

Socialization and the Anatolian Shepherd Dog

When Anatolian Shepherd Dogs were first brought to the United States in significant numbers as part of a project investigating the usefulness of Livestock Guarding Dog (LGD) breeds, there was a notion that the dogs didn't need to be socialized. It was thought that you could just throw them out with their livestock and ignore them and you would have a better LGD. People actually believed that socializing the dogs would somehow make them less effective at guarding stock. This is patently false reasoning.

When you look at how LGD are used in their countries of origin there is almost always a shepherd present to oversee the dogs and the stock, so the notion of dogs working without any human direction is not entirely correct. Yes, the dogs do work independently of immediate human direction, but they are rarely completely alone.

All dogs require handling by people, even working Livestock Guarding Dogs, whether the dog and its stock are being moved from one pasture to another, or the dog is being handled by the stock keeper in routine maintenance, or, worst case scenario, the dog has been injured in the course of its duties and requires a trip to the veterinarian. A well socialized dog will handle all of these situations far better, and with less stress for all involved, if he has been socialized. I have been told wild-sounding tales of dogs that had to be lured into chutes or shot with tranquilizer darts so that their owners could bring strangers into a pasture to purchase livestock. If true, these tales only serve to tell of the sad failure of the dogs' owners to do right by their dogs and give them the socialization required to achieve the most basic of handling. A well socialized dog will guard his livestock just as well as a feral dog that has not been allowed to develop a normal bond with his caretakers. He will likely end up living a better life overall than his unsocialized counterpart because he will be able to be safely handled and likely will receive better care as a result.

If you are going to show your Anatolian then socialization is also very important. This is a breed that is suspicious by nature, and he only becomes more so with age. Your Anatolian needs to be taken as many places as possible as a pup and young dog so that he learns that the breadth and depth of 'normal' is vast. Being shown runs counter to almost everything that an Anatolian was selected for as a breed. He is being taken out of his home territory, paraded in front of strange humans who will proceed to put their hands on him and examine him at both ends, and is at the same time confronted with many strange dogs that, at home, he would be expected to run off but at a show he is expected to tolerate. Pity the poor dog who is plucked from the comfort of his pasture and, with no socialization at all, is thrust into the noise and confusion of a dog show.

Even the Anatolian who will never be shown, but will be a companion his entire life, deserves the same socialization that one would give a show dog. His duties in life will be to guard his human family with the same devotion and fervor that he would do his livestock, and for this reason socialization is of the

utmost importance as he will be expected to integrate into his human family and entertain all of their human foibles.

Anatolians can take awhile to mature physically, but generally do not show the extended puppyhood of some other groups, such as the Sporting breeds. This will vary by line, but in general, most Anatolians are mentally mature by the age of two. The ones that I have lived with have shown a spike in testing their boundaries between the age of two and three, and then settle into the dogs that they will be the rest of their lives. All of the Anatolians that I have known have shown the breed traits of pronounced suspicion of new situations and new people, and pronounced guarding behavior. These traits become even more strong with age. The cute, bumbling Anatolian puppy that you bring home will change immensely in a short time, and part of that change will be a decrease in his willingness to meet new people and make friends with them. While he is still young and open to novelty and training, it is your job as his owner to teach him about the world. Give him a wide range of normal to integrate into his mental map of the world. Expose him to different people and situations in the safest possible ways. Do your job well and your Anatolian will reward your efforts with a lifetime of loyalty and a sense of safety and security that you will find in few other breeds.

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