

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting to know the difference between puppies
- » Welcoming your furry family member
- » Discovering routines you both can master
- » Dealing with the infamous puppy behavior
- » Taking care of your puppy

Chapter **1**

Celebrating the Wonderful World of Puppies

You've been looking forward to bringing your puppy home for days, weeks, and perhaps even years. Taking the leap and adopting a puppy is both exciting and a little bit scary. If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't be discouraged. This book focuses on helping 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; however, a child usually has a lot more build-up, with months to mull over internet posts, read magazine articles, and figure out the nursery decor. And even the infant stage is pretty tame — not so much with a puppy.

Unlike other pets, puppies imprint and engage with you from the minute you meet them, depending on you from that day forward. In return for your kindness, they offer you their unconditional love and enthusiasm every day of their lives. Puppies are like toddlers in their adoration and attentiveness, weaving their way into each and every social interaction that goes on in your life.

Puppies and infants have even more similarities; both nonverbal and reliant, they 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 21 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.

Raising a puppy is a project to be approached mindfully — and, fortunately, this book makes it a positive and fun experience for everyone. This chapter lays the groundwork for what lies ahead. It's a jumping-off point into the world of puppies. With these guidelines in hand, you'll have no trouble getting through the first year.

Considering Your Options

You may not have given much thought to the differences between dog breeds and personalities, assuming, like many do, that the only characteristics separating one pup from another are coat color and body size. The truth is puppies are as unique as snowflakes and come in all shapes and sizes. Unless your plan is to choose a dog who complements your couch cushions, use the following sections to explore more about your life and each breed's motivations and temperament.

Examining your current life

Before adopting a puppy, consider how a dog will fit into your current lifestyle. Chapter 2 focuses on your life, both now and in the not-too-distant future. Although puppies are cute, they grow up fast. Puppyhood lasts about a year, and dogs live a long time (generally, 10 to 14 years, depending on the dog breed or breed mix), so think about your life over the next decade plus. 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.

Exploring types and breeds of dogs

When it comes time to choose your forever dog, you'll have different types of dogs to consider, from purebred and natural mix-breeds (also known as *mutts*) to fancy *designer* mixes (two breeds mindfully bred to create a new breed — a Chiweeny, Pomski, or Goldendoodle, for example). Different types of dogs do better in certain home environments. For example, more universally friendly breeds like

Labrador Retrievers tend to do well in busy households that are a hub of childhood activity, while herding breeds such as Border Collies often fare better in active homes with structure and a clear sense of purpose. Chapter 2 explores the ideal home environment for different types of dogs as well as the necessary exercise, learning, 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
- » Nonsporting
- » Sporting
- » Terrier
- » Toy
- » Working

Each 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.

Fine-tuning your search

You have a wide array of places you can adopt your new puppy. Chapter 3 guides you along in your search, helping you tailor your talk to various organizations, breeders, or rescues. Here, you can find a curated list of questions to ask in your search for a reputable and reliable breeder or rescue facility. I also fill you in on the kinds of questions you may be asked on your application for a puppy.

When you visit your puppy's birth home — whether it's with a breeder or at a shelter, store, or private home, first impressions count. Is the environment clean? Are the people friendly and warm? 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, 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?

YOUR PUP'S INGRAINED NEED FOR A JOB

Most puppies' breed instincts are no longer necessary to human survival, but 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.



WARNING

Don't get a puppy from a breeder who doesn't allow you to visit their premises or meet the parents, and never ever pay for a puppy online. There are many puppy scammers and breeders who breed dogs haphazardly or keep their dogs in cages around the clock. These poor animals are stressed and isolated, producing puppies who begin their life with reflective stress and compromised health.



REMEMBER

Puppies, like children, have distinct personalities. Chapter 3 also includes a temperament test 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.

Helping Puppy Get into the Groove

Puppyhood is your golden opportunity to influence and shape your puppy into a well-adjusted companion. This section overviews clear, actionable steps to help you lay a strong foundation for a lifetime of good behavior.

Setting a routine

Before diving into lessons and routines, Chapter 4 invites you to view your life from your puppy's perspective. With a brain like a sponge, their first learning experiences focus on the new sights, sounds, and smells in their world. Fundamentally needy, your puppy will develop routines centered around life's certainties: eating, drinking, sleeping, and pottyng.



REMEMBER

To help them feel safe and secure, you want to meet those needs while framing their behavior in ways that make sense. Understanding how they communicate through body posture and nonverbal signals is key to building trust and connection. Puppies and toddlers have more in common than you might think — both rely on consistency and predictability to thrive.

Welcoming your puppy home

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. Leashes, collars, harnesses, crates, gates, toys, bones, and more — make these purchases early using the shopping list in Chapter 5. Preparing your home — puppy-proofing and staging their space — ensures they know where to go and what to do as they adjust to their new environment. Explain your routines to family and friends beforehand to keep everyone on the same page. Having a plan not only puts your mind at ease but also ensures a smoother transition for your puppy. Though the first few days can feel jarring for both of you, your puppy will quickly begin to bond with you and their new life.

Understanding your puppy's daily rhythm

Structuring a schedule around your puppy's essential needs is imperative. Knowing both the amount and ideal sleep patterns of all puppies helps take 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 should include secluded nap times and bring some regularity back into your life. And as the old saying goes, “*It takes a village*” — Chapter 7 helps you build your puppy's support team by showing you what to look for in a trainer, vet, groomer, dog walker, and more.

As your puppy starts learning the moment they arrive, you want to create consistent habits, from reinforcing mealtime manners to teaching actions and commands using positive reinforcement. By making these lessons fun and engaging, your puppy will associate learning with joy and connection. Chapter 8 discusses the importance of using a proactive (rather than reactive) approach to teaching your puppy how to behave with all people — kids included. By teaching friends and family fun activities and games to play, your puppy will learn respect for all people, no matter their size or age.



TIP

In a puppy's mind, kids are often categorized as other puppies and can be perceived as rivals for toys, food, and attention. By setting boundaries and teaching both kids and puppies how to interact respectfully, you can create a harmonious environment where trust, learning, and fun can flourish.

Socialization that sticks

Socialization isn't just about exposure; it's about creating safe, positive experiences with new sights, sounds, people, and places. Early socialization helps build resilience and confidence in your puppy, preparing them to handle whatever life throws their way. Chapter 9 dives head-on into socializing your puppy — one of the most critical aspects of their development.



TIP

If you want a well-rounded, gentle-mannered dog, follow this secret tip: Overdo socialization in puppyhood. Mindful socialization is far more important than rigorous. Expose your puppy to everything — objects, surfaces, sounds (inside and out), places, and people of all ages, races, sexes, and sizes. Include exposure to other animals and pets, too. Even young puppies can be socialized safely.

Pay attention to your puppy's reactions every time there's a shift in their sensory experiences, because slight changes in weather patterns or sudden sounds can cause hesitation. If your puppy is startled or concerned, a coddling reaction from you may be misinterpreted as mutual fear. Knowing how to calm them when stressed can make the difference between a pet who rolls with the changes and one who locks up emotionally or reacts defensively.

And because life is full of curveballs, Chapter 10 shows you how to maintain your puppy's good habits and confidence through big transitions — like moving homes, welcoming a new baby, or traveling together.

Tackling the Growth Phases

The following list is an overview of what you have to look forward to as your puppy grows through their first year:

- » **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. Make a positive impression, knowing that you'll play a big role in shaping their personality. They're needy and dependent on you, so make the most of this time together. Chapter 11 guides you.

- » **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: less of a help-me attitude and more of a can-do spirit. Embrace it. Chapter 12 shows you the way.
- » **6 months to 9 months:** By now, you're getting a good glimpse of your puppy's lifelong personality quirks. Are they needy, independent, or focused? Your puppy is maturing faster than you can keep up. Now is the time to start fun, positive lessons and to increase games that encourage interaction. Fortunately for you, bad habits can easily be phased out during this stage if you remember to stay cool. Puppies make quick connections between their actions and your reactions during this stage and are motivated to behave to get what they want — from treats to toys and attention. Chapter 13 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.

- » **9 to 12 months:** At this point, for the most part, you can see the light at the end of the tunnel. During this phase, if you've been consistent with routines and lessons, you'll have a super puppy — devoted, responsive, and mindful. Well, that's 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. Chapter 14 tells you how to stick with it — you're on the path to a confident, well-adjusted dog who trusts you completely.



REMEMBER

Does committing the next year to teaching 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 how to greet and how to conduct themselves in a crowd. They won't learn these things overnight — like school for children, puppy progress gradually stage by stage.

The following sections identify some key cues to use with your puppy and the importance of consistency during training.

Teaching your puppy directions 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 smart! Here are a few of the directions you can learn together in Part 3:

- » **Follow:** This direction says, “I’ll lead the way. Follow me!” You use this one whenever you and your puppy are out and about.
- » **Stay:** This direction encourages impulse control and emotional regulation. Saying “Stay” tells your puppy to relax and be patient. After you’ve perfected some early lessons at home, you can use it everywhere you go.
- » **Come:** A must-have item in your vocabulary, this one calls your puppy back to your side. Stay positive if you want your pup to listen. I like to think of “Come” as the human phrase equivalent of “huddle!”
- » **Leave it:** Most dogs think their middle name is No, so try to avoid that one. To teach your puppy to leave stuff alone, practice “Leave it” — a short phrase that says that’s not for you.

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

You may be aggravated at times during your puppy’s first year. Some issues like house-training, nipping, and jumping aren’t as serious (see Chapter 15), whereas others like anxiety and aggression (see Chapter 16) are. Just remember that many of your puppy’s challenging behaviors — the ones that frustrate you to tears — are natural reactions to their environment and circumstances. Whether it’s jumping on guests, barking at the delivery driver, pulling on the leash, or struggling with separation anxiety, these behaviors stem from instinct and can be addressed with patience and understanding.

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

- » You want them to come and be near you when they want to explore and play.
- » You want them to chew on their bone, but they favor an item perfumed with your scent, like a sock or slipper.
- » They think digging is fun — sometimes indoors and other times outdoors.

- » Barking is their way of alerting you that visitors are approaching, whereas you may be happier with the sound of a doorbell.
- » Some nights, you're exhausted, and your dog wants to play.

You feel like you should do something when your puppy jumps on a houseguest, barks at a passerby, or tears off with your napkin, but screaming, poking, or chasing them can be 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.

Of course, more serious issues — what I call red-flag issues — warrant concern and immediate attention. Aggression comes to mind, as does separation anxiety, excessive barking, and destructive chewing. I cover these in detail in Chapter 16. Keep in mind that a puppy exhibiting these behaviors isn't happy; harsh corrections won't ease their intensity. Instead, find a more constructive, cheerful approach, modify your own behavior, and help your puppy develop a more relaxed, go-with-the-flow attitude. You'll all feel calmer in the process. That said, aggression is a sobering topic. If your puppy's behavior feels overwhelming or unsafe, don't hesitate to seek professional guidance.



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 17–19 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 an important topic. Although doing so is a responsible decision, it's not inexpensive, and some people struggle with the idea of intervening in their pet's natural development. I get that, and still, there's the serious issue of pet 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 gives 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. Know what signs and symptoms to watch for and how to read what your puppy feels when they're unwell. Sharing this information with your veterinarian can save your puppy's life.