

# EU Platform on Animal Welfare

## Health & Welfare of Pets (dogs) in trade

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### Voluntary Initiative Group

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# Members

**Member States<sup>1)</sup>**

**FVE**

**NGOs<sup>2)</sup>**

**Independent expert**

**(Last meeting 24th March 2022 Remote)**

1) BE, DK, FR, FI, IE, DE, IT, RO, SK, ES, PT, HU, NL

2) Eurogroup for Animals, 4 Paws, RSPCA

# We ask your endorsement today for:

- Supplementary guidance doc. on socialisation of puppies
- Supplementary guidance doc. on socialisation of kittens
  - Intended to help breeders, also in conjunction with the Responsible Breeding guidelines endorsed nov 2020
  - Breeders should ensure puppies and kittens have a good start in life – they are well socialised and behaviourally healthy -
  - Competent authorities may wish to use these guidances to verify whether breeders are keeping puppies/kittens in suitable environments

# Socialisation of puppies, kittens

## CONTENT

- Description of stages of development
- Description of sensitive period(s) for socialisation
- Guidance on socialisation and early experiences
  - General guidance
  - Socialisation programme
  - Transitioning puppies/kittens into new homes



**Table 1** Overview of the stages of puppy development from birth to adolescence (summarised from Dietz et al 2018; Landsberg et al 2012).

Development stages			
Neonatal: birth-to-2 weeks	Transitional: 2-to-3weeks	Socialisation: 3-to-12 weeks	Juvenile: 12 weeks-to-sexual maturity (adulthood)
<b>Sensory, physical &amp; behavioural milestones</b>			
<p><b>Born completely dependent on their mother:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Puppies are blind, deaf, unable to control their own body temperature &amp; cannot toilet independently.</li> <li>- Puppies are sensitive to touch, pain, and temperature; they can detect certain odours &amp; tastes.</li> <li>- Puppies can lift their head &amp; 'right' themselves, but movement is limited to 'wriggling' short distances.</li> <li>- Time is mostly spent sleeping &amp; nursing.</li> <li>- Eyes and ears gradually open from 10 days of age (eyes) &amp; 14 days of age (ears).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rapid improvement in neurological and behavioural development:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Toileting increasingly becomes under voluntary control.</li> <li>- Puppies begin to crawl forwards &amp; backward, start to stand, perform simple walking movements, &amp; wag their tails.</li> <li>- Puppies begin to interact with one another.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rapid learning facilitated by maturation of the sensory and physical capabilities leads to development of social behaviour:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Puppy brain growth is rapid up to 7 weeks of age.</li> <li>- Senses are developed and fully functional by 4 weeks of age.</li> <li>- Learning rapidly increases through experience - puppies associate social and non-social objects with positive or negative emotions.</li> <li>- Toileting is voluntary &amp; by 3 weeks of age puppies start to choose specific areas away from their bedding for elimination.</li> <li>- First puppy teeth appear by 3-4 weeks of age &amp; all puppy teeth are present by 6-8 weeks of age.</li> <li>- Weaning starts at 3-4 weeks of age &amp; completes by 6-8 weeks of age.</li> <li>- Normal sitting &amp; standing develops by 4 weeks of age.</li> <li>- Puppies play with their mother &amp; littermates; play-specific behaviours and expressions develop.</li> <li>- Exploration of their environment and new objects increases up to 5 weeks of age.</li> <li>- After 8 weeks of age puppies become more fearful of new experiences.</li> <li>- Puppies are particularly sensitive to human contact and new experiences.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Continued physical growth and consolidation of social learning:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Puppies grow &amp; refine their motor skills.</li> <li>- Puppy teeth are lost from 12-16 weeks of age &amp; all adult teeth are present by 6 months of age.</li> <li>- Learning capacity is fully developed by 12 weeks of age; speed of learning slows by 4 months of age.</li> <li>- Exploration of environment increases, but puppies become increasingly fearful of new experiences unless their learning during the socialisation period is repeated and positively reinforced.</li> <li>- Onset of sexual maturity is highly variable and may be influenced by breed and other factors.</li> <li>- Toy or small breeds can reach sexual maturity from 6 months.</li> <li>- Large or giant breeds can reach sexual maturity after 18 months of age.</li> <li>- Social maturity happens much later by 18-24 months of age.</li> </ul>

# General guidance

- Breeders should have a socialisation and habituation plan
- Regularly & appropriately handle puppies/kittens to habituate them
- Gradually habituate puppies/kittens to different textures, sounds, sights
- Gradually introduce puppies/kittens to a carrier (transport)
- Gradually introduce puppies/kittens to other animals
- Etc.

# Socialisation programme

- Puppies/kittens must be monitored throughout the socialisation programme
- Keep track of each puppy's/kitten's progress

**Table 2** Socialisation and early experience from birth-to-9 weeks of age

Types of experience	Puppy development period > Weeks since birth >	Neonatal		Transitional	Socialisation					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Human interaction</b>	Puppies, from a young age, must receive regular, consistent, and positive handling by people. Socialisation of individual puppies should be done in the presence of the bitch and the puppy's siblings.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Early gentle handling & daily weighing	Provided the bitch is accepting, puppies may be weighed daily for the first 2-3 weeks by the breeders or main caretaker. Combine with gentle handling:	x	x	x						
	Gently hold and stroke the puppy along the head, back and tail, touch paws and legs. As the puppy ages, the puppy's head, body, tail and paws can be touched and examined. The mouth and teeth should also be gently examined.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Lift up and hold the puppy close to the body of the handler for 30s, the handler should wear different material types (e.g., wool, fleece, t-shirt etc).	x	x							
Handling for daily care and examination (include as part of daily interaction)	Gently groom the puppy from head to tail with a small, soft brush, soft towel, and soft grooming mitt. The duration of grooming should increase as the puppy ages.			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Place collar on for short periods of time during socialisation sessions. Collar wearing should increase in step as the sessions increase in duration. Ensure collar is suitable for size and age of puppy. Puppies should be comfortable wearing a collar before they are homed.			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Handling for weekly weighing	Puppies should be weighed at least weekly from 3 weeks of age until homing. A food treat and basic training can be used to encourage the puppy to step on to and sit still on the weigh scales.			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Time away from littermates	From 4 weeks of age puppies should be handled for health checks, grooming, and weighing for short periods away from their litter. To start with, time away from littermates should last no more than 5 minutes. Gradually increase to 10 minutes with longer durations paired with interactive play and reward-based basic training.				x	x	x	x	x	x
One-to-one play sessions	Puppies should have individual daily play sessions with people, lasting for at least 5 minutes. Interaction should be encouraged through a variety of suitable toys (e.g., soft, squeaky, tug toys etc). Basic training can be interspersed with play (e.g., requesting a puppy to sit and briefly wait before throwing a toy, and calling a puppy to come to interact with the handler for a toy).				x	x	x	x	x	x
Interacting with people wearing different items of clothes	Puppies should experience caretakers wearing different items of clothing (e.g., hat, sunglasses, rucksack, high-vis, wig, wellington boots, overcoat, etc). Puppies should be allowed to investigate at their own pace and be rewarded for approach using food treats and interactive play.			x	x	x	x	x	x	x



# Transitioning into new homes

- Short periods of separation from the mother
- New owners should be provided with a copy of the socialization plan + guidance on continuation
- A list of things the puppy/kitten likes

# Received comments

- Consultation via the digital tool: one comment on the guidance doc. on kittens (kittens should be introduced also to harnesses & nail-clippers and should be offered foods with many different compositions and textures)
- However: There are already recommendations on variation of foods in the guidance
- Suggestion: further look at these comments in a future review/update of the document

# Other documents (for info & promoting use)

- Shorter /summary version of Responsible dog breeding guidelines
- Shorter /summary version of Responsible cat breeding guidelines
- summary version of the Guidelines on commercial movement by land.



# Please utilize the documents at home

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All translations welcome!

*Todas las traducciones  
son bienvenidas!*

*Всички преводи са  
добре дошли!*

*Alle oversettelser er  
velkomne!*