



Puppy Socialiser Guide

The role of a Puppy Socialiser

Puppy socialising is a crucial part of Assistance Dogs' work. Although fun, it requires a great deal of personal time, responsibility and a commitment from the entire family. However raising an assistance dog puppy is truly an unforgettable experience, one that many find themselves repeating again and again. The end result, however, is life changing for the person whom receives, a very special companion indeed.

Our puppy socialisers are the most amazing people, playing a vital role in the early socialisation and education of Assistance dogs. The aim of puppy socialising is to produce a puppy that is socially well behaved, friendly and responsive to the handler. It is also important that the puppy is at ease in all environments, including town conditions, is relaxed and confident when using all types of transport and learns an acceptable standard of behaviour on the lead. As each puppy is an individual, our staff will advise on the best way to achieve good results and the most appropriate time to introduce the puppy to these new environments.

From about eight weeks of age, puppies start their early training in the home. Each family opens their home and hearts to a little puppy, raising it with lots of love and special training, so the puppy can go onto advanced training, where it learns all about becoming an assistance dog. The socialisers are responsible for the puppy's care, safety, and behaviour in the home and out in public, as well as basic obedience skills. Puppy Socialiser is supplied with food, veterinary expenses and all equipment necessary to get the puppy through its first 12mths of development. They must also commit to bimonthly meetings for the association to assess the puppy's progress.

Essential criteria for puppy socialising

- A puppy needs to be welcomed into your home and understood by all the family. The puppy should be reared with the blend of affection, control and supervision normally given to a young child. As a prospective puppy socialiser who will care for and walk one of our puppies, the following criteria are essential:
- You must be at least 18 years of age to be in charge of the puppy. Whilst any children at home can enjoy lending a hand, it is important that any puppy training, e.g. lead work, is only carried out by a person who is a minimum of 16 years of age.
- You should be at home most of the day. This will ensure that there is enough time to feed, exercise and educate the puppy. The puppy must not be left on its own longer than three hours each day.
- You need to live in suitable accommodation with easy access to an appropriate relief area. Homes in, or within easy reach of, built up areas are preferred in order to condition the puppy to all aspects of town life.
- Whilst it is not a problem for other pets to be in the home, any pet dogs must be of a suitable temperament.
- Puppy socialising can be fun for children, although having a household with children and an Assistance dog puppy can be a mixed blessing! Both puppy and child must learn respect for one another. Children should be of a suitable ability and age to enjoy the experience, and allow you enough time to train and educate the puppy to the required standard.
- The puppy will need to experience busy town conditions, traffic, shops, crowds, car travel, and public transport on a regular basis so you will need access to a car and public transport.
- You will need to sign a copy of our Puppy Socialising Agreement each time a puppy is allocated and placed with you.
- Throughout the process you will never be alone! A representative of Irish Dogs for the Disabled will call regularly to check on the puppy's progress, give practical advice and help with any difficulties.

"Being a puppy socialiser gives me an immense amount of satisfaction and pleasure. It can be emotional when the puppy leaves but you know it is going to make a difference to the life of a disabled person, and that makes it all worthwhile."



Becoming a Puppy Socialiser

The foundation of this program is built on the love and trust provided by Puppy Socialiser Families.

At close to 8 weeks of age our puppies are placed in the socialiser' homes. While growing up, the puppy becomes a member of the family; a friend that all family members enjoy and help to become a confident, obedient, and loving dog. The home environment provides love and bonding with people as well as an early start on good house manners, familiarisation with the everyday world and early exposure in social situations that prepare the puppies for their future as Assistance dogs.

The primary goal of a Puppy Socialiser is to love and raise a puppy to be well-mannered, confident and socialised until the puppy is ready to begin formal assistance dog training.

Puppy Socialiser also acts as goodwill ambassadors to promote public awareness and support for the assistance dog program. Some Puppy Socialisers participate in fundraising events, give demonstrations and speak at public meetings and schools to promote the work of Irish Dogs for the Disabled.

Puppy Raiser FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

How old would the puppy be when I receive it?

A. Puppies are given out at approximately 8 weeks of age

How long could I expect to have the puppy?

A. A Puppy Socialiser will usually have the puppy from 8 weeks of age to anywhere from 12 to 18 months of age.

Is it hard to give up the puppy?

A. This is a question often asked. Yes, it is hard to give up the puppy. After you have had the puppy for 12-18 months in your home it has become part of your family. You get used to taking the puppy to stores and out to eat. To help with the transition of giving up the dog, some puppy socialisers think of it as the dog "going to college". Others adjust by getting another puppy and starting over again. Attending monthly meetings with other socialisers will help you to stay focused on your mission. These dogs are going on to improve the quality of life for a disabled person, whom will love and care for them. This is one of the greatest you could give. Remember that every assistance dog was once a puppy and someone unselfishly gave of their time to raise, love, train, and give up that dog. It is a very difficult thing to do, but look at the difference that dog has made in the life of their "Person".

What would my obligations as a puppy socialiser be?

A. Being a Puppy Socialiser requires patience, time and commitment. You are responsible for the care and safety of the puppy. You must provide a loving home environment, teach appropriate house manners, instills confidence in the puppy, commit to exposure and socialization outings, apply basic obedience skills each day and attend your Puppy Socialiser monthly meetings.

What do you mean by an exposure outing?

A. The puppy needs to be exposed to many, many things such as; the post office, the supermarket, public transportation, traffic, elevators, etc... This means you would commit to bringing the puppy everywhere with you.



How would I socialise the puppy?

A. Socialising is ensuring the puppy is exposed to other animals (dogs, cats, farm animals), to young children, infants and older folks too. The puppy will learn many socialization and exposure skills while attending your Puppy Socialiser meetings

Would I be responsible for Veterinary expenses?

A. A representative will advise you of a veterinary surgery in your area, also provides you with medical support and advice, where necessary. All veterinary will be covered by the charity.

What would I need to provide?

A. A loving home from where the puppy can grow and learn. Food will be provided by the charity or arranged through a local supplier... In order to reduce destructive behaviour an indoor kennel will also be provided.

I'm very interested. What do I do next!

A. Just contact the charity via email or phone, regarding your interest of become a Puppy Socialiser. An application form will be sent to your address, once processed your application will be forwarded onto one of our representatives in your area to arrange a home visit.

How long could I expect to wait for a puppy once I've been placed on the waiting list?

A. As we breed and buy in a number of puppies we are continually looking for socialisers. Once you contact the centre we will be able to indicate as to when the next litter is due to be placed.

What type of dog will it be?

A. We most commonly use Labradors and Golden Retrievers or first crosses between the these two breeds. Labrador-cross-Golden Retrievers have a very good success rate and it is for this reason that they are usually placed with first time puppy socialisers. Although some people express a preference towards a dog or a bitch, both sexes are used with equal success.

Do I get to name the puppy?

A. Assistance Dogs breeds and cares for a vast number of dogs and it is vital to keep accurate records on each one. To help achieve this all puppies are individually identified and named at birth. Each litter is given a letter of the alphabet and all puppies in the litter will have names starting with the same letter, e.g. Alice, Alec and Andy.

How should I expect the puppy to behave?

A. An assistance dog needs to be well behaved as it will spend the majority of its time in social situations with its owner - be it at home, at work or, for example, in a restaurant. Unacceptable behaviour includes begging or scavenging for food, jumping up at people, climbing on furniture and barking for attention. It is also important that the puppy is not destructive and is confident about being left on its own.



How much exercise should a puppy get?

A. Like children, puppies' bones are soft and fragile and strenuous, excessive exercise can be damaging to a growing pup. Although it is important for the puppy to have free exercise, this has to be balanced with education lead work. We can tell you how to protect the puppy's health and how to ensure safe and successful off-lead exercise

Where does the puppy go if I have a holiday booked?

A. When going on holiday its necessary for you to contact your rehrehensive and notify them in advance of your holiday plans in order for them to arrange alternative care for your puppy.

I already have a pet dog; can I still be a puppy socialiser?

A. Dogs and other pets can have a positive influence on a developing puppy although the puppy shouldn't become over reliant on them. This is why we need to be sure you have enough time each day to walk and spend time with the puppy. Your pup also needs space in your home to sleep separately from pet dogs.

We consider each application to become a puppy socialiser on individual merit. All other pets will need to be friendly and treated regularly for fleas and worms as well as receive annual boosters.

Preparing for The Puppy

There is usually a waiting period before you receive the puppy. What can you do to best prepare?

Puppy Proof your house and garden. Everything goes when on the puppy's level.

Including electric cords, pesticides, rodent traps, breakables, household cleaners, solvents, fertilizers, antifreeze, human medication, plants, chocolate, children's toys, kitty litter boxes, cat food, valuables and personal possessions.

When you are teaching and conditioning the puppy appropriate behaviour, it is important to learn that you keep the puppy with you, when you are at home or in an indoor kennel when you are not at home. These are the tools that help you keep the puppy under your direct control and supervision. These tools make for quicker and more effective communication between you and the puppy. A puppy can also be under your direct supervision behind a baby gate or a fenced in garden with you present. However, the puppy is NOT under your supervision when it is loose around the house or in the garden without you present and watching it. It is up to you, the teacher of the puppy, to be aware of how you are handling and setting the pup up for either success or for failure. Failure is allowing the puppy unsupervised freedom.

Think Safety:

It is your responsibility to protect the assistance dog puppy from accidents or mishaps. By knowing where the puppy is at all times and by restricting the puppy's movements when not supervised (placing the puppy into the indoor kennel). Teaching basic obedience and conditioning good behaviour improves safety. For example the sit-stay can be used to control the puppy. Other tools are the leash, tie-down, crate, fenced in area, baby gates and, most of all, you who needs to be aware.



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Keep the puppy on a leash:

Puppy goes off leash only when you are in a safe area away from traffic. When you are not home leave the puppy in a safe place such as the indoor kennel. Keep a collar and ID on the pup at all times. Advise children to be careful going in and out of the house and to shut the doors leading outside securely behind them.

If an Accident Happens:

We know that you would not intentionally hurt the puppy. Occasionally a very odd accident might occur that is truly out of your control. However, most incidents can be prevented by using the tools and advice we provide. If the puppy is injured by neglect or not following the guidelines in the program, the puppy will be withdrawn from the home.

Arrival of the Puppy

The moment you have been waiting for! You will be contacted by Irish Dogs for the Disabled to make final arrangements for the puppy's arrival. The puppy will be sharing the next 12 to 18 months with you.

Your puppy will arrive with:

- a name
- metal ID tag
- supply of puppy food
- medical record and schedule for next vet visits
- flea and worm details and due dates
- the name of the assigned veterinarian
- the name of your trainer or supervisor
- puppy coat for socialisation and exposure outings

This is a very exciting time for you, your family and friends. Please understand what a new and overwhelming experience it could be for the puppy. The puppy will be excited to get out of the car and will probably need to go Quickly, Quickly (toilet). So on arrival home don't go right into your house. Give the puppy one more opportunity to relieve itself. Don't forget to use the command and techniques outlined in toilet training section.

The Ride Home:

If possible bring someone with you when you pick up the puppy. Bring several old towels and some of the plastic baggies you've been saving for "quickly" bags. You can also consider having a crate for the puppy in the car for the ride home. You will be provided with a collar, leash and I.D. so you don't need to worry about that.

The puppy will be riding home in the wheel well or floorboard of the passenger side. The passenger will keep the pup secured during the first ride home. An alternative would be to place the puppy in the crate for the ride home. Often young puppies experience travel sickness to reduce the risk of this, try to encourage the puppy to sleep or remain calm in the car during the journey.

Don't give the puppy any food or water before the ride home. Just prior to getting in the car, bring the puppy to a relief area and try "Quickly, Quickly" command. Give the puppy a few minutes to relieve. Keep your verbal communication to the command. Don't play with the puppy while you are trying to get it to concentrate on relieving itself. If the puppy relieves itself, generously give it verbal "GOOD DOG" and physical praise, stroking it. If it leaves a present behind, be sure to pick it up with that plastic baggie you brought.



Arrival Home:

Your Personal Dogs:

Not going inside immediately will also give a family member or a friend an opportunity to bring any other pet dogs you may have outside to meet the puppy. You should do the greeting just outside your garden so your personal dog(s) don't feel territorial. One of the best ways to introduce your personal dog(s) is to be happy and give a lot of verbal praise using "GOOD DOG" while they are meeting. By being positive and using praise, you are letting the dogs know that you are in control and everything is a-ok.

All household pets will adjust to the puppy eventually. It is your responsibility to keep both the personal pets and the puppy from dominating or irritating one another. Know what is happening and structure them so you know who is near whom. The puppy should be easy to know where it is because you have it on leash, tie down or with you behind a baby gate. If the puppy is irritating any personal pet, teach the puppy "NO". If the personal pet is showing inappropriate behaviour towards the puppy, then that is unacceptable also. You are top dog of the house; the other pets should follow you. They are all counting on you to be the leader and keep them safe. If unsure of what to do next contact you're reprehensive.

First Time Inside Your House:

You are ready to bring the puppy inside. First offer the pup a drink of water and a small quantity of puppy food. Then allow the pup to explore your entire house under your watchful eye and on leash. If other pets are in the household, this will give you better control of the pup if it decides to leap on another pet or a person. Keep a close eye out for any squatting or circling. After about 10-15 minutes of house exploration take the puppy back outside for a few minutes for another opportunity to relieve.

Family and Friends:

Try to keep family, friends and other animals from overwhelming the puppy. Have children sit on the floor when greeting the puppy and make sure the puppy is not mouthing or jumping on the children. It is never too early to start teaching the puppy to sit to receive attention and praise.

Children or adults can give the puppy a toy and encourage it to play. All people in contact with the puppy need to learn how to give it appropriate attention. You can advise what verbal and physical communications for them to use. That's easy; most of us do it naturally. Verbally, "GOOD name of the puppy" and physical praise is stroking and petting the puppy. People should not encourage the puppy to nibble on their hands or tug at their clothes or allow the puppy to jump on them. People should not laugh at inappropriate behaviours like this, no matter how cute it might seem. The laughter signals to the dog that it is OK. You should either teach the person how to correct the puppy or you should be present, aware and quick to do it yourself.

Your constant awareness of appropriate behaviour goals and the puppy's current actions are critical for the puppy's success. Early intervention begins now. Not correcting or redirecting an inappropriate behaviour every time will leave the puppy confused as to what is acceptable. Teach the puppy in a gentle, but firm manner. Tell it "NO" when it does an inappropriate behaviour. Praise immediately when the pup stops the inappropriate behaviour.

It's a good idea to follow-up an inappropriate behaviour by directing the puppy to an alternate acceptable behaviour. For example: "SIT", followed by PRAISE when accomplished. Using an alternative behaviour to distract the pup from repeating the inappropriate behaviour can be very effective and conditions the puppy



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into good behaviour. Just remember you're teaching and redirecting. The puppy doesn't have a clue yet. Don't be harsh, or expect the puppy to know what you want after you've showed it once or twice or even three times. It's necessary to be repetitive with your directions and re-directions in order for the puppy to truly learn and to remain confident with understanding.

At first, keep the puppy on a leash with you or on a tie down near you when it is awake. Plan some time to devote to communication development with the pup. See section on Communication Development. When the pup wants to nap, gently put it either in the indoor kennel. It needs to get used to its private and safe place. We highly recommend an indoor kennel be used for bedtime and naps. Stay in the room for a few minutes and don't take the pup out of the kennel. It should soon settle down as it remembers it's tired.

In general when a puppy arrives at your home it will need affection, verbal and physical praise, introduction to its play toy, and time to adjust to its new environment. Patience and awareness on your part are required while showing the puppy acceptable and appropriate behaviour as it gets to know you and the household.

The First Night:

1. Puppy should stay overnight in an indoor kennel with a teddy.
2. Keep pup awake as long as possible, until about 10-11pm.
3. Give the puppy an opportunity to "quickly" outside just before bedtime.
4. Best if you are ready for bed too.
5. Place puppy gently in kennel. A toy or one biscuit can be used.
6. After you shut the door on the kennel its best not to leave the room. Time for you to read or turn the light out.

If the puppy whines, ignore it. See if it settles down. If its volume gets louder, you may soothe it with a short verbal, "its OK puppy", just so it remembers you are there. DO NOT take it out of the kennel or open the door and physically comfort it.

The puppy may cry for a long time. IGNORE IT. Try putting a radio on low or the ticking of a loud clock sometimes helps. If you are reading, shut the light off. If the light is off, turn the light on and start reading. Be visible to the pup so it knows you're there. Give it very little verbal acknowledgment and give it no physical acknowledgment.

If the pup wakes up in the middle of the night, it may have to go outside. Go ahead at this point. You don't want the puppy relieving in the kennel. Let it out of the kennel and carry it outside. Give it some verbal and physical praise in greeting, but don't play with it. It should do its "quickly" within several minutes. Wait and see if it needs to do both "quickly", but do not wait more than three minutes. Praise it only when it relieves and then finishes. Bring it back inside, put it back into the kennel and resume sleeping. You can put a toy in with the puppy. Ignore it if it whines or barks. After a few days or weeks it will be growing bigger and learning to control its elimination desires. You will not and should not have to get up in the middle of the night after this point.

Plan to be a little tired for a few days or few weeks. It will pass. If you feel the puppy is abnormally unhappy in the kennel, call your puppy supervisor for advice the following morning.



Toilet Training

When starting toilet training please remember that you have a young puppy and that it will take a time for the puppy to learn what's expected of it. Please follow the following instructions and your puppy should progress with toilet training with ease. If you have concerns, please do not hesitate to contact one of our staff for further guidance.

- The command used is quickly, quickly and this command will be used throughout your puppy's life.
- Set up the crate provided and this will become the puppy's bedroom. It needs to be comfortable but use something easy to wash initially as your puppy will have accidents initially.
- Then choose an area in the garden that you will only go to with the puppy when you want your puppy to toilet. Then tell the puppy too quickly, quickly.
- If the puppy then toilets reward him/her, if the puppy doesn't toilet then return the puppy to the indoor kennel, without saying anything negative to the puppy.
- Please remember that the puppy will not toilet in front of you outside, if you punish it for toileting in front of you inside. So if your puppy has an accident, say nothing and just clean it up.
- With this approach you should find that your puppy learns easily to respond to the quickly, quickly command.

Supporting you and the puppy

Regular visits and support

Puppy socialisers receive regular visits from their Puppy Supervisor. These visits are normally carried out every four to six weeks although new puppies are visited more frequently, especially in the first few weeks.

These visits are designed to give both parties the opportunity to discuss the puppy's progress and any concerns. Puppy Supervisors monitor the puppy's health, standard of social behaviour and educational development.

They also provide practical support and advice on all aspects of the puppy's care and education including feeding, grooming, worming and environmental exposure, as well as demonstrating the best way to handle and train a puppy.

It must be emphasised that puppies, by their very nature, can cause damage in the home unless they are carefully supervised. It is important that the puppy can be left unattended without causing damage. Our staff will provide advice and equipment to prevent damage to the home.

Your Puppy's health

The Vet

It is vital that you have access to a local veterinary practice with 24-hour cover which is close enough to be reached quickly in an emergency.

Irish Dogs for the Disabled will pay all veterinary expenses while the puppy is in your care. The vet will forward an itemised account to the charity for settlement.

Vaccinations

Our vaccination policy was drawn up under the guidance of our Veterinary Advisers. It is designed to ensure our puppies receive maximum protection in all situations, enabling us to start exposing them to the environment from a much earlier age than normal.

Before arriving at your home, your puppy will be vaccinated with the appropriate vaccine covering all the major diseases. The puppy will be vaccinated again in line with Irish dogs for the Disabled' policies. Your Puppy Supervisor will let you know when these vaccines are due.

Worming

All puppies are given treatment against worms before they arrive at your home. They are wormed again every three months. Your Supervisor will provide the medication, together with instructions on how to give the treatment as well as general advice.

Neutering and bitches in season

It is policy to neuter all working assistance dogs other than active breeding stock. Timing will depend on the pup but males are usually castrated between eight and nine months of age, whilst the pup is with its puppy socialiser. The operation will normally be carried out by your vet and the puppy will convalesce at home. Your Puppy Supervisor will assist you to make all the arrangements for this.

Bitches are normally spayed following their first season, which can occur any time after six months of age. If the season happens whilst still being puppy socialised, it is far better to leave a bitch with you for the duration of her season (about three weeks) wherever possible. Where this is not practical, your Puppy Supervisor will consider each case on its own merit and give advice and options accordingly.

When the puppy leaves

This will probably be a day full of mixed emotions for you and your family as your pup leaves you - but you should be proud that you have started its training for such a worthwhile job.

"It is nice to know what you are doing is so worthwhile and you get a real sense of achievement from it. When the puppy leaves, you know you've done your bit and it's going on to do the next stage of its training."

Assistance dog in training

Once at the centre the puppy (now a young adult dog) will be allocated to an Assistance Dog Trainer who will commence the next stage of its training. During this time you will receive regular training updates. When the dog has completed this stage it will progress to advanced training with an Instructor who will complete the final stages by training the dog and match you dog to a suitable client (disabled person).

The graduate

We will tell you when your dog qualifies as a working assistance dog and you'll receive a framed photograph of the dog presented with our thanks for you work. The new assistance dog user is asked to contact you, just to let you know how the dog has settled.

When they don't quite make the grade

Inevitably, for a variety of reasons, not all puppies and young adults make the grade as assistance dogs. If this happens, we will try to train the puppy into a different working role such as Therapy dog. If this is not possible you may be offered the dog back under our rehoming scheme.

Alternatively we have a long waiting list of approved adopters waiting to give one of our dogs a loving home. If you wish to be considered, please notify your puppy supervisor.