Advantages of Puppy Socialization Classes
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Few things are as exciting as getting a new puppy, but every would-be owner needs to be aware of the immense responsibility of being a good dog owner. Millions of dogs are euthanized each year upon relinquishment to an animal shelter. Dogs less than two years of age are the largest percentage of those brought to a shelter. What was the most common reason for sending them back? Behavior problems. How can this situation be avoided? One possible solution may involve puppy socialization classes. By introducing the puppies to this socialization training at an early and impressionable age, the hope is that the puppy will experience less stress upon entering new situations, and therefore acquire fewer undesirable behaviors.

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association evaluated the association between retention in the home and attendance at puppy socialization classes. A survey was conducted by way of questionnaires completed by adoptive owners of dogs between 1 to 6.5 years of age. All of the dogs were adopted through the Animal Humane Society in Golden Valley, MN. This humane society offers puppy socialization classes for puppies from 7-12 weeks of age. This age has been shown to be the best time for a puppy to develop the social skills that may help prevent behavior problems. During these classes, the puppies learned, in a safe and nonthreatening way, to adapt to a variety of sounds, sights, smells, people, other dogs, equipment, and even walking surfaces.

Three groups of dogs were assessed: those who were enrolled in the humane societies socialization classes, those who were not enrolled in any classes, and those who were enrolled in a socialization program other than that offered by the humane society. Higher retention rates were reported for dogs that participated in humane society puppy socialization classes. This suggests that these puppies were a little easier to handle for their new owners. Of course, other factors were taken into consideration such as gender, handling practices, type of collar used, and the presence of children in the home. In general, retention was higher if the dogs were female, wore halter-type headcollars as puppies, were handled frequently, or lived in homes without young children.

There are many benefits to having pets for children, but the lower rate of retention of dogs in homes with children demonstrates the importance of having realistic expectations, knowledge, and effective tools to manage interactions between children and dogs. Children and puppies do not always understand the actions of the other, and it is necessary to anticipate possible clashes in their interaction with one another.

If you just can't resist that adorable puppy, be prepared to arm yourself with as many training tools possible, and don't forget about the likely benefits of puppy socialization classes.