

# Classroom comfort

The owner of a tiny Japanese Chin, finding no size segregation in puppy class, may raise an eyebrow of concern. The Neapolitan Mastiff owner may likewise be concerned. Will his big guy be able to safely navigate around tiny dogs?

The exposure to different sized dogs during classes, however, is invaluable.

“On the streets and in parks, dogs are going to see other dogs of all shapes and sizes,” says David Muriello, director of training at Biscuits and Bath in New York. “A mixed-size class mirrors the real world.”

Is it natural for a small dog to be fearful of a big one? “Dogs have a perception of what is safe, and it is related to experience, not size,” Muriello says. The earlier a puppy is exposed to all sized dogs, the more likely she is to

admit a wide range of dogs in her comfort zone throughout her life. “If a tiny dog has been with a big dog in class and has had a good experience, he is likely to make a positive association with a new big dog on the street,” Muriello says.

When the dogs have positive experiences in class next to all different size dogs, they learn that being around other dogs is safe. Muriello explains that he controls after-class playtimes and off-leash socialization times by dividing the dogs by size and play style. Look for a class that blends sizes with safety in mind.

Muriello tells of a tiny-dog owner, skeptical on the first day of a general obedience class about the 100-pound mixed breed next to her. As it turned out, her tiny dog was under-socialized and the “scary” big dog was afraid of his own shadow. “Both dogs benefited from the mixed-size class,” Muriello says.

“The apprehensive small-dog owner raised her dog’s and her own comfort level, and the big dog and owner gained needed experience in interaction, as well.”



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