

# The real scoop about puppies

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It's about time someone spilled the beans about pups. We all love them – that goes without saying – but let's look at the reality of it all.

## BE PREPARED

Puppies are a ton of fun, and a ton of work. Prior to bringing home your pup, you should be prepared in terms of what you need to know about bringing up baby. You'll need to be up early and have a constant supply of paper towels on hand. You knew that, but perhaps didn't realize that you should have bought stocks in the company. Yes, your first few weeks will consist of puppy play, puppy naps and puppy pees.

Your pup will need to be well supervised. You can't even make coffee without keeping your eye on 'Sparky.'

Puppy proof your home well in advance of his homecoming; keep all toxic cleaners out of reach, all chewable items under lock and key. Safety locks on cupboard doors, and baby gates to make supervision easier are well worth the effort. The run of the house is not an option.

## DAMAGE CONTROL

So, be prepared – not only to rearrange your home for the next year or so with rolled-up area rugs and crates in the kitchen, but be prepared for some damage.

Even the most dedicated puppy owner will let their guard down at some point. You will experience loss. It may be a pair of shoes or a mitten, or it may be couch cushions or the legs of your table.

When I was a young girl, my puppy 'Ben' ate part of our new linoleum flooring. My parents had saved for it, and installed it only a few weeks before. They were forgiving of both of us, but insisted on more supervision (and additional chores). Lesson learned.

## REALITY BITES

You may find yourself living with a baby alligator instead of a pup. Puppy teeth are sharp. It's time to get to a puppy class and learn how to properly teach your pup bite inhibition.

Especially if you have young children in your home or visiting, it is imperative that you follow instructions on how to stop the nipping and biting so it doesn't escalate. Ensuring there is downtime for the pup and kids will help you succeed. Many pups become over-stimulated if the family is running riot, and more of a handful if constantly asked to be on the go. Just like children, puppies need some quiet, alone time.

Speaking of downtime, schedule some for yourself. As loveable as they are, puppies can stir up frustration. This is usually due to lack of knowledge about how to manage the situation and how to properly instruct the puppy. If you feel frustration building up, crate the puppy and give yourself a time out.

## DOLLARS AND SENSE

There is a financial reality to dogs. Ask your veterinarian about pet health insurance, and do your research. Even with insurance, your pup will need checkups, vaccinations, spay/neutering and a parasite protocol. Veterinary care should not be viewed as an option; funds should be available to keep your pup healthy over his lifetime.

Multi-dog households are on the rise, which is great, but the more the merrier should not be your motto if you're on a budget.

## TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

Do you travel? You shouldn't count on family and friends to dog sit. Be prepared to take care of him on your own and always have a backup plan. Find a reputable boarding facility or dog camp where you can leave your dog when necessary. Of course, many dog lovers vacation with their dog, but again, consider the possibility of a problem arising. If you normally stay with friends, you may have to look at the option of pet-friendly hotels. Not everyone will welcome your dog. That is reality.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

Each dog is unique and needs to have time spent on his lessons. Make sure this is an enjoyable process for both of you. Your pup can learn while enjoying himself and it should be your mission to find a trainer who teaches in a respectful and motivational manner. Anyone can train with force, but those days should be long gone.

The reality of dog training is that it is a continual process of maintenance. Many clients ask us how often we train our dogs. My answer is "Always." This means I am always asking something of my dogs, and following up in a consistent manner.

I spend time when teaching them something new, but the maintenance is ongoing. I live near a lovely bike path. To this day, I ask my dogs for a Sit-Stay when any bikes come past. You should go to training classes to learn the skills to be a great dog handler. The lessons will carry you through many years.

## SOCIAL LIFE

A pup's socialization should be ongoing for at least the first year. Get him out and about, meeting new people and going to new places, not just while he's a few months old, but until he's a confident, stable adult dog. It's reality that a large percentage of dogs lose their homes due to behavioural issues. Many of them could have been avoided with proper, early and ongoing socialization.

New owners are often surprised by how vocal and active a puppy can be; how often they jump up and grab sleeves; how often they scream in their crates; how often they run away with intent; and how often they bark back. Take a deep breath and know that this, too, shall pass if you put the work in now. Before you know it, your nipping puppy will be the dog you visualized having.

In reality, pups are fantastic. To see yours grow and learn and become the dog he was meant to be will be a joyful journey for both of you. There is nothing else like it.

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Golden Retriever courtesy Sunkozi Perm. Reg'd.

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How to housetrain your puppy

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