

Before You Get a Puppy

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *Before You Get a Puppy Behavior Blueprint*.

Before you get a new puppy, make sure you know exactly what kind of puppy to look for, how it will honestly fit your lifestyle and how to raise and train them. If you are still searching for a puppy, please read *BEFORE You Get Your Puppy*, which is available for free download from www.bestdogstuff.com, www.openpaw.org, and www.siriuspup.com. Make sure before you bring the new member of the family home, purchase a dog crate, six Kong chew toys, and some really tasty and nutritious treats before your new addition comes home.

Deciding What Type of Puppy to Own

The breed, type, size, activity level, hair color, hair length, and sex of your prospective new addition are personal choices and best left entirely up to you and your whole family. Once you have all agreed on a choice, go to your local shelter, or Animal Care facility to look for and spend a little time with at least six adult dogs close to the type that you have selected. Asking questions of the kennel staff or the resident trainer at these facilities on breeds of dogs or breed mixes of the adult dogs will teach you more about what to expect from a puppy than any book or video. Also, the experience of spending time with these adult dogs will ensure you know how to teach and control adult dogs before you get your puppy. Who knows you may even fall in love with one you've spent time with, a win-win situation for everyone. Really, the process of choosing a dog is not much different from choosing a car. First, you need to learn to drive, and second, you want to choose a car that looks and feels right to you and meets your needs for some time to come.

You will probably have read lots of well-meaning advice from pet professionals that advise you, for example, not to get certain breeds if you have children, not to get large dogs if you live in an apartment, and not to get active dogs in the city. In reality, all breeds and types of dog can be wonderful or problematic with children. It very much depends on whether or not the puppy was trained how to act around children and the children were taught how to act around the puppy. Because of their lower activity levels, large dogs adapt more quickly to apartment living than little dogs. Big dogs just take up more space. And active dogs can live in cities just as active people live in cities. In fact, city dogs tend to be walked and exercised more than suburban dogs.

In the long run, it will be you who will be living with your puppy and teaching him to adjust to your lifestyle and living arrangement.

If You Are Selecting a Puppy from a Breeder

In order to truly make the best match it is vital that you know how to evaluate whether your prospective puppy is physically and mentally healthy. Research your prospective puppy's lineage to confirm that his grandparents and great grandparents all lived to a ripe old age, and to check how many of his doggy family suffered from breed-specific problems. This rules out ever buying puppies from Pet Stores. Long life is the best indicator of overall physical and behavioral health

and the best predictor that your puppy will have a long life expectancy, hopefully free from extensive and expensive vet bills. In terms of behavioral development, by eight weeks of age your prospective puppy should be on his way to being housetrained, chew toy-trained, outgoing, friendly, and sociable. Any signs of fearfulness are absolutely abnormal in an eight-week-old pup. Check that the puppy was raised indoors, around human companionship and influences. Like normal daily noises, TV, Stereo, cooking sounds and smells vacuuming etc. Ask the breeder how many strangers, especially men and children, have handled the puppies. Check for yourself how easy (or difficult) it is to hug and handle (restrain and examine) your prospective puppy. Also check how quickly or slowly the puppy seems to want to come to you or the breeder.

The Early Times with Your Puppy

The first week the puppy comes home is the most important week of its life. From the very first day, make sure you eliminate mistakes in potty training, implement chew toy training program so that you prevent any future house soiling, destructive chewing, excessive barking, or separation anxiety problems.

When you are not at home, leave your puppy in a long-term confinement area like a puppy playroom, (see Home Alone article) or crate, with several stuffed chew toys. Long term confinement helps to prevent mistakes and teaches them to settle down with chew toys and use the potty outside when taken at the regular intervals. When you are at home but cannot pay full attention to your puppy, confine them to a small, short-term confinement area again like their doggy den or crate. Remember, do the math, if your pup will be spending more than a total of 14 hours a day in a crate type confinement area, seriously consider not taking on the responsibility of a puppy at this time. When they are out of the crate they need full attention, training and fun exercise. Confinement is a temporary management and training tool. Once your puppy has learned house manners (age ranges vary on breed and training regime used), he should be able to enjoy full run of your house for the rest of his life.