



McMASTER & HEAP VETERINARY PRACTICE

EARLY PUPPY SOCIALISATION

Steve and I have just been to the Pan Pacific Vet conference in Brisbane. We enjoyed a week of new ideas and techniques, connecting with old friends, and looking at lots of new equipment. We already have new equipment lined up for the Practice that will enable us to do a better job in dentistry and anaesthesia.

Most of the lectures we attended were on dentistry, animal behavior, radiography and small animal medicine.

I'd like to discuss the importance of early socialisation of your new pup and the ways in which we, at McMaster & Heap, can provide advice, encouragement and support in this area.

The socialisation period in puppies begins at age 3 weeks and continues to age 12-14 weeks, depending on the breed. During this time, a puppy's brain is developing social capabilities and associations. Puppies who do not experience appropriate socialisation during this period often suffer behaviour problems throughout life. Early socialisation allows for healthy social development, preventing avoidance behaviours and acts of aggression based on fear of other dogs, people or new environments.

Appropriate socialisation involves exposing your pup to a variety of different people, places, environments and situations without causing him to become afraid. Examples include people of all ages, sizes, and colors, men with beards, people wearing uniforms, headgear or glasses, people in wheelchairs or walkers, and people riding bikes, skateboards, or rollerblades. Owners should carry treats with them at all times so that new people the puppy meets can provide a positive interaction.



vaccinations so the pup is distracted and doesn't develop fear associated with taking a temperature or being stuck with a needle. We don't muck around as pups have shorter attention spans.

Our practice mascot LOLA, my devoted, gentle Black Lab is always cruising around and I make sure these pups get introduced to her in the consult. She allows them to sniff, leap and run around her in a non threatening, safe, fun way so they are learning social interactions with a placid, kind mature dog. These interactions with safe older dogs are important although they need to be healthy and fully vaccinated. It is appropriate for the adult dog to give an occasional reprimand in the form of a bark or air snap when the puppy is biting or playing too roughly. Any aggression beyond that, however, is not appropriate. Problem behaviours seen early on that will require the help of a professional in this area are: avoidance of other people and animals, lunging at people, alarm barking, excessive mouthing and biting during handling.

Another very important aspect of early socialisation is attending a well controlled, fun, informative **PUPPY PLAYSCHOOL**. We are very fortunate to have Carol, a registered vet nurse, with years of experience handling and enjoying dogs, running our playschool evenings. It is here, in our large reception area, once a week for 3 sessions, that your pup will learn in a safe and controlled manner how to interact with other pups and new people. They will also learning basic training and they will start to understand what you want from them. They will get an appreciation that a vet clinic is



Teaching a puppy to sit for all interactions with new people will also encourage him to greet people in a polite manner. Exposure to inanimate stimuli, such as vacuum cleaners, cameras, balloons, crates, and veterinary offices is also important. The use of food treats to create a positive association with objects, as well as people is essential.

At McMaster and Heap we value and respect your new babies and we want their experience at OUR Practice to be awesome. They generally first visit us between 8-10 weeks of age for their vaccinations. This age bracket is their first fear period. This sets them up to have strong fear learning capabilities and one negative experience can be detrimental for life. We aim to be gentle and quiet around them initially, giving them time to smell and trust us. We offer treats during the physical exam and



not scary or threatening – actually its loads of fun and you get loads of treats. You also learn a lot about the general needs and health of you pet including nutrition, desexing, vaccinations, insurance, advise on the best toys and treats, further training and we can help if behavioural issues develop along the way.

Give McMaster & Heap a call to find out more about our successful

Puppy Playschool classes. We all believe they are an essential part of developing a well rounded, calm, socialised, happy, healthy little pup as well as being fun and informative and inexpensive. Children are also welcome... as long as well behaved!

Dr Michele McMaster

OPEN 7 DAYS



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