

SOCIALISATION: WHAT, WHY AND HOW?

Recently there has been a lot of discussion about the importance of socialisation of pups and dogs.

So, what is it and how can it help your greyhound's performance?

- We know that confident, bold dogs are more successful than shy, timid dogs. Many scientific studies have tested this theory and have found a link between confidence, trainability and performance
- Although genetics are important, what a dog will become frightened of most commonly depends on its **earlier experience**.
- This is because the more it is familiar with, the less it has to be frightened of. The acceptance of things that are 'normal' will depend on what the dog has encountered in the **early stages of its life**.
- Exposing the pup to different environments is commonly called **Socialisation** and **Habituation**.

IDEAS FOR SOCIALISATION

Identify everything this pup will need to cope with as an adult racing greyhound and ensure that they are familiar with each environment or situation. Include:



- ✓ **Cars and car travel**
- ✓ **Dog trailers**
- ✓ **Isolation and kennelling (particularly pre-race kennels)**
- ✓ **Many different people**
- ✓ **Leads/collars/harnesses/coats**
- ✓ **Different foods**
- ✓ **Supervised water play**
- ✓ **Synthetic lures**
- ✓ **Squeaky toys**
- ✓ **Burst-proof balls**

Allow the dog to encounter all of these between 6–14 weeks of age and ensure your greyhound associates them with positive things, like food, attention or play. It is important that you keep doing this after 14 weeks of age until pre-training, but at the early stage the pup will be more likely to want to explore whilst showing curiosity and acceptance.

SOUNDS & OBJECTS

For a pup to learn to be interested in chasing a lure visual and noise stimuli, they can't be afraid of it. In young pups start with toys that are not too loud but build this up over time. Allow them to get used to the indoor environment and hear music, television and even vacuum cleaners. This will also help them settle in to a post-racing pet home. Handle the pup every day, practice running your hands over their body whilst they stand quietly.

Look in their ears and mouths, handle their feet. Make this a pleasant experience by initially keeping it brief and being gentle and encouraging. Reward them with food, praise and a chase game. Take the fear out of these strange sounds. Let them explore strange objects left in their yard – anything from a straw bale to a coloured beach ball will add to their experience – be inventive!

PEOPLE

Inconsistent and very short interactions with your greyhound puppy will not adequately prepare them for a racing career. Greyhounds need to be confident when being handled by many different types of people, including different men, women and children. Whenever you have visitors, encourage them to play and pet the pups. Exposure to children (under supervision) is important.



TRAVEL

Gradually, introduce pups as they get older to the idea of being in a vehicle or trailer. You may start by simply feeding them in the back of a stationary trailer. Another day you could drive them up the driveway and back and increase the duration of trips over time.

OTHER DOGS AND PETS

Aggression in dogs does not improve their running speed. Aggression is detrimental to the dogs' career, retirement options and general welfare. Aggression can occur as a response to fear and anxiety. So, in the first 3 months of a pup's life introduce it to other dogs and puppies you can trust to 'play nice' and always under close supervision. Ensure that it meets other breeds of dogs – not just greyhounds. Allow it to meet other greyhounds outside of its own litter too.

PLACES

Until your pups are fully vaccinated moving off-site presents a risk. However, after the vaccine course is complete any chance of taking the pups to visit places with different smells, sights and sounds will benefit their future behaviour.

With all these techniques remember to start small and build up. New objects should be introduced from a distance, car trips should be short and new sounds should start quiet. Don't try to force a pup as you risk building negative associations. These negative associations may in turn make your greyhound fearful and anxious.