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Concept of socializing.

Behavior is formed from birth, it is therefore crucial to steer your puppy in the direction you want the dog to be, and socialization is a big part of that training and in managing the puppy and or dog.

To realize is - no amount of whatever socializing will alter the APBT natural genetic dog to dog / animal aggression – this breed of dogs are born fighting dogs – some more keen and game than others – even so from the same litter.

This said, puppies that are not exposed to new experiences from 3 - 4 weeks onward can and will become shy, frightened, human aggressive, and even fear biters.

To make sure this doesn't happen, you must take certain measures to prevent such tragedies under controlled circumstances – manage you dogs.

It is utmost important and absolute necessary to socialize your puppy - getting your APBT dog used to the various immediate environment and scenarios of your home and yard, day to day noises, to people of all ages “things” and to other animals. Socialization is of utmost importance in raising a well-rounded, adaptable dog for any in house situation - be it a family dog, trained guard dog, hunting dog, show or conformation dog or for any ability dog sport in general.

Start from the moment you bring the pup home – (normally at +- 4 - 8 weeks) - the foundation is laid in the first 6 months - but continue for the rest of the dog's life, continue with repetition and correction - for life.

Be sure to follow your veterinarian's recommended vaccination and worming schedule during this time (realize the possibility of exposure to sick and infected street or show dogs and airborne fungi, bacteria or viruses), and do not allow a puppy that **hasn't been vaccinated** to have contact with other dogs, or places where dogs frequent roam and could found droppings, such as the street in front of your house, the property of your friend, park or accepted area for dogs in your neighborhood.

In today's society, because we realize and are keenly aware of the fact the dog is an APBT (knowing this) we as responsible owners are inclining to create an encapsulated world for our dogs, where they are restricted within our dwelling walls, doors, yard fence or kennel.

Many dogs are then shut off from outside experiences, and frequently from new and everyday people and situations that normally would come into the equation of dogs used to outside of your premises and even screened to situations in their own home territory – just to be safe.

We heard all the “boogie man” stories about APBT’s.

This is good and well but during 6 weeks to adult dog the puppy should be socialized with people, animals, birds and a variety of normal day to day human and animal noises traffic etc.

Having an APBT and knowing this breed you will naturally want to keep your dog out of the streets without on hand supervision, resulting in a dog that feels secure only within the physical boundaries of their home / yard or around those people and situations with which it is intimately familiar.

But socializing your APBT dog regularly outside the home territory is essential for the dog to also experience other people (then start this from a young age), animals and unfamiliar situations (especially if you intend showing or competing on shows.)

If you don’t they know of nothing else, and when change occurs and the dog is exposed to the outside world or dog shows, it causes undue stress for the dog (shyness and fear) and unwanted negative situations.

Stressed dogs are more likely to bite, get excited aggressive and defend against intruders or unfamiliar other animals and will also engage in other destructive behavior.

Some dogs might lose their homes and sometimes their lives due (at least in part) to inadequate or nonexistent socialization.

The opportunity to socialize should be offered to all dogs of all ages and breeds – especially during growing up from puppy stage - all the time.

With the APBT, it is crucial, since our breed should not be seen shying away from — or worse, uncontrolled dog to dog aggression leading to dog fights, showing unprovoked aggression to the general public, running children and other animals – yep ... fact ... the APBT have a keen prey drive but you the owner and handler must be in control.

All the time you must realize this dog was bred for dog fighting and dog aggression comes as part of the parcel.

Socializing is essential and most beneficial to pups and young dogs, and actually started when they are born – At **4 – 8 weeks** in the kennel - getting the pup used to the kennel management and feeder and accepting man handling them (no fear) and introduction to toys, eating and following and a bit of prey drive action with a tease item.

This natural managing the pups continued by the breeder **8 weeks**.

A puppy's earliest socialization comes from being touched, handled and fed by the breeder, the mother, and the interactive life with littermates and owner.

It stands to reason and is acceptable that all dogs stand to benefit from it.

It is possible for a dog that has been under socialized to be slowly re-trained, to accept new things with careful loving and a repeated re socialization effort.

Adult APBT's who have been properly exposed to humans and animals alike, appreciate continued socialization and interactive contact if for no other reason than they like being out with their owner and family, meeting new people, and love being petted and handing out kisses.

Socialization is defined as a continuous process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity by learning the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to an expected social expected position.

With dogs, this term refers to the practice of exposing and getting use to of your dog to “things” it could encounter in its lifetime or expected to encounter with the purpose you condition it for.

In essence, it is like specific job training for their expected role as a sound companion or whatever purpose or exposure you as owner intend.

Dealing with puppy fears.

Socialization is the most important thing you can ever do for your puppy and doesn't just mean to force your dog down in the middle of every single scary situation that you can imagine so that the dog can get used to it.

Realize a 6 week pup is actually 8 months old in human terms still a baby.

Start with your pup or young dog, trips to safe fenced open area and being around littermates, other dog's, animals and people is recommended.

Thunder and loud unfamiliar noises will be a reason to be frightful if exposed to the first time.

Watching TV together (this noised will become a norm to hear and even dog barking on TV should not trigger fear but an attentive response.

Let the dog follow you when possible and even some trips in the car.

It is normal for some puppies to be apprehensive and wide-eyed when out in new situations normally very inquisitive and should be with no real fear.

Ideally, they will be curious and outgoing, but shy or cautious responses to certain things are not uncommon or unheard of. It is important to keep a tight rein on your own emotions in such situations, and not to express your frustration.

It is equally important not to comfort a fearful dog, as this encourages their belief that whatever they're nervous about is truly a thing to be afraid of.

Greet objects of fear with neutrality and confidence. Even showing excitement is preferable to avoidance. Socializing your pup or young dog could be an advantage for them to come to know and except other people and animals, but not a good idea for the adult APBT realize this is an APBT and will behave as an adult APBT when full grown – dog to dog aggression is normal APBT behavior.

Realize though that circumstances at the “public place” can never be controlled and sometimes this can bring out APBT behavior in your puppy or dog.

But as your APBT gets older, the dog public place might become a problem, no matter how much the dog has been socialized – then a safe fenced in private place will be the answer. Though an older APBT may not start a fight in public (even on a leash), but if challenged or provoked, they will definitely finish it. As your APBT gets older (if socialize properly) and stronger, it's best to keep the socialization process safe and in a safe controlled environment of your choice, and you the handler then have to be in control (leash or nozzle) and be ready - with knowledge and experience to handle your dog in any situation even if it is the other dog or the other dogs owner is the mot*r f*c*er that will course the problem, which normally will be the case.

Realize the danger and then you will reveal your lack of commitment by taking your un-socialized, fear biting or aggressive dog to a dog show or a walk in the street.

Never let your adult dog play in the public park (Don't even consider how much fun it is for your dog, frankly not one of your excuses is good enough justification to risk the future of this breed).

APBT are strong, energetic, agile and powerful dogs and yes – fighting dogs.

They are also very resourceful and driven.

“Determination” is one of their most notable traits.

Whatever they set out to do, they will put their heart and soul into it.

Whether it's escaping out of an inadequately fenced yard to explore the neighborhood, getting in street fights or through a fence fight in the street or destroying your new couch or garden furniture, ripping off the washing on the line or digging up your flowers, scrubs or trees when left home alone or climbing into your lap to shower you with kisses – they just don't give up easily.

Children and dogs.

This is usually a great combination – like a click made in heaven - but socialized with children from a young age and always under the supervision of adults.

Most of my keep pups grow up with children – in the bed in the pool even eating from the same food (ha ha).

APBT are such strong dogs and do play rough, that it doesn't take much more than a playful unintentional 'head butt" to give a child a black eye or a bleeding tooth or knocking them to the ground to get to the ball.

But more importantly are the rules that apply when children play or walking the dog.

Never allow a child (and then even more ... other people's children) to walk a dog of this caliber without the assistance of an APBT breed knowledgeable experienced adult at hand.

It is perfect for the dog to be handled by your children and your wife in all growing stages – they get use to this and respect given and taken.

If a dog of this magnitude sees a cat or another dog or animal or bird that it decides to go after (normal APBT behavior), a child will not have the strength to hold it back.

You're will be asking for a terrible accident to happen and your child or the child to be traumatized.

To know the real APBT game dog's awesome relationship and friendly character to humans is to believe it; their amazing love of people should be encouraged.

These dogs are indeed remarkably affectionate, and crave human attention – yep from children and your wife.

They are wonderful cuddles and nothing beats a belly rub.

In fact, most family APBT "think" they are lap dogs.

Human aggression, severe shyness, and instability are not traits typically found and accepted in the real APBT game dog breed.

Dogs with these traits are not good representatives of the breed and should not be placed into adoptive homes or never be bred with.

If an APBT starts to show fear of something, do not pick them up unless you absolutely must and can safely handle the situation.

You don't want to have to pick up a 25 kg or heavier adult dog every time the dog sees something that makes him nervous or overexcited especially when meeting other dogs.

If it is something moving which has sparked some interest even suspicion or fear for the unknown related or excitement, simply calmly stand there holding the dog on a short leash and wait for the “thing” to pass – talking to the dog to calm it.

If you have the opportunity, introduce the young or adult dog to moving things before the object starts moving around – then with you in control of the situation.

Always praise your dog for investigating strange objects or different people – opportunities given.

If your dog is hesitant about meeting new (strange, funny or suspicious) person or visitors and or visitors with unknown to the dog children in your yard first put the dog away until visitors are seated with you, then bring the pup or dog in because you will be the person the pup or dog need to see (and knowing your dog) then your dog will accept the visitors – under your supervision. You might try carrying familiar treats in your pocket for people to give to your dog under your supervision, so the dog immediately will begins to associate new visitors.

Use the right APBT gear.

When you are out socializing a new, untrained or even your usual dog away from your home in any public place or at a show make sure you use proper equipment that's in good repair.

A fearful or high prey drive dog – aggressive to other dogs (you will know) can buck out of an ill-fitted collar and take off running faster than you can grab him and within seconds engage in lighting – that’s what they do.

Similarly, with a dog that shows an aggressive response to something, the last thing you want to have to worry about is how secure your leash/collar is.

Collars with quick-release plastic clasps are a bad idea for most circumstances, a metal buckle collar is preferable or a lockable clamp.

Then a double ring is even better.

If you choose to use a prong or choke collar, make sure it is of sufficient strength for your dog, and that the links are in good shape.

For dogs that tend to slip their collars (this they are famous for), a choke slip through type collar may be an option to prevent breakaways and on hand control.

Body harnesses are comfortable for the dog, but can also easily be backed out of, sometimes more easily than with a collar.

Make sure your leash is in good shape — not chewed or frayed — strong enough for the dog in question, and comfortable on your hands.

(Rope horse leads are frequently used for very strong pullers.)

Socialization your dog with other animals – it is worth a try but not always successful.

Some who own this game bred dog feels that a full-grown APBT should never be exposed to another dog (yep I do), as the risk of combat is too great.

It is a proven fact and true that this breed harbors a great capacity for aggression towards his own kind.

Some will only target other dogs, while others consider anything on four legs fair game – donkey's, horses, goats, cats or birds.

Some (Yep "some") APBT harbor less or no dog aggression and will even let other dogs share their food and toys – this depends on the success of some breeding goals of breeders and mostly the genic makeup of the dogs. I never had a dog like that.

It is **important to note** that socializing the game dog usually does not prevent a young dog from becoming dog aggressive as the dog ages.

Dog aggression is normal for this breed (I'm sure APBT owners will agree you do find degrees of gameness and degrees of APBT aggression).

An APBT should never be left unsupervised with any another animal.

A solid working knowledge how to break up a dogfight is essential. *{See article on this subject on this website or ask to be mailed.}*

Additionally, anyone who wishes to own this breed should know what to do in the event of a dog fight do happens, and should be prepared for the possibility of having to maintain a segregated household if his dogs do not get along with other dogs or animals.

A puppy might readily accept bigger or alpha dog only when young.

Expectable norm that young APBT dogs that have not "turned on" i.e.- shown aggression towards other dogs — should be offered controlled socialization with other dogs for as long as is possible.

The key word here is controlled.

Playmates should be chosen carefully, and great care should be taken not to introduce the youngster to an overly aggressive partner – (males and females do fight disregarding gender).

It is preferable to introduce the two dogs on neutral ground, where neither feels the urge to defend their territory.

Also, remove all "triggers" that might cause spontaneous jealousy or possessive behavior between the two - toys, food, feed bowl or be especially attentive that attention often will spark jealousy or aggression.

If the two dogs are meeting on-lead, try not to overly pull back or drag away on the lead, as this has been known to spark an aggressive or protection mode.

If possible, you may wish to arrange for the dogs to meet off-lead in a fenced-in area, to avoid tangles.

In the case of an APBT game dog that has in time shown a clear dislike of other dogs (immediate aggressive), it is best not to force this type of issue as far as socialization is concerned – keep them apart.

Except in very extreme cases (also depending of the specific breeding and genetics), a dog-aggressive dog can usually be taught and socialized to semi and reluctantly ignore other dogs when it is required out of obedience to you the trainer.

This will also become needed behavior for competing in the show ring or expected behavior the Vet's office.

However, knowing the limitations of this breed (and knowing your individual dog temperament gameness and prey drive) is the key as well as know your own dog's personal boundaries, and what it will and will not tolerate – be responsible and accountable and ready.

When it comes to other animals – other than dogs, many of the same rules apply as with meeting other dogs.

Take introductions slowly, and carefully watch your dog body language for signs of excitement, prey drive or stress.

When meeting cats, donkeys, goats, pigs, horses etc., it might be semi tolerate if the young dog that was socialized with your house cat but normal prey drive usually will not allow other cats or animals and then be especially aware of a confrontation.

A fleeing cat or animal most probably will spark a prey response - chase and grab bite and kill, and a hostile (with hissing) cat elicit definite no stop defensive aggression from the dog.

A physical barrier, such as barrier gate or a well-constructed cage, might be used when introducing a dog to a smaller or other animal and this will not be full proof – no guarantees. Select a safe and proper - no problem - area for exercise, conditioning or training.

Many dog owners are turning to off-leash fenced in dog runs (not open dog parks) as a means to give their dogs exercise, conditioning and off-lead play with the trainer. These dogs are uniquely suited for combat, and while they may not be the one to start the fight, they will usually be contented to engage and will tail wagging continue to battle as long as they can if you don't stop it.

Fair or not, an APBT that is involved in a dog fight will usually be regarded as at fault, no matter what role it played in the incident. With other options available — such as having play dates at private safe encampments (no other animals present or at home or socializing at selected safe areas the risks of an off-lead dog park are not justifiable when dealing with this breed). Be a responsible APBT owner – or decide on another breed. A well-socialized, well-trained APBT is a joy to be around if that is your choice of dog, and a very worthwhile member of their family and community.

They also spread awareness about the breed with you as ambassador and what they are capable of becoming in the right hands. People will remember "that nice APBT they met (sometimes that nice owner), and hopefully act accordingly when breed legislation comes around.

Last words, every APBT owner has a duty to make their dog the best breed ambassador they can be.

Protect your dog (yep - protect your dog) is what it is about.

For you the new owner of the +- 8 week old puppy.
Realize your puppy is still a baby and just been taken away from their planet (the breeding kennel).

Around 8 weeks of age until 18 weeks puppies are experiencing what is sometimes called a critical fear period, and also a fear imprinting period.

This is getting used to your environment – noises, other dogs and animals, people dressed and acting weird around the dog, traffic, humans on bicycles, weather (rain and thunder), other barking dogs and some day time periods without family at work. Puppies during this stage are especially sensitive to their environment and are likely to show specific increased fear or separation responses.

During this time, the littlest thing can scare your pup; a flapping garbage bag, breaking glass, fireworks, thunder, foreign noises (as I'm sure many of you know).

Important to know - the experiences your pup has at this time in its life can literally affect the pup for the rest of their days.

They often do and some fearful experiences will be the fastest way to make sure your dog hates whatever > for their entire life.

It is advisable to take your pup to a puppy class where the instructor is in control of the levels of stress that your puppy is under.

(with all sorts of behavior situations with man animals and environment) and coach your pup and you about how to know if your dog is stressed and what to do if it is and then slowly expose your pup to all of those scary things in life but at a level that your pup can handle mostly with treats.

That's the most effective way to ensure that your pup thinks scary things are actually pretty awesome.

If I gave the child an R 20.00 every time they see lightning, you can rest assure they will just start to hope for lightning.

The most important part of proper socialization is to go at your pup's pace.

If your puppy doesn't want to do something, don't force the pup.

If you give the pup enough space it will approach scary people and things on its own time.

When the pup finally does, you then shower them with praise and sought after treats.

Not all dogs want to greet every person and jump in every mud pit they see. If the dog has a miss trust personality ... it's not the same as being fearful.

Be respectful of your puppy's individual personality and accept the dog for just who it is, even if the dog doesn't feel like doing something you want the pup to do – don't force it. You will be surprised about the turn in your dog's behavior with daily **TLC** and reinforcing fear attitude to positive outcomes.