

IN THIS CHAPTER

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Chapter **1**

Welcome to the Puppy Love Club: Here's All You Need to Know!

Choosing to bring a puppy into your family is one of the more exciting decisions of your lifetime — but it's also a little scary. If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't be discouraged. I've written this book to help you no matter where you are on the puppy continuum. Adopting a puppy is more like bringing home a baby than, say, a fish or a hamster, but with a child, there's usually a lot more build-up, with months to mull over magazine articles and room décor. And even the infant stage is pretty tame — not so with puppy. Unlike other pets, puppies bond and engage with you from the minute you meet them, and they depend on you like a child from that day forward. In return for your kindness, they offer you their unconditional love and enthusiasm every day of their lives. Dogs are like toddlers in their adoration and attentiveness, delighting in every interaction and weaving their way into every social interaction that goes on in your household.

Puppies and toddlers have even more similarities: Both are nonverbal and reliant on you. 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 a 2- or 3-year-old, so they 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.

Looking at All Your Options

Dogs come in a lot of shapes and sizes. Until now, you may not have given dog breeds and personalities much thought. Instead, you may have believed that the only characteristics separating one pup from another were coat color and body 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.

Before you consider the differences between dog types, in Chapter 2 I help you peek into your lifestyle to get a handle on what it is you want from your relationship. Puppyhood is a quick window, lasting about a year, but dogs live a long time (generally, 10 to 14 years, depending on the dog breed or breed mix), so it's important to think about your life now as well as 5 to 10 years from now. For example, 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 out” to jogging, this puppy will lose their appeal when you find them climbing your walls or curtains.

In Chapter 3, I explore different types of dogs, both purebred and natural breed blends (also known as *mutts* or *mixed breeds*) and what are known as *designer* mixes (two breeds mindfully bred to create a new breed — a Chiweeny, Pomski, or Goldendoodle, for example). A quick peek at the concept of *hybrid vigor* will help you to appreciate a dog who looks and acts unique. I'll also help you explore the ideal home environment for different types of dogs as well as the necessary exercise, training, and socialization commitments of each one.



REMEMBER

After you have an idea of the personality you want, you can consider breeds. Over time, hundreds of known breeds have been developed worldwide. In the United States, the breeds are grouped into seven categories: Herding, Hound, Non-Sporting, Sporting, Terrier, Toy, and Working. 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 4, I show you how to start your search. Talking to various rescue organizations and breeders is a project in and of itself. To help you, I've created a list of questions that are important for you to ask — and I also fill you in on the kinds of questions you may be asked as a potential parent to their dog.

First impressions count. When you visit your puppy's birth home — whether it's with a breeder or at a shelter, store, or private home — do you get the sense that the puppy is in a safe, positive, and relaxed environment? While there, do you feel comfortable asking any pertinent questions and voicing your concerns? And, because many good breeders will question you (because, let's face it, they want to find good homes for the puppies they love like their own babies), do you find their questions insightful and/or appropriate?



REMEMBER

Puppies, like children, have distinct personalities. In Chapter 3, you'll 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 is set on a timid puppy who needs patience, coaxing, and love to come out of their shell. Believe it or not, you can make accurate behavioral predictions such as these when puppies are just eight 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 any puppies in on this secret. Their skills are their life's talent, and employing them gives their lives 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 into the Family Groove

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



REMEMBER

Regardless of your mood, this initial trip can be scary and overwhelming for your puppy, who may be separating from their 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 set up your pup's room before they come home, and explain your routines to family and friends. Having a plan puts your mind at ease, which will help your puppy survive this transition stage. Your puppy will bond to you and their new life in no time, though the first few days can be jarring for both of you.

Understanding your puppy's point of view

The most important task to focus on in the early months is socializing your puppy to people, places, and normal stimulations. As far as developing good habits early on, your puppy will thrive on consistency and predictability, and so will you. In Chapter 6, I explore the new science of modern dog training and describe what science has proven about living with dogs. Researchers used to scoff at us crazy dog people, reminding us that dogs were incapable of reason and emotion; now those researchers have come full circle. Studies show that puppies and human toddlers have a tremendous amount in common: Now it's the academics who are telling us that dogs think and feel, and will mature to the capacities of a 3-to-4-year-old child. This chapter helps frame out just how capable and eager your puppy is for learning and how making the most of puppyhood — by investing in play, socialization, and training — will reward you for a lifetime.

In Chapter 6, I also focus on describing your puppy's daily needs and how to structure a schedule around them. Knowing how your puppy likes to organize their day takes the guesswork out of this experience and humanizes many of their communication skills and dependency issues. 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. In that chapter, I help you structure a realistic day, which must include secluded nap times, and bring some regularity back into your life.

Raising a puppy in the modern world

Think of puppyhood as your golden opportunity to influence and civilize your puppy. The chapters in Part 2 of this book introduce you to directions and problem-solving techniques that are personality, size, and age-appropriate. Each chapter is broken into easily understandable exercises that are fun to do and easily repeated by others.

Training and conditioning your puppy starts from the moment they step into your home. From first introductions to family, friends, and other pets to conditioning and bonding in the first days and weeks you have them home, Chapter 7 will guide you through these first days and experiences.

Your first goal regardless of the age your puppy is when you bring them home is to teach them early manners — from where to go to the bathroom to how to greet family and friends when they come through the door. Conditioning good habits from the start doesn't happen magically, of course, and in Chapter 8 you'll discover how learning to listen to your puppy makes teaching basic habits easy and fun. (*Hint:* You use your eyes to read their body language.)

If you have kids or grandkids, having a puppy will add a new 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 8 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 learns respect for everyone who walks on two legs.

Positively overdoing bonding and socialization



TIP

If you want a well-rounded, gentle-mannered dog, follow this 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 them with healthy, friendly dogs.) Even changes in weather patterns must include mindful handling. If your puppy is startled or concerned, a soothing reaction from you may be misinterpreted as mutual fear. To teach them how to manage themselves, reassure your puppy with your confidence and direction. Knowing how to calm them when they're stressed can make the difference between a pet who rolls with the changes and one who locks up emotionally or reacts defensively. Chapter 9 gives the lowdown on socializing your pup.

Tackling Training Throughout Your Puppy's Growth Phases

Here's just some of what you have to look forward to as your puppy grows through their first year (turn to Part 3, Chapter 10–13 for more on training during each stage):

» **Taking Baby Steps (8 to 16 weeks):** Infancy is a curious time for a puppy. They're encoding your home and all the people in it for the very first time. This is where you get to make a positive impression, shape their personality for the better, and socialize them to sound and daily routines that they'll discover in your home. They're needy and dependent on you, so make the most of this time together. Chapter 10 will guide you!

» **Teaching Your Pre-Adolescent Puppy (16 weeks to 6 months):** Before the terrible twos start, you may be convinced that you've adopted an angel. Then it happens almost overnight: Your puppy falls from grace. If it's any consolation, all their mischief is a wonderful sign of normal development. Your puppy is growing up. Most people notice more confidence during this stage and less of a help-me attitude and more of a can-do spirit. Embrace it. Chapter 11 shows you the way!

» **Surviving the Teenage Months (6 months to 9 months):** Okay, by now you're getting a good glimpse of your puppy's lifelong personality quirks. Are they needy, confrontational, strong-willed, dependent, focused, obstinate? Your puppy is maturing faster than you can keep up. Now is the time to start fun, positive training routines and to increase games that encourage interaction. Fortunately for you, bad habits are easy to phase out during this stage if you can remember to stay cool. Puppies are still eager to please during this stage and are motivated to behave to get what they want — from treats to toys and attention. Chapter 12 tells you what you need to know.



REMEMBER

The hardest behavior to control during your puppy's first year isn't your puppy's — it's yours. Anger and frustration will spell your ruin — your puppy won't understand you, and they'll react with confusion and, possibly, defensiveness.

» **Striving for Off Lead Control (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 been consistent with training, you'll often have a super puppy — devoted, responsive, and mindful. Well, that is to say, *most* of the time. Sometimes your almost-adult puppy still tests their independence; sometimes that incorrigible 3-month-old puppy reemerges, and they're up to their old tricks.



REMEMBER

Does committing the next year to train a puppy sound like a project? Well, you're right — it is. After you commit to the role of your puppy's parent and teacher, they can learn all they need to know throughout the first year — from where to potty and what to chew to polite greeting manners and how to conduct themselves in a crowd. They won't learn these things overnight, however — like school for children, 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 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 11:

- » **Follow:** This command says, "I'll lead the way. Follow me!" You use this one whenever you and your puppy are out and about.
- » **Stay:** This command is all about self-control. Saying "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 item 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.
- » **Leave it:** Most dogs think their middle name is No, so try to avoid that one. To teach your puppy to leave stuff alone, you need to teach them a word or short phrase that says "That's not for you."

Picking a consistent approach



REMEMBER

You can find many gadgets to help you convey and emphasize your directions, from clickers and target sticks to training collars and leashes. Keep in mind, though, that if you randomly try these objects or mix and match your approaches simultaneously, you're likely to confuse your puppy.

Read Chapter 5 to find out about equipment for your home, and read Chapter 13 to discover how various leashes and training gadgets can help shape your puppy into a trust-worthy companion. 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 4, I dissect all areas of frustration, from housetraining (in Chapter 14), nipping and jumping to the more serious infractions, such as aggression. Just remember that many of your puppy's naughty behaviors — the ones that frustrate you to tears — are fun and enjoyable to them. Even though this book doesn't take the place of professional advice when your situation is dire, use this book to shed light on Everything Puppy — from a wagging tail and puppy breath to adolescent defiance.

At times, you and your puppy just don't see eye-to-eye:

- » You'll want them to come and be near you when they want to explore and play.
- » You'll want them to chew on their bone, and they'll favor an item perfumed with your scent, like a sock or slipper.
- » They'll think digging is fun — sometimes indoors and other times outdoors.
- » Barking will be their way of alerting you that visitors are approaching, whereas you may be happier with the sound of a doorbell.
- » There will be nights when you're exhausted and your dog will want to play.

Habits are formed at many an aggravating moment, leaving you stranded and in a vicious cycle. Ironically, this cycle is *your* 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 they have) 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 15, I help you to understand your puppy's mindset and try a whole new approach to resolving your differences.



REMEMBER

Your puppy is easily overwhelmed by your frustration. Even though a young puppy may look like they know what you're talking about when you shout "No," their reaction is only fear and confusion. And I *know* you don't want to scare your puppy. In Chapter 15, I discuss how to teach your age-appropriate puppy the concept of No. They can learn it, but not until their brain has developed some maturity.

Of course, more serious issues — what I call *red-flag issues* — warrant concern and reaction. Aggression comes to mind, as does separation anxiety, excessive barking, and destructive chewing. I'll go over these issues in Chapter 16. Bear in mind

that a puppy exhibiting this behavior isn't happy; your corrections won't lighten the 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.



REMEMBER

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

Ensuring a Clean Bill of Health

If you take care of the inside of your puppy, the outside can better take care of itself. Chapters 17, 18, and 19 help you make pertinent healthcare decisions, balance your puppy's diet, stay on top of their daily hygiene, prevent parasites and disease, and understand their healthy vital signs so that you can react calmly in an emergency.

Spaying or neutering your puppy (see Chapter 17) is crucial. It's a responsible action, and everyone must stem the growing overpopulation, for which widespread euthanasia seems to be the only other solution. Even though controversy abounds when it comes to all sorts of issues involving spaying or neutering — appropriate age, competing surgical choices, and after effects, to name just a few — knowing the facts will give you the ability to choose your course of action wisely.

A sick puppy is like a toddler: When they're ill or troubled, your puppy is unable to articulate it in words. They will, however, respond in ways that would be obvious to another dog. In Chapters 18 and 19, I help you decipher your puppy's signals so that you know how to keep them healthy and happy *and* how to respond to them when they're ill or in case of an accident.



REMEMBER

Reading these chapters doesn't take the place of having regular check-ups or consultations with a veterinarian. Your veterinarian has a medical degree and may recommend tests or blood work to determine a specific ailment. So, use these chapters to educate yourself on the signs and symptoms to watch for and how to read what your puppy feels when they're unwell. Sharing this information with your veterinarian is more than invaluable — it can save your puppy's life.

