



Chapter 1

Welcome to the World of Puppies



Golden Retrievers, 6 weeks old

Pugs, adult and 2-week-old puppy



Genetics Determine Your Puppy's Health and Temperament

No other species has been as welcome in our lives and homes as dogs. Although we have wonderful relationships with several domesticated species, including cats and horses, none of them participate in our lives as fully as dogs do.

The dog that your puppy will grow up to become is the result of nature (his heritage) and nurture (the care he receives and the experiences he faces when he joins your home).

The physical characteristics of your puppy's parents combine to create the appearance he will have as an adult dog. These include his height, weight, body shape, ear type, eye color, coat length, and coat color. If your puppy's mother and father are both of the same breed, then your puppy will share the characteristics of that breed. However, if the parents are of different breeds or are mixed breeds themselves, then your puppy may be quite unique, possessing attributes from each parent.

Your puppy's parents also affect his health. If his parents are physically healthy, then chances are he will be also. Genetic health is also important. Ideally, your puppy's parents should not carry any genetic problems or the tendency to develop health problems later.

Much of a puppy's temperament is derived from his experiences, but his parents' personalities play a role in determining his adult personality. If Mom and Dad are protective, the puppy will likely have that tendency, too. If the parents are sweet, affectionate, and loving, the puppy is apt to share those characteristics.

The parents also share their inherited "working" tendencies with their offspring. Dogs that herd livestock will share those working traits with their puppies, as will dogs who use their scenting abilities to follow game. Dogs who enjoy training and performance sports are more likely to produce offspring who are also easily trained.



Jack Russell Terrier, 9 days old

Puppy Development during the First Two Weeks

A female dog's pregnancy lasts from sixty to sixty-four days, and she can suffer from morning sickness, loss of appetite, and, during the later stages of pregnancy, general discomfort. When the puppies are born, they are blind and deaf, round and fat, and helpless. When born they have hair, tiny little toenails, and can already twitch their tiny tails.

During the first few days, a puppy is attracted to his mother's body heat because he cannot control his own body temperature. This attraction to heat enables him to find his mother and his sense of smell helps him find a nipple so that he can nurse. Because all of his littermates share this need for warmth, the puppies will cuddle together in a big pile to keep each other warm when the mother dog leaves to eat or go outside to relieve herself.

At this age, puppies cannot walk; they move by making swimming motions with their legs. These motions also occur while the puppy is sleeping. Called *active sleeping*, these motions, along with muscle twitches, strengthen the puppy's muscles.

The mother dog must also help the puppy relieve himself. After the puppy has eaten, Mom will lick the puppy's belly and genitals to stimulate him to relieve himself. Then Mom will clean up after him.

A puppy spends the vast majority of his first two weeks sleeping. The puppy will nurse, get cleaned up by his mom, and then pile up with his littermates to sleep some more. And he'll repeat the whole sequence in a couple of hours. As he's doing this, though, he's growing rapidly and his muscles are getting stronger.

“A puppy spends the vast majority of his first two weeks sleeping.”

Puppies Grow and Change during the Third and Fourth Weeks

Many changes take place during the third and fourth weeks after birth. Although he's still sleeping a lot, a puppy is gradually snoozing less and becoming more aware of the world around him.

A puppy's senses change dramatically during these two weeks. His sense of smell gets better and he'll begin twitching his nose as he inhales odors. His eyes open, and within days the puppy will begin to track movements that happen in front of him. His hearing improves, too, and by the end of the third week he may even startle a little at sharp or unexpected sounds. As his senses develop, the puppy begins to recognize his littermates, his mother, and the people who care for him.

The puppy is also getting stronger and one day he will try to coordinate all four legs so that he can stand up. Once he's up, he begins walking. Although he's very unsteady, he gradually gets better at it.

His curiosity kicks in now, too, and he will begin exploring his surroundings. He and his littermates need a safe place because he has no common sense and could get lost or stuck in a bad situation during his explorations.

The puppy is still nursing strongly and is growing rapidly. Although his mom is still cleaning him, he is more able to relieve himself on his own and may begin toddling away from his bed to do so.

By the fourth week, all the puppies in the litter will begin playing. This is great fun to watch because the puppies are so clumsy and uncoordinated. But they have fun, try to wrestle, and even begin to bark as they play.

Border Collie, 3 weeks old





Border Collie, 6 weeks old

Puppies Become Toddlers in the Fifth and Sixth Weeks

A puppy is developing, growing, and changing rapidly during weeks five and six. He's changing from a baby to a toddler.

He's aware of his senses and is learning to use them. He can recognize his mother's and his littermate's smells, appearances, and the sounds they make. He also recognizes familiar people.

The breeder has been handling the puppy since birth, examining him to ensure there are no health problems and to make sure the puppy is gaining weight. But now the breeder will have other family members begin handling the puppy, too, so that he becomes accustomed to different people. He needs to get used to a variety of people in the next few weeks and months, but this should begin very gently and carefully so that the puppy is not frightened.

The puppy also becomes more aware of what is happening around him in the house, and that includes the sound of a vacuum cleaner, the sight and sound of a flapping trash bag, the sounds of music and television, and all the other sights, sounds, and smells of a home.

His mother will begin to wean him, and the breeder will introduce soft foods into his diet. Learning to eat these new foods will be a challenge, though, because he will initially try to suck them as if he were nursing his mother. But he will teach himself to eat through trial and error.

Even though he's weaned at this point, he needs to remain with his mom and littermates. At this age, they are vital in teaching him how to be a dog: how to play, how to get along with others, and how to accept limits on his behavior. Puppies sent to new homes during this important stage of development often have behavior problems later.

“The puppy becomes more aware of what is happening around him in the house.”

The Joys and Lessons in Play

During the fourth through sixth weeks of life, puppies begin playing in earnest. They wrestle with each other, roll around in a big puppy pile, and begin chasing each other as their legs get stronger.

As the puppies play, their muscles and bones get stronger. The puppies also gain coordination as they use their legs more. They learn to walk, then run, and then bounce and even jump. Granted, they only jump an inch or so initially, but they're learning how.

Toys become interesting during this stage, too, and puppies will use anything from a ball to an empty cardboard box as a toy. The puppy will investigate the object, shove it with his nose, paw at it with a front paw, and then try to chew on it.

Play is fun and great exercise for growing puppies, but it's also a learning exercise. The puppies who investigate strange objects are being socialized to strange things as they play and this is good for them. Wise breeders put a variety of different objects in with the puppies for this very reason.

As the puppies play more, breed differences also become evident. Border Collie puppies begin to stare with their eyes to initiate play just as they will stare at sheep when they herd them as adult dogs. An Australian Shepherd tends to play by knocking the other dog with his hip, potentially knocking the other dog off his feet, and Aussie puppies begin doing this early. Boxers play by "boxing" with their front paws. Many terriers like to hide in small spaces and then pounce on an unsuspecting littermate. It's fun to watch these traits develop.

Rottweilers, 4 weeks old



Labrador Retrievers, 16 days old



Littermates Teach Social Skills

As they play with each other, puppies also learn how to get along with each other. The social skills taught now will be with a puppy for the rest of his life and will have a bearing on his relationships with other dogs as well as with people.

As puppies wrestle and play, they learn their own strength, especially the power in their little jaws. If a puppy bites too hard during play, his littermate will yelp. If the biter backs off and gives his hurt littermate a lick of appeasement, then all is well and he is forgiven. However, if he continues to play too hard, his littermate will stop playing with him. Because his littermates are vital to him for both comfort and companionship, being shunned is a horrible experience for a puppy and a very effective means of helping him correct his behavior problems.

Dogs are experts at communication through verbal sounds, facial expressions, and body language. Puppies finely tune these skills during puppy play. For example, one puppy may initiate play by lowering his front end and leaving his hips standing up, at the same time wagging his tail. This posture, called a *play bow*, is an invitation to play.

Puppies also invite play with toys. One puppy might pick up a toy, shake it in front of a littermate, and growl. When one of his littermates grabs the toy, a game of tug of war or keep-away is on.

The breeder shouldn't interfere in puppy playtime even if play gets a little rough. The puppies can teach each other so much during this stage of development, more than we can ever understand, and our interference can have lasting repercussions. The mother dog is the best referee, and she will step in when things get out of hand.

Puppies Become More Independent in the Seventh and Eighth Weeks

A puppy's mother and littermates are still very important during the seventh and eighth weeks of his life. Although the puppy is weaned and no longer nursing, his mom still provides comfort and security and is teaching him the rules of being a dog. His littermates provide companionship and are the best playmates he could have. In addition, as he interacts with both his mother and his littermates, his communication skills continue to improve.

The puppies are playing more and although play often gets a little rough, that's OK. The puppies will teach each other and police themselves. As they gain coordination, they take turns chasing and tackling one another, all the while gaining strength.

Curiosity is well developed now, so puppies can potentially get into all kinds of trouble. They will sniff, paw, and chew on everything within reach. That means you must supervise the puppies or restrain them in an escape-proof pen. Puppyproofing the house and yard is also very important; put away anything the puppies could get into and potentially destroy or that could harm them. (See "Puppyproofing Your Home," later in this chapter.)

If the backyard has a safe place for puppies, they can go outside in good weather. Offer them safe things to explore and climb on, such as a cardboard box, a wooden plank, a concrete block, a big ball, some safe dog toys, and even a fireplace log.

Although many breeders send puppies on to their new homes at this age, many experts recommend waiting. In fact, many breeders have no problem holding on to puppies until they are 9 to 10 weeks of age because they are a little bigger and more confident at this age, and they settle in to their new homes with less worry.

Rottweiler, 7 weeks old





Golden Retrievers, 2-year-old adult and 9-week-old puppy



Momma Dog Is the Best Teacher

Your puppy's first and best teacher is his mother. Although puppies learn a lot from each other, a puppy and his littermates are excitable and emotional. However, a mother dog's maturity and natural maternal instincts make her lessons much more valuable to the puppy.

A good mom is caring and affectionate with her puppies. She protects them from danger and comes running when she hears them cry, but as they get older she also allows them a little more leeway to roughhouse and play. She will interfere, though, if things get too rough.

The mother dog also encourages play by holding a toy down in front of a puppy and shaking it slightly so the puppy grabs the toy. Mom will then simply hold on to the toy, allowing the puppy to pit his tiny strength against hers. Puppies learn many life lessons from play—more than we can comprehend—and Mom helps her puppies learn by encouraging them to play.

A good momma dog also teaches her puppies how to accept discipline. When a puppy misbehaves, the momma dog corrects the puppy firmly and quickly (using a growl, snarl, or bark) and with just enough force (pinning the puppy to the ground) to stop the undesirable behavior. She never holds a grudge, she doesn't wander around for ten minutes muttering about the bad puppy, and she never hurts or scares the puppy. Nor does she give the puppy a choice; the puppy will accept the discipline. Not only is the momma dog a good example for you to follow as the puppy's new owner—caring; affectionate; fair, yet firm—but this lesson from momma dog makes it possible for you to teach your new puppy later.

“A good momma dog also teaches her puppies how to accept discipline.”

Lots of Changes during Weeks Nine and Ten

Between 9 and 10 weeks of age a puppy grows rapidly and changes quickly. He becomes more independent and is more likely to wander away from his littermates rather than stay close to them. He explores as much as he can and gets braver about trying new things. Keeping him safe from himself is definitely more of a challenge now.

He is ready to go to his new home now and, when handled gently, will make the transition with little worry or fear. This is the age when puppies are able to bond with people, so you need to spend lots of time with him when he first goes home. Play with him, introduce him to a comb and brush, and snuggle with him.

A puppy is also more developed physically and can begin housetraining. Although he cannot hold his bowels and bladder for long, he is beginning to develop control. By starting housetraining now, you can prevent him from learning bad habits. You can introduce a crate to him and begin taking him outside with you to the place where you want him to relieve himself. (See chapter 3 for more on housetraining.)

Puppies at this age often use their mouths on people as they did with their littermates. However, the other puppies had a thick coat of hair and people do not! Plus, those puppy teeth are very sharp. A puppy needs to learn not to bite, but frequent corrections from you will often cause the puppy to fight back. So prevent the puppy from biting as much as possible (see chapter 9 for specifics), and then if he does, tell him, "Ouch!" Stop him from biting and then distract him by handing him a toy that he can play rough with as much as he wants.

Shih Tzu, 10 weeks old



Miniature Dachshund-English Cocker Spaniel mix, 7 weeks old



The World Is a Scary Place

Puppies are, for the most part, carefree and happy. However, the world occasionally appears frightening. A sudden sound or sight may startle your puppy, or he may notice something different that he hadn't paid attention to previously.

Kody, a Newfoundland puppy, walked out of his owner's back door one day and began barking furiously at the patio table. It had been there for longer than he had been alive, yet he apparently hadn't noticed it and thought it was quite scary.

Puppies are most prone to fear at specific ages, including 8 weeks of age and during teething between 4 and 5 months of age. However, every puppy is an individual; some go through these specific fear periods and others do not. Some get worried about things at 12 or 13 weeks of age. The age is not as important as your ability to recognize that your puppy is going through this developmental stage. And then you must handle his fears correctly so that he doesn't grow up to be a worried dog; you want a confident, curious puppy.

Kody's owner, Joan Swanson Hamilton, walked her puppy to the picnic table by encouraging him in a happy (not reassuring) tone of voice and saying, "Come on, you silly boy! It's just the patio table!" She then touched the table and chairs and encouraged him to approach them, too. When he did, she walked him away while continuing to talk silly to him.

If she had tried to reassure Kody, he might have misunderstood her and continued to think that the table was scary. By using a happy tone of voice, she conveyed the idea to her puppy that his fears were silly. Kody learned another important lesson, too, though. He learned to trust his owner's judgment.

The Best Age to Bring Home a Puppy

Most momma dogs stop nursing their puppies between 5 and 6 weeks of age. Although some moms continue feeding the puppies for a week or two after that, the momma's milk will dry up soon after the puppies begin eating solid food.

However, that doesn't mean puppies should leave their mom and littermates at this early age. When puppies do not have time to play, wrestle, and otherwise interact with their littermates, they lose valuable learning opportunities that will affect their behavior with both people and other dogs as they grow up. The lessons momma dog teaches are even more important, especially in regard to learning social behavior and accepting discipline.

The most common age for a puppy to go to his new home is 8 weeks of age. However, the drawback to getting a puppy at this age is the possibility of a fear period. If the puppy goes home with you and is worried about life, then he may develop carsickness (because the car took him away from his mom), he may worry about children (if your kids greet him while he's afraid), and he will be afraid of the veterinarian's office if he goes in the next day for vaccinations.

Before bringing your puppy home, talk to your puppy's breeder about the right age to do this.

If the puppy is bold and confident, then go ahead and bring him home. But if he's at all worried or cautious, tell the breeder you will pick him up the following week.

All things considered, the best age to bring a puppy home is between 9 and 10 weeks of age. He's probably past the 8-week-old fear period, he's had lots of time with his littermates and mom, and he's in the right stage of life to bond with people—specifically, you!

“The best age to bring home a puppy is between 9 and 10 weeks of age.”

Labrador Retrievers, 9 weeks old





West Highland White Terrier, 11 weeks old

A Shopping List for Your New Puppy

You are going to need some supplies for your new puppy. Here is a basic list:

- **Baby gates.** Gates limit your puppy's freedom so he doesn't get into trouble. Buy enough that you can close off hallways and keep him in one room with you.
- **Cleaning supplies.** Puppies have accidents and track in dirt from outside. Enzymatic cleaners (available at pet-supply stores) are awesome for cleaning up housetraining accidents.
- **Collar and leash.** Choose a soft, buckle-type collar and a four- to six-foot leash that's comfortable in your hands.
- **Crate.** I talk about appropriate crate size for your puppy as well as crate training in chapter 3.
- **Food.** Pick up some of the food your puppy is used to eating. If you want to change it later, you can do so gradually.
- **Food and water bowls.** Unspillable ones are best!
- **Grooming supplies.** Pick up a shampoo that's safe for puppies, a brush and comb, a nail trimmer, and any specific supplies needed for your puppy's breed. (See chapter 10 for more on grooming.)
- **Identification.** Pick up a tag for his collar (available at most pet-supply stores) and make sure that both your cell phone and your home phone numbers are on it.
- **Pooper-scooper.** For backyard cleanups. You can also use plastic grocery bags to clean up after your dog.
- **Rectal thermometer.** A rectal thermometer (the kind used for human babies) is important in case your puppy doesn't feel well. Normal temperature is from 101 to 102 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Toys.** Pick out several indestructible, safe toys.

It's much easier if you do this shopping before you pick up your puppy. That way, once you're home with him, you can stay home.

Puppyproofing Your Home

Puppies are curious creatures and can turn just about anything into a toy. Although chewing up a cardboard box won't hurt your puppy or cause any more damage than making a mess, many household items are harmful to him. Plus, replacing chewed-up shoes, television remote controls, and cell phones is expensive.

You can prevent a lot of damage and potential harm by puppyproofing your house prior to bringing home your puppy. Look at things from your puppy's perspective (and height) and put away anything dangling or tempting.

Make sure that all dangerous substances are out of reach or behind childproof locks.

- In the kitchen, those include candy (especially chocolate, which is toxic to dogs), oven cleaners, floor cleaning and waxing products, insect sprays and traps, and rodent traps.
- In the bathroom, dangerous products include toilet-bowl cleaners; shower, sink, and floor cleaners; makeup; hair-care products; medicines; vitamins; and bath products.
- In the living room and family areas, make sure that cigarettes and other smoking products are out of reach. Pens, felt-tipped markers, and craft supplies should be put away when not in use.
- Many houseplants can be dangerous, including ivy, dieffenbachia, and many flowering bulbs, including daffodils and tulips.

If your puppy gets into something he shouldn't, call your veterinarian right away. If the vet isn't immediately available, call the ASPCA's Poison Control Hotline at 888-426-4435. There is a fee, but they'll connect you to experts in poison control.



Golden Retriever-Labrador Retriever mix, 8 weeks old

Making Your Yard Safe

You need to make sure your yard is just as safe as your house, especially since your puppy may occasionally spend some time alone outside once he's older. Just as you did in the house, take a look at your yard from your puppy's perspective.

The fence around your yard needs to be very secure. Block any holes in the fence where a small puppy could squeeze through. Block any gaps or holes under the fence, as curious puppies can be quite determined to get out. Make sure that the fence is tall enough that a curious puppy can't jump or climb over it.

Put away all gardening equipment, including tools, gloves, and other chewable items. Fence off your flower and vegetable gardens so that the puppy doesn't inadvertently destroy all your hard work. Make sure that all yard chemicals such as fertilizer, herbicides, and other toxins are securely locked away. And then be cautious about using them around a puppy. Always read the labels thoroughly before using them.

Put away lawn chairs, hammocks, and other recreational items for the time being. Just bring them out when you're going to use them. You can teach your puppy to leave them alone later, but for now, preventing problems from occurring is best.

Encourage all family members to get into the habit of putting away all tools, toys, and other personal items when they are through using them in the backyard. Kids' toys are a puppy's favorite things to chew on because the toys smell strongly of the kids.

Make sure there are no poisonous plants in your yard that the puppy might nibble on. Check the ASPCA's Web site, www.aspc.org, for a list of poisonous plants.



English Shepherd, 8 weeks old

Bringing Home Your New Puppy

Bring home your new puppy when you will be able to spend a couple of days with him. A Friday is great if you normally work Monday through Friday. This way, the two of you can get to know each other and he can feel more secure before you have to resume your normal schedule.

Make sure that you have everything you need before you pick up your puppy. You're going to want to come straight home without stopping anywhere once you have the puppy, so double-check all your supplies first.

Have a crate in your car, with a soft blanket on the bottom. Toss a couple of towels in the car, too, in case the puppy gets carsick. Puppies tend to worry and stress out when they leave the only home they have known, and stress can lead to carsickness.

Ask the breeder not to feed the puppy if you're coming to get him in the morning. Then he is less apt to get carsick with an empty tummy. If you're coming to get him in the afternoon, ask her to feed the puppy a small breakfast, just enough to tide him over until he gets to your house—his new home. Once your puppy is home, take him directly to the place where you want him to relieve himself. Walk him around, but don't play with him. When he relieves himself, praise him. (Housetraining is explained in chapter 3.)

Once in the house, offer him a drink of water, and in an hour or so, let him have something to eat. Then, over the next couple of days, you can introduce him to what will become his normal routine. (See chapter 10 for specific information on feeding your puppy.)

“Make sure that you have everything you need before you pick up your puppy.”



West Highland White Terrier, 14 weeks old