

Preparing for your new puppy



Welcoming a new puppy to the family is a very exciting time for everyone involved.

No doubt, you will have spent a lot of time doing research and deciding on the right breed for your family situation and lifestyle, finding a reputable breeder, and preparing for the new responsibilities that will come with a life-long canine friend.

Your breeder will have spent time answering your questions and preparing you for the transition of your puppy into its new home. Your breeder will have also provided you with lots of written information about feeding, worming, vaccinations and other care your puppy will require. Your breeder will be a valuable resource of information throughout your puppy's life. They will be excited to receive updates even into your puppy's golden years. After all, your puppy is part of their family too!

Setting your puppy up for success

Before your puppy even heads home, it is time to prepare for its arrival. You will want to think about where the puppy is going to sleep (both now and when it is a fully-grown adult), where it is going to spend time outside, and the places it will be allowed and not allowed to go. If you are at work, or at school, where is the puppy going to be housed? Is there adequate shade and shelter? Is there water accessible at all times in a way that the puppy cannot tip or spill it? Is the area secure so your puppy cannot escape?

Your puppy will have been living with its littermates, who provide company as well as warmth, so it might take a little time before your puppy gets used to being alone.

Try to make sure that your puppy is not isolated away from the daily goings-on of the family nor left alone for long periods of time in the first few weeks, and work on slowly increasing the amount of time you will be away.

Preventing problems

Puppies are naturally curious, so you need to 'puppy-proof' your property by doing a thorough hazard check. It is a good idea to get down to puppy height and have a look around the places the puppy will have access to, both now and as it grows.

Similar to making your house safe for a baby or young child, you have to look for things that could potentially be a problem – are there electrical cords that might accidentally be chewed on? Is the remote control for the TV within reach? Do the kid's toys, shoes or clothes need to be safely packed away? Or are there any potentially toxic items in the area – plants, chemicals?

It is normal for puppies to go through a phase of putting everything in their mouth, so anything they can reach is fair game and may end up being chewed on or carried around.

If an area is going to be 'off-limits', then you can start by making sure you have a way of preventing an exploring puppy from gaining access. Inside the house, baby gates may be useful to limit access to stairs, specific rooms or areas of the home. Outside some strategic fencing may help keep your puppy out of your prize rose or herb garden.

Another thing to consider is what you plan to feed your dog when you first bring it home. Your breeder will have given you some advice on feeding, and hopefully will have given you some of the food your puppy is currently eating to prevent any sudden changes in diet that might lead to tummy upsets in the first few days. You will need to organise food and water bowls and consider where you will store your puppy's food.



Preparing for your new puppy



Getting into a routine

Although it is super exciting the day your puppy comes home, it is important to try to establish a routine as soon as is possible. This helps the puppy transition to its new home as there is some level of predictability in its life – meal time, play time, toilet time, quiet time.....

Puppies need time to play and explore, but they also need time to sleep. Your puppy's sleeping area needs to be clean, warm and dry and in a place with little human traffic and no drafts. When your puppy first comes home, you may want to set up a playpen or crate with the puppy's bed in it, so it has a secure area where it can be when not under supervision.

The puppy's pen or crate becomes its safe space – somewhere they go to sleep, or somewhere to go when things get a bit too exciting. If you have children, they should be taught to leave the puppy alone when it is in its pen or crate - this is a place for 'quiet time'. The pen or crate should always be a positive place for the puppy, with some toys, something to chew on and a bed with warm, clean bedding.

When your puppy first comes home, you will be working on training your puppy where you want it to toilet, so the pen/ crate/bed needs to be reasonably close to access to the toileting area.

Having a routine will certainly help with toilet training. Puppies typically need to toilet when they first wake up from sleeping, right after a meal, and after exercise or play. Making sure that meals occur at about the same time each day along with regular play sessions, exercise and bed-time, can help make it easier to predict when it is time to head out to the toileting area with your puppy.



Puppies do best with a reliable and consistent rule structure. Everyone in the house needs to understand the rules that will apply to the puppy and needs to follow them – for example – if it is decided that the puppy is not allowed to get up on the couch, everyone needs to work on teaching the puppy to rest on its mat and take time to reward it for doing so.

If one person insists the puppy is on its mat, and another allows or encourages it onto the couch (and the kids have the puppy under the doona on the bed), the puppy will not understand what it is meant to do.

Other pets

If you have existing pets, you will need to make sure that introductions are well supervised and take place in a very positive way, so nobody is frightened or overwhelmed.

Puppies are still learning the rules of polite interactions, so it is not uncommon for an adult dog (or even a cat) to tolerate cheeky behaviour to a point and then tell a puppy off once they have over-stepped the boundaries.

Most older, well-socialised dogs will do this gently. Still, you need to supervise so the puppy is not a constant nuisance to your older dog, and the older dog is reasonable with its feedback. Puppies are great actors, and will often squeal and run like they have been badly hurt when all the older dog did was 'woof' at them. Puppies need this feedback, so don't tell your older pet off, but do check your puppy is OK without making too much of a fuss of them.

Your puppy will be taking up a lot of your time, so you need to think about making sure you still spend quality time with your other pets so they don't see the arrival of your new puppy as a negative event, and they are not missing out on the exercise and human interaction they need.

Depending on the type of pets you have, you may have to consider limiting your new puppy's access to their areas – for example, pet birds may need to be housed well away from the puppy, or your cat may need access into areas the puppy is not allowed to go to be able to have time and space to rest.

Preparing for your new puppy



Children and puppies

No one in the family is going to be more excited about your new puppy's arrival than the children in the household.

All interactions between children and your new puppy must be supervised – both to ensure that the puppy is not over-whelmed or accidentally hurt and to ensure that the children understand and are coached in how the puppy should be handled and interacted with.

Children of different ages have differing levels of comprehension. Although a puppy can be a great friend and playmate, it is not uncommon to see children putting themselves and the puppy at risk by their behaviour – pushing, poking and pulling, grabbing and competing for the puppy, running and squealing.

You don't want the puppy getting hurt or frightened at this young age as this may mean it learns to distrust all children.

You also don't want the puppy getting overexcited and unable to calm down. Supervision is the key!

Children also need to be educated on good hygiene practises when interacting with their puppy. Simple things like making sure they wash their hands after playing with the puppy are important lessons they need to have reinforced every day.

If your children are having friends over, it might be a good time for the puppy to go and have some quiet time in its pen – the kids can go crazy for a bit whilst the puppy gets to enjoy a chew toy in the safety of its bed. This way, the association will remain positive, and everyone can play together once things calm down a bit.

Remember, not all children have been exposed to animals, so some of your visitors may need extra supervision to make sure everyone goes away safe and happy.

