



Encouraging Puppies and Kittens to Be More Social and Easier to Handle

Some kittens and puppies are a little shy and naturally a bit more afraid of strangers, especially some children and men. Some young pets have difficulties with new experiences and situations. Behaviorists and veterinarians now understand that this fear is the primary reason pets may bite. Fortunately, young puppies and kittens can be “conditioned” to accept positive contact with strangers and new experiences.

Ideally, your puppy or kitten should have a positive introduction to many different people and many different experiences during the first few months in your home. The most effective technique for persuading puppies and kitties to trust new people and new situations is to have special treats associated with these new experiences. These special treats should be small, delicious treats such as small pieces of freeze-dried liver, semi-moist treats (Pill Pockets?), sausage, cheese or anything that agrees with the pet and convinces them that these new experiences are truly wonderful. These situations include handling their ears, brushing teeth, brushing fur, trimming nails, turning on a vacuum, and going on positive adventures to the park, visits to veterinarian to just get weighed, held on an exam table or petted by the staff. Don't force things! Make sure these exposures are done in a way that's comfortable for the puppy or kitty. There are some young individuals that can be a bit more fearful at 8-11 weeks so don't keep exposing a puppy or kitty to a new experience if they stop taking tasty treats. This is a sign of stress. Consult with a veterinarian for guidance if there are questions or concerns.

Socialization is best done from 8-16 weeks of age, but pets of any age can eventually be reconditioned to accept strangers. Science shows that it's easier for brains to remember bad experiences than good ones, so make sure your foundation for your puppy's or kitty's brain is filled with terrific associations. You can avoid big problems in the future and, let's face it, handling and spending time with your puppy or kitty is a ton of fun!