

## Have a CoVid dog? It's Time to Drop the Excuse and Start the Training

Recently, I watched as a dog cowered away from a woman who was attempting to say hi. The dog's owner apologized and said the dog was a CoVid puppy. This is a new phrase implying the dog has behavior issues. These issues can span from fear and anxiety to dogs who act aggressively or those just without manners. But just because you ended up with a dog during the pandemic does NOT mean that dog has to have behavior issues their entire lives.

We've been dealing with these same issues in animal welfare forever. Two-thirds of the dogs who enter the system are under-socialized and not set up with the skills needed to handle the world. Luckily we have a formula to help them.

Although the formula changes depending on the dog and the particular issues present, there are 3 common elements that everyone with a CoVid dog can do to help their pup. The first is exposure. It's key to expose your pup to the world in a safe, low-chaotic environment where they can watch without having to react or participate.

This may be inside or outside, but the dog needs to feel safe enough that they'll eat a tasty treat (if they don't, they need more space). This step includes lots of downtime for the human but is crucial for the dog to take in and understand that they don't need to react or even engage with things going on around them. It is imperative to protect your pup from everything and everyone during this step.

The second thing to do is to set your dog up with a coping mechanism. Then teach them to employ this strategy anytime things get uncomfortable for them. Going and getting a ball works great for dogs who flinch bark. Dogs who bite should be taught to go to their people's leg or lay down nearby. Try attaching a toy to your dog's collar so it's always in easy reach!

Lastly is to encourage curiosity. I love seeing a curious dog. It means they're comfortable enough to explore and take in their environment. Let your dog smell everything and anything. Don't let them be rude, but let them engage without being worried or getting yelled at. No dog has ever died from smelling a litter box, toilet, or trash. Relax and let them engage with their world in their own way.

Dogs who missed their socialization period can have behavior issues and challenges. These can result in the dog's world getting smaller – we don't bring rude dogs to places or let them explore if we don't trust them. It also forces you to monitor your pup constantly. Instead, set yourself and your dog up with the skills to succeed and perhaps even excel in life so there won't be any need for excuses.

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