



Socializing Your *Pit Bull* Test Your Socializing Smarts

1. True or False? Smart Socializing involves setting your dog up for success with only positive dog-dog interactions. **TRUE!** - The more positive interaction ANY dog gets with other dogs, the more likely he will develop and maintain 'dog-tolerant' behavior for life.

2. True or False? - Dog Parks are a dependable place for positive dog-dog socializing opportunities. **FALSE!** - While Dog Parks can be fun, they also bring plenty of **NEGATIVE** interactions by forcing your pet to come up against dogs that might be overly stimulated, short-tempered, outwardly aggressive or otherwise badly managed. Smart Socializing means keeping your friend dog-tolerant, and that involves **AVOIDING** dicey situations where conflict can spark.

3. True or False? 'My dog is really good with my brother's dog. Is it true that he'll be good with all other dogs?' **FALSE!** - The friendship your dog has worked out with your brother's dog will not necessarily translate to other dogs. It would be completely normal for him to be very picky about which dogs he likes.

4. True or False? - I heard it's okay to go to the dog park until the first fight, then you can quit going with no harm done. **FALSE!** - A dog's first fight is always the one you want to avoid. Why? A bad fight can make a huge impression on your dog and cause him to have a shorter fuse the next time a dog-dog conflict comes up. Dogs learn from their bad experiences just like we do, so it's best to protect them from conflict.

TIP: Protect Your Dog from a Bad Dog-Dog Experience.

Dogs don't need to 'prove' that they can be buddy-buddy with every dog they meet. A good goal is making sure your dog can calmly tolerate and even ignore other dogs when he's out on-leash. Even better if he also has a small handful of trusted play partners for supervised fun in safe areas.

6. True or False? - A good way to socialize a dog is to let him walk up and greet dogs that he doesn't know during his walks. **FALSE!** - Leash greets can be a very challenging way for any two strange dogs to meet and a sure bet way to set the wrong two personalities up for a loud argument. Also, allowing your dog to do this will encourage him to pull like crazy towards any dog he sees. The tension that builds from the excitement of a rushed greeting can escalate into leash aggression for him and yanked shoulders for you - Not good! - *See other side for more info on socializing*

Leash Reactive: Not able to be calm around other dogs while out on leash. May pull, whine or bark.
Dog Tolerant: Able to ignore other dogs on-leash and tolerate most rude behaviors from other dogs.

Smart tips for introducing two dogs for a play session:

Mature dogs (one year old and up) do best with dogs of the opposite sex. Take your time and introduce new dogs in measured baby steps. Avoid rushed greets! Socially mature dogs should meet on neutral turf like a city street with a long side-by-side walk to help break the ice and get them used to each other's scent and presence. Some dogs (puppyish dogs or very well socialized dogs) can play with new friends almost immediately; others may take weeks or months before they get to this stage. Some may never get to the point where they can play with other dogs. That's okay - For them, just being calm, tolerant and well behaved while on-leash is a very worthwhile goal.

If you stage it well, a good first intro between mature dogs will be rather uneventful. The goal is to help them get familiar with each other without allowing any physical contact. They can work up to having more contact over the next few days or weeks. With time, familiarity will lesson their excitement level and pave the way for a smooth relationship.

NOTE: *In BAD RAP, it can take many days before a mature foster dog can play with our personal pets. The slower we take things, the fewer problems we see and the more long-term success we can enjoy.*

On the day that you finally decide to let dogs have full contact with each other, make sure both are well exercised and well acquainted. Remove all toys and food items. Keep their leashes on and when they seem relaxed, drop the leashes. This moment of faith can be scary, but if you've laid some good groundwork with SLOOOW introductions and good obedience training, your dogs should enjoy having the opportunity to finally interact. As they sniff each other, keep your voice happy and confident and praise them for

showing relaxed body language. Practice calling them back to you to make sure they're still under voice control.

If you see either dog stiffen or the hair on their back puff up ('hackles') calmly step in, leash them up and try again another day. If the dogs start to play, use your voice to keep things calm and to prevent them from getting too aroused. Don't allow mounting or toy-tugging during these first few play sessions.

If a scuffle does break out, you haven't failed! You may have just pushed things too fast. It may be best to lower your expectations and take things slower, or hold off on any more greets and call in a trainer to help you. It's not unusual to have a couple of minor snarfs as dogs get to know each other, but it benefits everybody to keep those to a bare minimum. As a rule, it's always best to end intro sessions when things are going well. Don't wait until the dogs have played so hard that they become over aroused or so tired that one or both get grumpy. Instead, end the play on a positive note and lavish praise on everybody -including yourself!



TIP: Practice **Defensive Driving** with Your Dog.

If someone insists on rushing their dog up to meet yours, just hold out your hand, step in front of your dog, smile brightly and say, "Sorry! We're in training right now!" Don't be shy - It's our responsibility as dog owners to protect our pets from potentially negative experiences. It's perfectly OKAY for your dog not to greet every dog he encounters.

The smartest ways to socialize your dog:

Obedience Classes, where every dog gets used to acting calm and relaxed around other dogs without the pressure of inappropriate leash greets and **Structured Play Sessions** in safe, contained areas with other known dogs. Dogs are like people, most of us like having a few close friends that we trust and enjoy. And like people, good friendships come from familiarity and develop over time.