

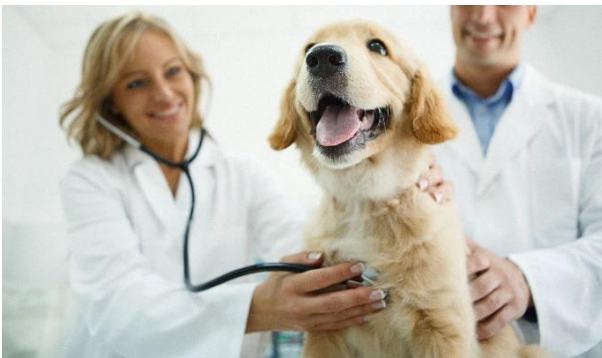


Helping Life Happen

## What Should I consider When choosing a puppy

**Health tests** – different breeds are prone to different genetic conditions. Responsible breeders will be knowledgeable and open about potential health issues in their breed. They should be able to provide evidence of health testing and breeding from generations of dogs with clear histories. Certain breeds will be more prone to health issues so research thoroughly and be prepared for this if you choose a more susceptible breed. Go onto your chosen breed's breed club website to discover which health tests are recommended for your chosen breed and look for these in puppy adverts. It's a very quick way to rule out 95% of puppy adverts. If there's no health testing, or very little compared to the recommended tests, you can rule out that breeder. If you find a breeder who hasn't done all the relevant health testing, you should be concerned about what other corners they are cutting.

**Health records** – your puppy should have a record of vaccinations, flea and worm treatments; make sure the breeder is able to provide a history of this and all vet visits. Microchipping is now a legal requirement so never choose a puppy who hasn't been chipped. And remember it's illegal for puppies to leave the breeder before 8 weeks; a puppy being sold under this age is a huge red flag.



**Breeding** – look at how many different breeds are being bred and how many dogs are owned by the breeder. Offering puppies of a variety of different breeds may not be a good sign and could indicate that they are simply 'supplying to demand'. Consider how many litters there are too. If they have two or more litters on-site it could be a red flag for a less responsible breeder. Check how many litters the breeder has from each dog – if they are breeding frequently or having many litters from each female, it's never a good sign. Aim to find a breeder who lives with their own dogs in the house and raises the litter indoors. A kennel raised litter is unlikely to have received the proper socialisation that will get the puppies used to household noises, handling, and novelty.

**Registration** – looking for a Kennel Club registered breeder can give you more assurance that they are following full health testing requirements. KC registration allows breeders to track the history of their dogs, including vital health and genetic issues, as well as ensuring a wider gene pool. For non-KC breeds, make sure they are a member of a respected breed club. However, being a registered breeder or part of a club does not guarantee everything, so you still need to do thorough research and choose carefully. A breeder who is willing to sell you a KC registered puppy 'without papers' should be avoided.

**Waiting list** - be prepared to go on a Waiting List for a good breeder's puppies. It is unlikely that a reputable breeder will simply have a puppy available for you when you enquire unless you get very lucky. While you wait, research local training schools, and start looking into training methods so that you are ready to begin training as soon as you bring your puppy home.

**Recommendations** - Go to dog shows, meet other owners, chat with trainers, and get recommendations for breeders. If you can meet dogs from previous litters to see how they turned out, it will give you a good idea of any issues within the lines.

**Research the Breed** - This one may seem obvious, but it's surprising how many people get a puppy without fully understanding the breed they are taking on. Don't just get one person's opinion, speak to as many owners, breeders, and dog trainers as possible. For every perfect Labrador you meet, there will be another whose owners describe it as a 'nightmare'. Never choose a breed based on one person's experience because the chances are, yours won't turn out the same.

Visit breed shows or events like Discover Dogs and Crufts, you can connect with people who really know their breed and arrange to spend time with them. People are passionate about their dogs and most will welcome you to meet their dogs. By spending time with them, you can gain an understanding of the breed's individual traits and decide if they're the right match for you. There is no denying every breed has specific traits. You might meet exceptions to the rules, but they really are the exceptions!

A good breeder will give you an honest view of the good and bad traits. They should be able to give you a truthful overview of the puppy's parents and ancestors, don't settle for only positives, dig out those less appealing traits too. A breeder who wants to sell the puppies quickly may not be as truthful or as willing to discuss potentially negative traits.

The breeder should also ask you lots of questions to ensure you are making the right choice for your family and the life you want to offer. If the breeder doesn't ask you any questions, this is a red flag! Likewise, can the breeder answer questions about their breed? Do they know what they were originally bred for? Do they compete with their dogs or go to breed shows? Why have they bred the litter?

**Cross breeds** - Avoid seeking out a cross bred litter, unless the breeder is part of a breed club whereby they are advocating health testing and temperament testing, such as a Labradoodle or a Cockapoo and are breeding to improve the breed. A good Cockapoo or Labradoodle breeder for instance will ensure both parents are fully health tested, will have put careful planning into breeding their litter, and will breed for temperament. Responsible breeders will not cross 'any old dogs' together, as they want to protect their breed and continue to improve the breed overall in terms of health and temperament. With a random cross breed, you have no way of knowing what health or genetic issues are being passed over to the puppies, and unless the breeding has been done for a specific purpose, it's likely that very little thought has gone into the breeding of the litter. There will be no genetic health testing, no thought into the temperament of each parent, no knowledge of the temperament of grandparents or health problems, and most likely zero early socialisation. You also have no idea what temperament or breed traits your puppy will have and what breed they will take after. If you are looking for a hypoallergenic dog, then selecting a cross breed is risky. You won't know how many traits of each dog your puppy will have, so there is no guarantee the puppy will have a hypoallergenic coat. With Labradoodles for instance, as little as 1 in 10 of a litter could have a non-shedding coat.



**Photos and videos** - prior to visiting the litter, ask for photos and videos of the puppies. The litter should be raised indoors in the home. Avoid litters where the puppies are in kennels, on sawdust or on a concrete floor. What else is in the environment? Are there toys available, and enriching areas for the puppies to explore different surfaces and novelty? Always visit more than one litter so that you can make an easy comparison about how the puppies have been raised and the knowledge of the breeder. Never take money with you to a viewing so that you don't place a deposit on a puppy in the spur of the moment.

**The Mother** - make sure you see the puppies with their mother. It's easy to make up an excuse of why the mother isn't there (on a walk, needed a break, doesn't like visitors etc.), but any excuse is a bad one! Look at how the mother is interacting with the puppies, it's not hard to make a 'fake' mother and replace the real one with a more appealing stand-in. If the mother seems uninterested or uncaring it could be a warning sign of a 'fake'. Visit multiple times so you can establish a clearer picture of how the mother and puppies behave. Take a close look at how the mother is responding to you as a visitor. Any behavioural traits the mother displays now will likely be imprinting on the puppies, so if the mother is aggressive towards you, the puppies could develop this trait as they mature.

**A Relaxed Mother** - Research suggests that a mother who experiences high levels of stress during pregnancy will pass this onto her puppies because her body's hormones and chemicals will affect how her puppies develop. There are fewer studies on dogs, but in people it has been shown that extreme stress in a pregnant mother can affect how a child's brain responds to cortisol, which leads to high anxiety in response to low level stressors. We can assume the same happens in dogs and these puppies would be tuned to react strongly to stressors, creating more fearful and anxious dogs.

We can't control every aspect of our puppy's development, but being aware of the conditions the mother has lived in will go a long way to helping reduce the likelihood of lasting damage.

Behavioural issues can be genetic and hard to change. If the mother or father are nervous, the puppy will be more likely to show similar traits. Puppies are very impressionable and the behaviour of the dogs around them will be influential, so if the parents are barking lots, this is likely to pass onto the puppies too. Never choose a nervous puppy and assume you will be able to build its confidence. A puppy who displays a lot of fear at 8 weeks will likely develop into a fearful adult and even the most dedicated, skilled owner will have a tough time changing that.



**Meeting Place** - never agree to meet in a neutral or convenient place. This is a sure sign that something is not quite right. A good breeder will want you to see where the puppies are growing up, they should be proud of their environment and keen to show you around, they should welcome you to spend time there and ideally visit multiple times before taking your puppy home. Don't settle for less than this!

**Pressure** – a good breeder will never put pressure on you to take a puppy. They should encourage you to take your time and come to a decision. A good breeder will interrogate you to make sure you're a good match for their puppies. If they don't want to know about the home their puppy is going to, it strongly implies a lack of care so you should be VERY concerned!

**Guilt Factor** – it's not uncommon to hear of people who have bought a puppy to 'save' it from an unpleasant environment. While it might seem like worthy action, this simply fuels the wrong industry. Every puppy who is sold makes way for the next litter so by 'saving' one, you risk thousands more ending up in the same horrific conditions. If you don't like what you see, walk away and report it. This is the only way to make a difference and stop the bad breeders.

**Early Socialisation** - We all know about the importance of socialisation when you bring a new puppy home, but, at 8 weeks old we are well into the critical socialisation period. Socialisation should begin with the breeder; in many ways they have the most crucial role in your puppy's development. A breeder who claims it is not their responsibility should be avoided.

They can't be taking their litters out in public to meet the world, but they should be gently exposing them to a whole range of experiences, including handling exercises, grooming, noises, surfaces, novel items, normal household activities, and - in an appropriate way - other people, and animals.

The breeder should also be teaching puppies about sharing from an early age, as well as feeding puppies from separate bowls to avoid the development of resource guarding.



**Positive Experiences** -Socialisation isn't a case of passing the puppies around groups of people or playing sounds over a loudspeaker. It requires careful thought and planning. Choose a breeder who is knowledgeable and thoughtful about their puppy's socialisation. Ideally, look for someone who is following a socialisation programme, for example, Puppy Culture. The Puppy Culture programme shows breeders the how and why of raising a litter of puppies, giving them protocols to follow to ensure the puppies receive the very best start to their socialisation, confidence building and handling right from birth.

Breeders should be aware of each puppy's unique personality and any areas of socialisation they needed more support in. All puppies will be different; even within well-bred litters, there will be bolder puppies or more reserved puppies. The breeder should be able to identify each individual and have records of their behaviour in different situations. From this, they should be able to effectively match each puppy with the most suitable home.

The best breeders will start preparing their puppies for life in their new homes. This could include short durations of separation from the litter, crate training, toilet training and maybe even some basic obedience training!

Separation training is a great one to ask breeders about, puppies who have learnt to enjoy time on their own before moving to their new homes will be much better prepared for the change than those who have never spent any time away from their mother and littermates.