is textbook socialising in the real world.

Do remember that your dog's reactions will vary week on week as they pass through different developmental stages, so your distances may change too.

Here is a list of ideas to get you started (please follow current Government COVID guidelines on social distancing).

- Stand outside a supermarket, near the noisy trollies and watch people come and go.
- Find a park bench on the outskirts of a quiet park, sit and watch the world go by.
- Gradually find slightly busier benches as your dog learns to cope.
- Walk up and down a quiet street with a few people and cars.
- Find a slightly busier street.
- Find a busy car park, open your car boot with your dog secured within in and sit together and watch the world go by.
- Calmly observe dogs playing together at a distance.
- Sit or stand outside a field with other animals in it.
- Find a retail park with a Pets At Home and hang about the car park, calmly observing the animals coming and going.
- Record your doorbell or door knocker on your phone and play it randomly, pairing the sound with giving your dog a treat.
- Do the same with loud noises like fireworks, trains or thunder.

Finally, as and when restrictions loosen you should adopt the 1 in 3 rule, or **GAP** protocol.

For every 3 dogs you encounter you should allow your dog to:

Greet the first for 3 seconds on lead and then move away.

Avoid altogether and walk on by.

Play off lead in a supervised manner for a short time.

(Whilst this won't be the case for EVERY 3 dogs, you get the point).

This protocol also works exactly the same with greeting humans too and will prevent your dog from automatically going into crazy play mode every time s/he sees another dog or person.

Finally, always be led by your dog. If s/he does not want to interact, respect their choice always and move off.

If you want more information on advice on socialising your puppy during these unprecedented times, please contact me on at kirsten@kirstendillon.com