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Help! My Puppy Needs Life Experiences!

For puppies to grow into confident adult dogs they need early introduction to a range of experiences that they may encounter in life. The more things they are introduced to as a puppy, the better they will be able to cope with novel experiences, such as new sights and sounds *etc*, throughout their life.

It is up to you as your pup's leader to ensure that he has as many positive experiences as possible whilst protecting him from bad experiences. Remember that your pup (let's call him Deefer) will often take his cue from you, so try to show a matter-of-fact confidence in every situation. If, for example, you rush around screeching at lightning and thunder and slamming windows and doors shut when a thunderstorm is coming, Deefer will probably begin to think that thunderstorms are bad events. To avoid this, make preparations for the storm in a calm manner and carry on as though a thunderstorm is a normal occurrence. Treating Deefer with a high value reward *after* a loud crack of thunder will help convince him that thunder is really a pretty good occurrence - after a thunder crack, he gets something good!

Before you introduce Deefer to new experiences you should learn about his body language and the signs he may show if he is anxious. Talk with your Delta Instructor to find out about doggy body language and for suggestions on what to do if Deefer does indicate that he is worried.

It is important to introduce new things gradually - do not flood Deefer with too many new experiences at once. Start with him at a distance from new objects or sounds and gradually move him closer if he is coping well. Reward him for every sign of confidence.

If you do see signs that Deefer is anxious when you are introducing him to new experiences, then you need to take action to relieve that anxiety. This means you will need to take charge in a confident manner - do NOT fuss over him and try to reassure him - this may make him more worried. Instead, move him in a no-fuss manner to a distance at which he feels safe, allow him to approach the "scary" item at his own pace, or gradually increase the volume of sounds as he becomes comfortable. *Remember to reward* him for every small sign of confidence.

The checklist below may help in your quest to expose Deefer to as many new experiences as possible while he is still a puppy. Using the principles outlined above, check each item off as he becomes comfortable with it. It may not be practical to expose Deefer to all these items, but you need to ensure that at the very least, the items most commonly encountered in life are included. There may also be items which are not listed - add them at the end of the list.

If Deefer has a bad experience with any item or event it is best to contact your Delta Instructor for suggestions before exposing him to that event again.



For more information on Canine Good Citizen™ training for your pet, contact the Instructor listed on the front page of this handout.

For more information on the Delta Society go to www.deltasocietyaustralia.com.au

Look for the other Handouts in the Delta "Help!" series:

- 🐾 Help! My Dog Jumps on Me!
- 🐾 Help! My Dog Needs Better Manners!
- 🐾 Help! My Dog Digs!
- 🐾 Help! How Do I Housetrain My Puppy?
- 🐾 Help! My Dog Barks!
- 🐾 Help! I Have a Demolition Dog!
- 🐾 Backyard Fun for Your Dog!
- 🐾 Help! My Puppy Bites!

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