

Chapter 1

Puppy Love: Making All the Important Decisions

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the differences between puppies
 - ▶ Helping your pup settle in with the family
 - ▶ Training with your pup's age in mind
 - ▶ Dealing with the infamous puppy behavior
 - ▶ Taking care of your puppy
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Choosing to bring a puppy into your family is one of the more exciting decisions of your lifetime — just shy of bringing home a baby! Unlike other pets, your puppy will bond and engage with you, and she will depend on you day after day. In return for your kindness, she'll offer you her unconditional love and enthusiasm every day of her life. Dogs relish human interaction and involvement, and she'll weave her way into every social interaction that goes on in your household.

Puppies and babies have a lot of similarities. Both are nonverbal and dependent — at least in the early stages. Both depend on you to shape and fulfill their everyday needs, from learning where and what to eat and drink to figuring out where to sleep and go potty. A puppy matures a lot faster than a baby, so that's a plus (the first year of a puppy's life equals about 20 of a human's), but a dog's emotional capacity parallels an 18-month old, so she'll never leave for college, wreck the car, or max out your credit cards!

Civilizing a puppy is a project to be approached mindfully — and, fortunately, this book makes it a positive and fun experience for everyone. This first chapter lays the groundwork for what lies ahead. With these guidelines in hand, you'll have no trouble getting through the first year.

Browsing Breeds and Considering Your Options

Until now, you may not have given dog breeds and personalities much thought. Instead, you may have thought that the only thing separating one pup from the other was coat color and size. Unless your plan is to choose a dog who complements your couch cushions, you have to know a little bit about the types available.

In Chapter 2, I go over puppy personality types and help you consider what type of dog will suit your lifestyle. Your heart's pick may be a high-energy breed from the Sporting Group, but if you're at work most of the day and you prefer vegging to jogging, this puppy will lose her appeal when you find her climbing your walls.



After you have an idea of the personality you want, you can think about breeds. Over time, hundreds of known breeds have been developed worldwide. Each of these breeds has specific characteristics that allow the dogs to withstand the environment of the lands of their original descent. Each breed has a defined look, temperament, and interest that continues to get passed down from generation to generation.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the differences between breeds and explain how they're grouped into seven categories. I also explore the ideal home environment as well as the necessary exercise, training, and socialization commitments of breed groups. In addition, I look at the allure of mixed-breed dogs, which are made up of the latest designer breeds as well as the generic mixes who cost considerably less. A quick peek at the concept of *hybrid vigor* will help you to appreciate a dog who looks and acts unique.

After you've narrowed your breed choice, you're ready to begin the adventure of finding your puppy. First impressions count — make sure your puppy's first home, whether it's with a breeder or at a shelter, store, or private home, is a safe, positive, and relaxed environment where you feel comfortable asking any pertinent questions and voicing your concerns. Many good breeders will question you because they want to find good homes for the puppies they love like their own babies.



Puppies, like children, have distinct personalities. In Chapter 4, you find a temperament test that you can take with you when checking out a particular puppy. Visualize the ideal characteristics you value in a dog and list them in the margin. For example, do you want a dog who's devoted to making you happy and who's needy for attention and delighted to do your bidding? Or are you more comfortable with a puppy who's affectionate but independent? Maybe your heart's set on a timid puppy who needs patience, coaxing, and love to come out of his shell. Believe it or not, you can make accurate behavioral predictions such as these when puppies are just 8 weeks old.

Your pup's ingrained need for a job

A puppy's instinctual skills, with a few exceptions, are no longer necessary to human survival. But please don't let your puppy in on this secret. Her skills are her life's talent, and employing them gives her life a sense of purpose. No sheep to herd? The neighborhood kids will do. No snow in Savannah? Pulling a

skateboarder will satisfy a Siberian Husky. No ducks to retrieve? A tennis ball will do just fine. Dogs love to work, and they can't quell their passions just because you have a late meeting. So be sure to take the breed's job instincts into account when picking a pooch and always make time to indulge them.

Helping Your Puppy Jump In to the Family Groove

You've been looking forward to bringing your puppy home for days, weeks, and perhaps even years! Few things in life are as exciting as adopting a puppy.



Regardless of your mood, this initial trip can be scary and overwhelming for your puppy, who may be separating from her original family for the very first time. Plan ahead by organizing both the trip home and your arrival. Make your puppy-supply purchases, which are listed in Chapter 5, well in advance. Also, before your pup comes home, be sure to set up her room and explain your itinerary to family and friends. Having a plan puts your mind at ease, which will help your puppy get through this transition stage. Your puppy will bond to you and her new life in no time.

Understanding your puppy's point of view

Your puppy will thrive on consistency and predictability, and so will you. In Chapter 6, I focus on your puppy's daily needs and how to structure a schedule around them. Knowing how your puppy likes to organize her day takes the guesswork out of this experience and humanizes many of her communication skills and dependency issues. In fact, Chapter 6 points out just how much a human toddler and a puppy have in common — from a routine bathroom and sleeping schedule to predictable stages of development. I help you structure a realistic day and bring some regularity back into your life.

Further along, in Chapter 7, I help you explore Doglish, which is your dog's language. Teaching your puppy is a lot like teaching English to a foreigner — you have to translate your teachings into the person's native language. Puppies need a lot of direction and feel most comfortable when it's given in a language

they understand and by someone who's clear-minded and calm. All puppies want someone to admire and please; otherwise, they feel lost.

Positively overdoing socialization



If you want a well-rounded, gentle-mannered dog, follow this one secret tip: Overdo socialization in puppyhood! Go overboard with socialization, even more so than with training. Expose your puppy to everything — objects, surfaces, sounds (inside and out), places, and people of all ages, races, sexes, and sizes. Expose your pup to other animals and pets, too. (Until your puppy is inoculated, surround her with healthy, friendly dogs.) Even changes in weather patterns must be handled mindfully. If your puppy is startled or concerned, a soothing reaction from you may actually be misinterpreted as mutual fear. To teach her how to manage herself, reassure your puppy with your confidence and direction. Knowing how to calm her when she's stressed can make the difference between a pet who rolls with the changes and one who emotionally locks up or reacts defensively. (Chapter 8 gives the lowdown on socializing your pup.)

Raising a pup with children and within a neighborhood

Bringing home a puppy to raise with your family or to entertain the grandchildren when they come to visit adds another dimension to your months ahead. In a puppy's mind, kids are often pigeonholed as other puppies and can be perceived as rivals for toys, food, and attention.

Chapter 9 offers a proactive (rather than reactive) approach to raising a puppy with children — from phrases to use to groovy games and activities to play. By organizing fun activities, you're giving the child license to both control and enjoy the puppy, while the puppy is learning respect for everyone who walks on two legs.

Tackling Training through Your Puppy's Growth Phases

Think of puppyhood as your golden opportunity to influence and civilize your puppy. The chapters in Part III introduce you to directions and problem-solving techniques that are personality-, size-, and age-appropriate, designed to build your puppy's confidence both in you and in the world surrounding

her. Each chapter is broken into easily understandable exercises that are fun to do and easily repeated by others.

Knowing what you're in for

Here's just some of what you have to look forward to as your puppy grows through her first year. Turn to Chapter 12 for more on training during each stage:

- ✓ **Infancy (8 to 12 weeks):** Infancy is a magical time for your puppy! Delightfully self-centered and curious, she's experiencing her world — and all the people in it — for the first time.
- ✓ **Terrible twos (12 to 16 weeks):** Before the terrible twos start, you may be convinced that you've adopted an angel. Then it will happen almost overnight: Your puppy will fall from grace. If it's any consolation, all her mischief is a wonderful sign of normal development. Your puppy is growing up.
- ✓ **Budding adolescent (16 to 24 weeks):** Okay, by now you're getting a good glimpse of your puppy's personality. Is she needy, confrontational, strong-willed, dependent, focused, obstinate? Your puppy is maturing faster than you can keep up with. Now is the time to start fun, positive training routines and to increase games that encourage interaction.
- ✓ **Puberty (6 to 9 months):** Random defiance, running off for hours, ignoring direction: Don't take any of your pup's frustrating behavior personally. Your puppy must challenge you in order to grow up. Through this age-appropriate behavior, she's challenging your authority to ensure that she can trust your judgment.

The hardest behavior to control during your puppy's first year won't be your puppy's — it will be yours! Anger and frustration will spell your ruin — your puppy won't understand you, and she'll react with confusion and possibly defensiveness.
- ✓ **Trying teen (9 to 12 months):** At this point, for the most part, you can see the light at the end of the dark tunnel. During this phase, if you've done your training you'll often have the perfect puppy — devoted, responsive, and mindful. Well, that's to say, most of the time. Sometimes your almost-adult puppy still tests her independence; sometimes that incorrigible 3-month-old puppy reemerges, and she's up to her old tricks.



Does committing the next year to training your puppy sound like a project? Well, you're right — it is! After you commit to the role of your puppy's teacher, she can learn all she needs to know throughout her first year — from where to potty and what to chew to polite greeting manners and how to conduct herself in a crowd. She won't learn these things overnight, however — like human school, puppy training is a stage-by-stage process.

Teaching words your puppy should learn and love

Teaching your puppy commands is similar to teaching English as a second language. Though your puppy can't understand sentences or phrases, one clearly spoken word, paired with a posture or routine, will make your puppy feel directed, connected, and safe.

Here are a few of the commands you can find in Chapter 12:

- ✓ **“Follow”**: This command says, “I’m the leader. Follow me!” You use this one whenever you and your puppy are out and about.
- ✓ **“Stay”**: This command is all about self-control! “Stay” tells your puppy to relax and be patient. After you’ve perfected some early lessons at home, you’ll be able to use it everywhere you go!
- ✓ **“Come”**: A must-have in your command vocabulary, this one calls your puppy back to your side. You must teach this command positively if you want your puppy to listen!
- ✓ **“No”**: Most dogs think their middle name is No! To teach this command successfully, you must focus your frustration on something besides your puppy and time it just right.

Picking a consistent approach



You can find many gadgets to help you convey and emphasize your directions, from clickers and target sticks to training collars and leashes. If you randomly try these objects or mix and match your approaches simultaneously, you’re likely to confuse your puppy.

Read through Chapter 5 to find out about equipment for your home and Chapter 11 to discover all the training gadgets available to you before analyzing which make the most sense for you and your puppy. If you have family members involved in your pup’s training, have a group discussion to ensure that you’re all on the same page. Consistency is oh-so-reassuring to your puppy.

Handling Day-to-Day Frustrations — and More Serious Problems

In the chapters in Part IV, I dissect all areas of frustration, from nipping and jumping to the more serious infractions such as aggression. Even though this book doesn’t take the place of a professional when your situation is dire, use

it to shed light on everything puppy — from a wagging tail and puppy breath to adolescent defiance.

You will have times when you and your puppy just don't see eye to eye. You'll want her to come and be near you when she wants to explore and play. You'll want her to chew on her bone, and she'll favor something perfumed with your scent, like a sock or slipper. Your puppy's naughty behaviors — the ones that frustrate you to tears — are fun and enjoyable to her. Habits are formed at these most aggravating moments, leaving you stranded and in a vicious cycle. Ironically, this cycle is your own creation. Sure, it feels like you must do something when your puppy tears off with your napkin, but screaming is perceived as prize envy (you want what she has) and only guarantees a repeat performance! Think about it: If cruising the counters brings you back into the room, your puppy will repeat this tactic no matter the consequences. In Chapter 16, I help you to understand your puppy's mindset and try a whole new approach to resolving your differences.



Your puppy is easily overwhelmed by your frustration. Even though a young puppy may look like she knows what you're talking about when you shout "No," her reaction is really only fear and confusion. And I know you don't want to scare your puppy. In Chapter 12, I discuss how to teach your puppy the concept of "No." Until your pup is ready for that direction, follow the techniques in Chapter 12 to convey your disapproval effectively, and tidy up your home until she's truly old enough to contain her impulses.

Of course, more serious issues, what I call *red-flag issues*, warrant concern and reaction. Aggression comes to mind, as does separation anxiety and destructive chewing. These issues are covered in Chapters 17 and 18. Bear in mind a puppy who exhibits this behavior isn't happy; your corrections won't lighten her intensity. Find a more cheerful approach, modify your behavior, and help your puppy develop a more cheerful, go-with-the-flow attitude. You'll all be a lot more relaxed.



A sensible reason is behind every puppy behavior, whether it's counter sniffing, separation anxiety, or jumping on guests. Investigate and understand why your puppy is reacting in a certain way. Then juggle the variables to meet her needs as you redirect her to more appropriate activities.

Providing a Clean Bill of Health

If you take care of the inside of your puppy, the outside can better take care of itself. Chapters 19 and 20 help you make pertinent healthcare decisions, balance your puppy's diet, stay on top of her daily hygiene, and understand her healthy vital signs so you can react calmly in an emergency.

A sick puppy is like a toddler: When she's ill or troubled, your puppy is unable to articulate it in words. She will, however, respond in ways that

would be obvious to another dog. So in Chapters 20 and 21, I help you decipher your puppy's signals so that you know how to both keep her healthy and happy and how to respond to her when she's ill.



These chapters don't take the place of regular checkups or consultations with a veterinarian. Your veterinarian has a medical degree and may recommend tests or blood work to determine a specific ailment. Use these chapters to educate yourself on what signs and symptoms to watch for and how to read what your puppy is saying to you when she's unwell. Sharing this information with your veterinarian is more than invaluable — it can save your puppy's life.

Spaying or neutering your puppy is crucial, and I also discuss these procedures in Chapter 20. I have yet to share my life with a dog who has not been altered before her first year. It's a responsible action, and everyone has a duty to stem the growing overpopulation, for which widespread euthanasia seems to be the only other solution. Even though controversy abounds on subjects that include age, surgical choice, and aftereffects, knowing the facts will give you the ability to choose your course of action wisely.