**Ruff Notes – Oct 2021**

**Socializing Puppies During Spooky Season: Halloween Edition**

Skeletons, pumpkins, candy, and trick-or-treating! Halloween is a fun time of the year for many of us and can also be a great time to socialize puppies to novel sights, sounds, and experiences. Depending on the age and temperament of the puppy you are raising, there are many ways that you can socialize the pup that can benefit towards their goal of becoming a guide, breeder, or K9 Buddy!

**Halloween is a great time to socialize puppies to novel items**!

When socializing a puppy around novel objects, we want to make sure that it is a positive experience and that we are not pushing the pup over threshold. Make sure that you are using a high rate of food reward and that the puppy is showing loose, relaxed body language throughout the socialization.

**Note:** If the puppy you are raising attempts to flee, vocalizes, or refuses food rewards during any socialization exercise, please immediately contact your leader or CFR for support.

Seeing novel objects for the first time, even outside of Halloween, can be spooky for puppies. When socializing a puppy to novel objects, be sure to use a high rate of food reward and remember the 3 D’s: Distance, duration, and distraction. Keep in mind the age and temperament of the pup you are raising. Certain Halloween items might only be appropriate for an older, confident pup while others can be introduced to younger puppies.

Although this Ruff Note is Halloween themed, these helpful socialization tips can be applied to other types of socialization throughout puppy raising.

**Age-Appropriate Socialization Ideas**

**Young Puppies:**

* Pumpkins
* Stationary decorations
* Costumes
* Halloween music

**Older Puppies:**

* Pumpkin patch
* Moving decorations
* Home improvement décor sections

Please limit the use of costumes on puppies in training. Posed pictures of puppies in costume are appropriate, but they should not wear costumes for extended periods of time.

**Spooky Socialization**

The following is an example of how to socialize a puppy to a Halloween lawn decoration. You can read more on [puppy socialization](https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Puppy-Socialization.pdf) in the Puppy Raising Manual.

1. Start at a distance of the lawn decoration. Reward the puppy, even if they look at the object, when walking past.
2. Verbally encourage the puppy to investigate. Secondary reinforcement is encouraged when approaching a novel item or a known item presented in a new way (e.g. tree with holiday décor).
3. Over several, short training sessions, you can allow the puppy to investigate and approach the object, if it’s safe to do so. During this exercise, you may give the puppy permission to move freely on the leash, without tension, using the “ok!” cue to release the pup to move out of heel position.
4. When you feel the puppy is confident around the object or stimulus, recall the puppy using the “come” command or the puppy’s name and reward appropriately.

**What if it’s too spooky?**

If the puppy shows signs of stress (lip licking, yawning, taking food rewards roughly, etc.), you may need to find an alternate time to slowly introduce the novel object during a planned socialization session.

How to make socialization less scary:

* Increase distance from the object. Continue to verbally encourage the puppy at a distance.
* Apply a high rate of reinforcement when the puppy is looking at the object.
* Gradually introduce the puppy to the object over multiple sessions.
* Make the novel object “less scary” (e.g. laying decoration on its side or turning off moving objects to make them stationary)
* Change the environment (e.g. socializing during the day vs. at night or bringing the object into a space that the puppy feels more comfortable)
* Discuss carrying high value food rewards with your leader and CFR.

Note: If the puppy starts to show obvious signs of concern (barking, balking, hackling, attempting to flee) exit the situation as quickly as possible using the emergency lure technique. Immediately reach out to your leader or CFR for support.

**Halloween Safety**

1. Please do not take puppies of ANY age trick-or-treating, to haunted houses, or amusement parks without CFR permission.
2. Keep candy secured and out of reach of puppies.
3. Monitor puppies around Halloween decorations.
4. Puppies should be properly secured (in crate or tie-down) when answering the door for trick-or-treaters.

Note: if the puppy is showing concern, including barking at the door, contact your leader.