

SOCIALIZATION CHECKLIST

Building confident, adaptable dogs through positive, thoughtful exposure

Socialization is not about exposing a dog to everything as quickly as possible. It is about creating safe, positive experiences that help the dog learn to recover, adapt, and remain comfortable around the people, places, surfaces, sounds, animals, objects, and situations they may encounter.

How to Use This Checklist

Check an item when your dog has experienced it **comfortably** - not merely endured it. Repeat exposures in different locations and at different intensities. If your dog shows stress, increase distance, lower the difficulty, and try again another day.

PEOPLE

- Men and women of different ages, heights, builds, clothing styles, and appearances
- Children at a safe distance; calm children and children playing or moving quickly
- People wearing hats, hoods, helmets, sunglasses, masks, uniforms, or bulky clothing
- People using canes, walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, scooters, or other mobility equipment
- People carrying bags, boxes, umbrellas, tools, sports equipment, or unusual objects
- People approaching, passing, standing nearby, speaking, laughing, and gesturing

HANDLING & CARE

- Collar and harness put on and removed
- Feet and nails handled; nail trims introduced gradually
- Ears, mouth, teeth, tail, legs, and body gently examined
- Brushing, towel drying, bathing, and grooming equipment
- Standing calmly on a scale or low platform
- Veterinary-style handling and brief gentle restraint

SURFACES & FOOTING

- Carpet, tile, hardwood, concrete, gravel, grass, dirt, mud, and snow
- Metal grates, rubber mats, textured flooring, and shiny floors
- Stairs, ramps, curbs, thresholds, and low platforms
- Uneven ground, small bridges, boardwalks, and safe unstable surfaces
- Puddles, wet pavement, icy-looking surfaces, and different outdoor footing



SOUNDS

- Doorbells, knocking, doors opening and closing
- Vacuum, hair dryer, blender, appliances, and household equipment
- Traffic, horns, sirens, motorcycles, trucks, and heavy equipment
- Construction sounds, power tools, banging, clattering, and dropped objects
- Thunder recordings or weather sounds introduced at a safe volume
- Children playing, crowds, cheering, music, announcements, and loud voices

PLACES & ENVIRONMENTS

- Quiet neighbourhood walks and busier sidewalks
- Parking lots and storefront entrances
- Pet-friendly stores and appropriate indoor public environments
- Parks, playground areas at a safe distance, and sports fields
- Office-like environments, waiting rooms, hallways, and elevators
- Busy urban areas, rural settings, and unfamiliar buildings
- Different homes and yards
- Outdoor patios or other appropriate dog-friendly dining environments

MOVEMENT & TRANSPORTATION

- Cars and trucks; entering, exiting, settling, and riding calmly
- Automatic doors and sliding doors
- Elevators
- Shopping carts, strollers, wagons, bicycles, skateboards, and scooters
- People jogging or running past
- Public transit environments where appropriate and permitted

ANIMALS

- Calm dogs of different sizes and appearances at an appropriate distance
- Dogs walking past without greeting
- Cats observed safely
- Horses or livestock at a safe distance where appropriate
- Birds, squirrels, wildlife, and other moving animals without chasing
- Learning to disengage from animals and return attention to the handler



Socialization Checklist — Continued

OBJECTS & NOVEL EXPERIENCES

- Umbrellas opening and closing at a comfortable distance
- Balloons, flags, signs, decorations, and objects moving in the wind
- Garbage bags, recycling bins, carts, cones, and barriers
- Statues, mannequins, large stuffed animals, and unusual displays
- Automatic hand dryers from a safe distance
- Mirrors, reflections, glass doors, and unusual shadows
- Objects falling or moving unexpectedly without overwhelming the dog

EVERYDAY LIFE SKILLS

- Settling quietly while people talk or eat
- Waiting calmly while the handler stands in line
- Walking past food on the ground without grabbing it
- Remaining neutral around friendly strangers
- Passing other dogs without needing to greet
- Recovering after a surprise or startle
- Relaxing in a new environment after a short adjustment period
- Taking food and responding to familiar cues in moderately distracting places

SERVICE DOG PREPARATION

- Working around mobility devices and medical equipment
- Settling under a chair, table, or desk
- Navigating narrow aisles and doorways
- Remaining composed around dropped food and shopping carts
- Ignoring attention from strangers while working
- Maintaining handler focus around other dogs
- Entering unfamiliar buildings calmly
- Practicing short, successful public outings before increasing duration and difficulty

Remember: check an experience when the dog handled it comfortably — not simply because the exposure occurred. Repeat experiences gradually in different environments while watching the dog's body language and recovery.

OPTIONAL PROGRESS RATING

Track confidence across repeated socialization experiences

Use the scale after an exposure to record how comfortably the dog handled the experience. The goal is not to reach a 4 quickly. Look for steady improvement, easy recovery, and the ability to remain relaxed and functional across different versions of an experience.

1 - NEW

First or very limited exposure.

2 - NEEDS SUPPORT

Can succeed with distance, food, or extra support.

3 - COMFORTABLE

Relaxed and functional in the situation.

4 - CONFIDENT

Comfortable across different versions of the experience.

SOCIALIZATION PROGRESS NOTES

Experience / Location	Date	Rating	Notes / What Helped

IMPORTANT

Do not force interactions or keep a dog in a situation simply to complete the checklist. Quality matters more than quantity. Socialization should build confidence and resilience, not teach the dog that warning signs are ignored.

