

Socializing Older Dogs

step-by-step guide



1. Start Slowly & Build Confidence

Before introducing your dog to new people or pets, help them feel comfortable in new environments.

- ✓ Introduce one new experience at a time in a controlled setting.
- ✓ Avoid overwhelming situations—keep experiences short & positive.
- ✓ Use treats & praise to reinforce calm behavior.

2. Controlled Exposure to Dogs & People

Older dogs may be hesitant about new canine friends, so take it slow and set them up for success.

- ✓ Set up playdates with calm, friendly dogs first.
- ✓ Begin with leashed walks alongside a calm, well-socialized dog.
- ✓ Keep a comfortable distance and reward positive behavior.
- ✓ If both dogs remain relaxed, allow sniffing and light interaction on neutral ground.
- ✓ For more advanced introductions, progress to off-leash play in a secure area under supervision. Choose an open space large and comfortable for them to move around and not feel restricted and overwhelmed



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Step 3: Getting Your Dog Comfortable Around People

If you are hosting a party or small gathering, start preparing with only one new person leading up to the event.

- ✓ Invite a friend over and ask them to ignore your dog at first—no direct eye contact or reaching out.
- ✓ If your dog remains calm, reward them with treats. We take Harry away from the door and distract him with treats and brief, engaging training as the person enters.
- ✓ Let the dog initiate interaction when they're ready. Gradually allow your friend to offer treats to them if they remain calm.
- ✓ As confidence builds, introduce your dog to small, controlled groups of people.

Step 4: Desensitize Your Dog to New Environments

New places can be intimidating for dogs who aren't used to change.

- ✓ Start with quiet areas, then work up to busier locations like parks or pet-friendly stores.
- ✓ Pair each new experience with treats, praise, and encouragement to create positive associations.
- ✓ Keep outings short at first to prevent overwhelming your dog.

★ MAJOR TIP!

Do not force a dog into a social interaction when they are showing signs of being uncomfortable.



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Step 5: Build Confidence Through Training & Routine

The better your relationship with your dog, the more comfortable and trusting they will be of you during this process.

- ✓ Practice your basic commands like “sit,” “stay,” and “leave it” to create a sense of control.
- ✓ Keep a consistent daily routine so your dog knows what to expect.
- ✓ Play interactive games like treat-finding puzzles or obedience drills to build engagement and focus.

Step 6: Seek Professional Help if Needed

Some dogs need extra guidance, and that’s okay!

- ✓ If your dog shows severe fear or aggression, consult a force-free dog trainer or behaviorist.
- ✓ A professional can help create a customized desensitization and counterconditioning plan.

Bonus Tips for Success

- ★ Let your dog set the pace—never force interactions.
- ★ Always use positive reinforcement—reward calm behavior with treats, toys, or praise.
- ★ Be patient! Socialization is a journey, and progress takes time.

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Recognizing Signs of Stress & Handling Discomfort: **Signs Your Dog is Uncomfortable or Overwhelmed:**

⚠ **Subtle Stress Signals:**

- ◆ Lip licking or yawning (when not tired)
- ◆ Turning their head away or avoiding eye contact
- ◆ Slow tail wag (a stiff or low wag can mean uncertainty)

⚠ **Clear Signs of Discomfort:**

- ◆ Ears pinned back
- ◆ Tucked tail or crouched body posture
- ◆ Panting when not hot
- ◆ Whining, growling, or attempting to retreat

⚠ **How to Respond:**

- ✓ **Remove pressure:** Increase distance between your dog and the stressor.
- ✓ **Use positive reinforcement:** Reward calm behavior, not fearful reactions.
- ✓ **Give them a break:** Let them process at their own pace—never force an interaction.
- ✓ **Slow down exposure:** If they seem uncomfortable, back up to a step where they were successful.

The Dog Care Academy

It's never too late to help your dog feel comfortable and confident! Every small step you take builds trust and makes the world a more enjoyable place for them. Stay patient, celebrate progress, and most importantly—have fun with your dog!

LEARN MORE



★ Want more expert tips? Inside our course, we cover everything you need to raise a confident, happy dog!

DOG CARE ACADEMY

Brought to you by Dr. Laura
Robinson and the Harry Pupper
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