

Socializing Your Dog for Health Problems

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One hears about socializing dogs to people and other dogs, but many miss another important socialization.

One important thing is to socialize them to wearing "equipment." I do a lot of things that may on the surface not nice to the dog, but are actually very helpful if a dog due to health needs a leg cast, bandage, Elizabethan collar (aka head cone or E collar), or cart. If you wait till they're in pain, injured, or otherwise falling apart on top of having to deal with a new freaky thing attached to them, it's a lot tougher on everyone and stress is not good for a dog with health problems.

So, wrap a scarf around their neck or loin, put a T-shirt on them, put your sunglasses on them, a dog muzzle, wrap a bandana around their leg or a sock over it, put removable tape around their leg or a sticker on their back. Remember safety tho, nothing that could possibly injure the dog. If the dog is freaked, start small/minor and work gradually to bigger things. Tell them to leave it. Buy an Elizabethan collar (cheap and handy to have on hand) and let everyone get their turn with it. Get something that will drag behind them (but won't harm them). Get something that will somehow affect the way they normally move. Socialize them to being in weird things like a cardboard box. Touch them on various body parts with things they don't recognize like kitchen utensils (again, safety, no sharp stuff). Be calm but firm about it, don't make a big deal, don't say oh poor thing, or laugh at them, or plead with them. Don't ever leave them unattended. Calmly discourage struggling. Encouraging them with a cookie to help to get them moving, give a treat after when they've been good. Happy praise sometimes makes too much of a big deal about it (dog reads: ooh this IS bad!), so firm and calm is best.

If you get them to trust you when you "attach implements" to them they'll be very more accepting of other things in the future. Trust between owner and dog is extremely important. Obviously pre-socialization to "attachments" won't work all of the time with all dogs, but it gets you well ahead of the game and will work with most. Very skittish, extremely stubborn, and dogs that don't trust their owners will have more problems.

Carts for DM are especially tough for dogs to accept. Not only is this big *Thing* suddenly attached to them, but it chases them around. For an animal in the wild, a foreign object stuck on them would be deadly, so inborn instinct is Get It Off!! They also suddenly have no rear control (until they learn how). They have to relearn walking using the front. And this thing following them jolts them and punishes them whenever it cuts a corner that previously was not a problem. The dog will blame the cart, not the corner.

I don't know what the dog cart companies do for Dog Intro To Cart 101 (anyone?), but first impressions are very important. A gradual intro to the various aspects of the cart would be best. Get dog used to a harness (of any sort) around their front and rear where

the cart harness will be before adding wheels or rear support. Perhaps then start slinging their rear with the harness (or harness substitutes) on. Do tons of early cart training with the full setup exclusively out in the open so there's no banging of furniture, wall corners, or landscaping to punish the dog in it's early attempts with the cart. Then they learn that the cart is good, not a punisher, and can later learn to deal with corners when they've accepted the cart. Yes, it takes time!

BTW, I've only had one dog needing a cart, and he did great with it right off. I also tested the cart out on all my other guys to see how they'd take it given their background with "attachment socialization." All did extremely well. They had a 1st short session with it last nite (cart needed more work), then a 2nd session today after reworking the cart. Peri and Polly (both soft girls) did a little freezing at 1st but quickly started walking with it for Good treats, the others said cool for just plain ole boring biscuits.

Likewise it's good to board dogs at kennels so they're used to being in kennel runs in a strange place with strange dogs in case they need hospitalization at the vet (that said I HATE boarding and have someone sit at my place). Crate training for the same reason is a Must in case a dog needs crate rest for an injury.