

Choosing a Puppy

Where should I begin?

Puppies, by their very nature, are just too cute; and that is why they are so irresistible to us humans! This handout will help you, hopefully, to get around all that cuteness and choose a puppy who is right for you! (Please review our **Puppy World**, **Puppy Health** and **Puppy Socialization** handouts for information covering many aspects of “having a puppy”.)

What does puppy parenting involve?

Time! Puppy parenting involves a huge time commitment. A puppy doesn't know much about how to act in a home with people or in the world in general. He does know how to chew up valuable belongings, get into things he shouldn't and generally create a lot of exuberant excitement in a household. He needs to be taught everything: housetraining, how to act with people and how to play with dogs and other animals. You and other family members are the ones who will teach your puppy how to be a good canine citizen.

Give some serious thought about your current lifestyle and ask yourself some questions. What activities do you enjoy? Are you home a lot, or always on the go? Remember, your puppy will grow up to be an adult dog and, without guidance and training, probably not as cute. Make sure you are ready for a long term commitment. (Please review our **Choosing a Dog** handout for information about living with an adult dog.)

What else do I need to consider when choosing a puppy?

Will there be someone to care for the puppy and be home with him most of the time? Puppies CANNOT stay home alone for hours at a time without becoming bored. Your puppy will entertain himself by being destructive and messy! Housetraining a puppy can require supervised trips outside for potty purposes every 2 hours. Are you willing and able to take that responsibility on? (Please review our **Housetraining: Young & Old** handout.)

Are you ready to “puppy proof” your house? This means that EVERYTHING a puppy might find interesting to play with or chew on should be placed out of reach or behind a closed door. If your puppy gets into something he shouldn't have, you should roll up a newspaper and hit yourself on the head, because it is not your puppy's fault. You didn't take care of EVERYTHING! (Please review our **Enrichment Toys** handout for appropriate chewing suggestions.)

Can you block off areas of your house and yard? This is part of the puppy proofing process. Your puppy should not have unlimited access to everywhere in your house or yard. Using baby gates or X-pens to block access will help you manage and train your intrepid puppy.

Are you very patient, tolerant and FORGIVING? Your puppy will do things that you don't want him to do. It will happen – messes on the carpet or chewing up a favorite slipper. Mistakes WILL happen, but your puppy won't do anything on purpose, or to get back at you. He doesn't know what to do, and you will have to limit the opportunities for him to make a mistake.



Where can I find more information?

Your puppy will grow up, so it is important to have an idea of what characteristics your dog may have. Pure bred dogs have particular characteristics that breeders have genetically selected. These characteristics are what make that breed special.

For example, border collies are energetic herding dogs. They are bred to have a high work drive so they will chase after their herd. They can bark a lot to control and direct the herd and they also will nip at the feet of the herded animals to get them to go the right way. They are also very good at learning a lot of fun activities. Are these characteristics you want in your dog when he grows up and is no longer a cute, cuddly puppy?

Animal Planet and American Kennel Club have dog selection tools available to all. Dog breeds are divided into many different categories such as “Family dog breeds,” “Energetic dog breeds,” or “Breeds for apartment dwellers” to help you narrow down the search. After you choose the category you are interested in, you can browse through the matching dog breeds and find out information about size, temperament, and any special care or grooming needs and even a little history about the breed.

The American Kennel Club www.akc.org/dog-breeds/
Animal Planet www.animalplanet.com/dog-breed-selector/

Where can I find the right puppy?

There are several places to find your puppy: in front of a store, the next-door neighbor, a pet store, at a local shelter or from a breeder. All have some risks involved. The best advice for “in front of the store” is to keep walking so you won’t be overcome by all the cuteness. The “neighbor down the street” option may be somewhat better, as you may know the parent dog and the people. But both are a roll of the dice.

Consider a reputable breeder: A responsible breeder will never sell any puppy through a pet store or over the internet. In fact a responsible breeder will have several criteria that you will have to fulfill before you can take a puppy. The breeder will want to meet and interview you to make sure the puppy has a good match. You will also need to continue to train and socialize the puppy. And you will sign a contract stating that if the match doesn’t work out, or you are unable to keep the dog, he will be returned to the breeder.

Avoid pet stores, the internet and puppy mills! The pet stores and the internet are probably the worst places to get a puppy. A puppy sold in a pet store or on the internet is most likely a small, pure bred or designer dog that came from a puppy mill. A puppy mill is a farm that raises dogs for profit. The mother dog lives her life in a cage, providing litter after litter of puppies. Each puppy has very little human contact and is not properly socialized. A puppy mill puppy can have many behavior problems that cannot be easily managed or solved. (Please review our **Under-Socialized Dogs** handout.)

Many puppy mill breeders try to masquerade via the internet as legitimate breeders. Please review the downloadable checklist from the Humane Society of the United States for valuable information on how you can tell if a breeder is responsible. Find it at

www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/tips/finding_responsible_dog_breeder.html



Puppies and Shelters: Should I rescue a puppy? Yes, absolutely! Many puppies end up in shelters looking for their forever homes. They are most likely mixed breeds in many sizes, colors and shapes, but many purebred puppies end up in shelters too. If you go to a shelter to adopt your puppy, ask if they do behavior evaluations. Not all shelters have the staff available to do evaluations. The evaluation usually includes information about how a puppy reacts to people, other dogs, inanimate objects, noises and handling. Take advantage of this information and also ask the staff what else they may have observed about the puppy. You can also ask the staff what else they know about the puppy—was he part of a litter; who brought him in; where was he found; do they know anything about the mother?

Whether it's a breeder or a shelter, ask some questions!

Can you meet the mother and/or father dog? How do they interact with you? If they are on the property but “not available” that could be a warning signal.

What steps were taken to socialize the puppy and expose him to different environmental stimuli?

Socialization requires that the puppy be exposed to many different people. It can be difficult with a young puppy because of disease concerns, but some socialization is still possible. Has the puppy played with children, interacted with different people—men, women, young, old? Has he had some exposure to the outside world on even a limited basis—other dogs, riding in a car, exposure to grass, gravel, stairs, strange objects, etc.?

Ready to Find A Match!

You decided to get a puppy! You've considered your lifestyle. You've done a bit of research on breed characteristics. You've thought about where to go. You are ready for the next step – meeting the right puppy for you. Remember, not only are you trying to find a puppy who is a good fit for you, but you also want to make sure you are a good fit for the puppy, both now, and when he is all grown up!

First Meeting Observations: If possible take the puppy to a separate area, away from his littermates. After he's explored for a little while:

- Does he run toward you when you move around?
- Does he follow you around or go off on his own?
- Is he curious but cautious?
- Does he take a little time to “warm up” to you?
- Some puppies are shy, some are very rambunctious. Which personality works for you?

Interactions:

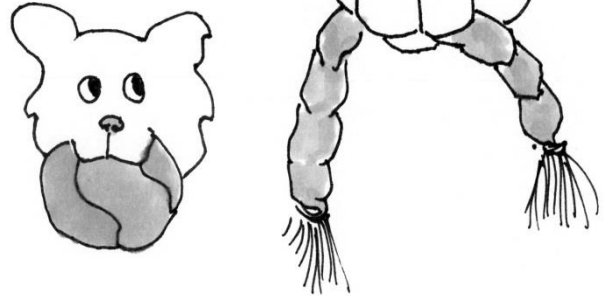
Handling:

- Gently pet the puppy. Does he seem to like it? If you stop, does he nudge your hand for more? Or does he walk away?
- Will he let you hold him in place? Does he struggle at first, and then stop? If you try it a few more times, does he get used to it?
- You are getting an idea of how tolerant he is with handling. How does his reaction to these situations fit in with your expectations and what you can live with?



Toy Play:

- Throw some toys around on the ground. Does the puppy run to the toys and play with them? Does he pick them up in his mouth and run around?
- What happens if you throw a toy in his direction? Is he startled? Then what does he do?
- If he likes toys this can be a big plus in a training and exercise program.



Puppy Teeth:

- Puppies can be very “mouthy” with their very sharp puppy teeth. If the puppy gets mouthy on your hand, can you redirect him to a toy?
- If you yell a loud “Ouch!” what does he do?
- A puppy can, and should, be taught that mouthing people is not acceptable, but it takes calm and consistent training. However, a very mouthy puppy would not be a good match for a family with young (under 10) children.

Think about the future: As you are playing with and observing the puppy, remember that eventually this cute little puppy will be a mature adult dog. Generally speaking, an extroverted, rambunctious puppy will grow up to be an extroverted, rambunctious dog. He will need calm and consistent training in order to learn self-control and manners. A shy, cautious puppy will grow up to be a shy, cautious adult dog. He will need calm, consistent training in order to gain some self-confidence and to learn he can be safe. Which responsibility do you think works for you?

Decision time! When it comes time to decide on the puppy you want, remember it is a long-term commitment so you want to choose one you can live with! Try to be objective. It is very hard with all that cuteness running around, but it will be worth the effort. And, have fun with your new companion.

Training Resources:

Marin Humane’s **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Remember to license your dog (It’s the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog’s collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn’t require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.