

Is a Puppy Right for You?

Time Commitment

How much time do you have to devote to the puppy? Are you willing to commit to the dog for its life? How patient are you? If you get frustrated quickly with repeated mistakes, training, etc. then maybe an older dog would be better for you. Puppies require making time for socialization, training house training, multiple feedings, middle of the night potty trips, and other activities. If you cannot devote time to raising the new baby properly and responsibly, now is not the time to bring a puppy home.

Socialization

This is the most important job of a puppy owner and cannot be put aside or delayed one second. This process started the day the pup was born and the critical periods will last through the first couple of months. Socialization is never complete in a dog but the longer you wait the harder it gets. At this young age every moment is significant, so if you are not ready to do all of the work needed to raise a well-adjusted and confident adult a puppy is not for you. See our handouts on socialization for more information on this topic.

Housing

Can you properly house the puppy? Check with your landlord (if you rent) or your home owner's insurance to make sure you can have the size, breed, and other characteristics of the specific dog you are looking at. Thousands of dogs are returned to shelters annually because they weren't allowed to live there! Does your condo association have any restrictions on dogs? Just because your next door neighbor has a dog it may not mean you are allowed to by the by-laws of an association. Also, consider crates and baby gates as part of housing your pup.

Lifestyle

What is your lifestyle like? Are you an active family that spends time hiking and camping or going for long walks? Are you more sedentary? Some dogs require a lot of exercise daily – both physical and mental. The half hour walk given to a Bulldog is far from adequate for a Border Collie. Please do bear in mind that small does not equal less energy. Some giant breeds have lower activity level than many smaller breeds. Size is not always relevant when it comes to how much energy and exercise a dog requires. Also, just because cousin Bob had the perfect Labrador doesn't mean the same breed would work for you! Dogs are individuals and each dog will require its training, exercise and care but those needs will differ from pup to pup.

Cost

Can you afford a puppy? Getting the puppy is not the biggest expense. It is what follows that can drain your wallet: buying the crate and other necessary supplies; vaccines every few weeks while the puppy is young; training classes; annual wellness checks and vaccinations; feeding (the bigger the dog the bigger the food bill – and cheap food will cost you in the long run with your dog's health); medical emergencies (can easily run hundreds of dollars if not more); licensing and rabies are required by law too (don't forget those costs!). Keep in mind that all of these costs are higher for puppies and most for senior dogs also. But will need to be maintained throughout a lifetime, not just the first few months of the new puppy.

Long Term

What will happen to the dog if you start a family? Can you socialize the puppy now to any eventual changes that may occur in your family structure; new babies, other pets in your neighborhood, grandma coming to stay etc..? What if you have to move? Thousands of pets are given up because of a new child or a move. Dogs can live into their late teens. Have you thought about the long-term needs of the dog? Also what will this puppy look and act like in 6 months after it has lost the cuteness appeal. Will you be prepared for adolescence in your dog? There is a very good reason most dogs surrendered to shelters are 9mo- 1.5 years old and that is because many people do not anticipate how challenging teenage dogs are.

Human Medical Issues

Are there any allergies or medical conditions in your family that could cause issues resulting in having to get rid of the puppy? No breed is truly hypoallergenic. People with serious problems may not be able to tolerate ANY breed. If there are suspected health concerns, consult a doctor before considering a pet. Also consider the strength and energy levels of this dog when it is an adult when considering your own situation.

Grooming

What about grooming? All dogs need grooming – even hairless breeds! Some breeds are quite a bit for the average person to handle and may require professional work. Others require only a few minutes of going over with a brush once a week as well as regular attention to teeth, ears and nails. All dogs shed to some extent. Also, coat length does not mean a breed will shed more or less. A short-coated breed can shed just as much as a medium to long coated one.

Need

Why do you want a puppy? Your 13 year old dog might not agree with your thoughts on getting a rambunctious puppy. Consider the pets you have now and other family members too. Are you expecting your kids to take care of this dog? Think again! Also – remember that that cute little wrinkly Mastiff puppy is going to grow up to be a big slobbering pony-sized beast! Cute puppies grow up to be dogs! Are you prepared for all the eventualities of caring for this animal and providing it with all the care it will need for another 10-15 years?