



UVHS Behavior Tips
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Choosing a Puppy – The Right Way

By Dee Ganley

Choosing a puppy should take you lots of time, thought and consideration. It should not be a spur-of-the-moment decision made because he is so cute, or because you feel bad for her situation. Puppies should never be given as a surprise gift.

When you bring a puppy home, you have taken on a responsibility for the next ten or fifteen years, and you should think carefully about what type of home you can provide. Do you have time to spend with a puppy, walking, training and playing? Can you afford to pay for food, vaccinations and veterinary bills to keep your dog in good health?

Once you are sure that you are ready for the responsibility of dog ownership, you should give thought to what kind of dog will best fit with your lifestyle. Libraries, bookstores, and pet supply stores are all places you can go to find books with information about different breeds. Make a list of breeds that interest you and then call your local dog club to locate breeders in your area. You should meet some adult dogs of the breed you are interested in to be sure that the breed is a good match. Find out how much grooming the dog requires. If it is a longhaired breed that may require professional grooming, find out how much this will cost in your area.

Obedience trainers are also a good resource and can give you information about the temperament of different breeds. While a good breeder should give you honest information, some may be more interested in selling you a puppy than in meeting your needs.

Temperament testing

While different breeds have different characteristic temperaments, individual dogs within a breed can have very different personalities. How can you choose a puppy whose personality will fit well with your needs? There is a series of tests that can help predict the type of dog your puppy will become - aggressive and dominant, confident and eager to please, or shy and submissive.

If you aren't experienced with puppies, ask a friend who is to go with you. Some dog trainers are happy to help you select an appropriate puppy. Here are a few simple tests that you can do to get a better sense of a puppy's temperament:

(Try to do these tests in an area that is new to the puppy)

1. Attraction to people - Place puppy on the floor and walk away. Turn and kneel down, then clap your hand and call the puppy to you in a happy voice.
 - A. Puppy comes readily, jumps up on you and bites or mouths your hands.
 - B. Puppy comes readily, tail up and happy, and may climb up on you.
 - C. Comes quickly, with tail held level or slightly down.
 - D. Comes hesitantly, low to the ground.
 - E. Doesn't come - sits and looks afraid.

2. Following - Next put puppy on the floor and walk away, without talking to or encouraging the puppy. Watch to see what he does. '
 - A. Follows closely, tail up, nipping at shoes or shoelaces.
 - B. Follows closely, tail up.
 - C. Follows hesitantly.

- D. Follows with tail level or down may crawl.
- E. Doesn't follow - sits and may start to cry.

3. Retrieval - Crumple up a small piece of paper or have a small toy ready. Toss it so that the puppy can see it. (do this test after any dominance exercises.)

- A. Chases it, brings it back to you but won't let you get it back.
- B. Chases it and brings it back to you.
- C. Chases it slowly and brings it back to you, letting you take it.
- D. Doesn't chase it.
- E. Gets it and runs away with it.

4. Trainability - Crumple a small piece of paper into a ball and hold it just above the puppy's head, making a crinkling noise to get the puppy's attention. Tell him to sit and move the paper slowly back over his head towards his back. If he sits, give lots of praise and let him have the paper for a couple of seconds. Repeat this three or four times and check his response.

- A. Jumps up on you to get the paper.
- B. Jumps the first time, but then sits quickly and is obviously happy to do it.
- C. Sits the second or third time.
- D. Sits, then lies down.
- E. Walks away - doesn't want to do it.

5. Social handling - Squat down next to the puppy and rub or stroke his head, neck, back, face and then feet. Stop and wait for puppy's response.

- A. Jumps on you, bites at your hands or growls.
- B. Paws at you, wiggles and squirms, tries to climb on you.
- C. Wiggles and licks your hands
- D. Rolls over and exposes his belly
- E. Struggles to get away from you.

6. Dominance - Put the puppy in a down position, and hold it in that position while you count to 10.

- A. Struggles hard, tries to bite your hands, cries or growls.
- B. Struggles - may cry.
- C. Struggles, then settles down.
- D. Little or no struggling, licks your hands.
- E. No struggling, but whimpers or urinates.

Scoring puppies: 3 or more A's - This puppy is very dominant and has aggressive tendencies. He could become a biter later on - he is not a good choice for families with children or first-time dog owners. He will need non-physical, but firm training from an experienced owner.

3 or more B's, or combination of A's and B's - This puppy will tend to be outgoing and dominant, again, he should go to an experienced owner. While he should not be in a family with young children, he might be okay with older children.

3 or more C's - This puppy will adapt to most households and should do well with children if he is properly socialized. He is a good choice for an older couple or first-time owners.

3 or more D's - This puppy will be submissive, and will need lots of positive, gentle handling. He would be a good companion for a senior citizen or quiet adult. Socialization will be very important.

3 or more E's, or combination of D's and E's - This puppy will be very shy and antisocial. If he has an A in his scoring, he may also bite out of fear. He should not be placed with children or inexperienced owners. He will require lots of love and work, and may never be reliable in crowds.

If you are not sure of your scoring, try again in a new location or ask a friend to help you. Some breeders do temperament testing on their litters as a routine practice. Ask, and if a litter you are looking at has already been tested, ask to see only those whose temperament is appropriate for your situation. (Don't risk falling for a cute little fellow who isn't a good choice in the long run.)

Also remember that this test is only a guide, and any puppy can have a bad day. Ask the owners lots of questions to see what they have noticed about the puppies' behavior.

While love alone may not be enough, love plus proper training and socialization can improve behavior.

Have fun looking for the puppy that's just right for you. By taking care to find the right match, you can look forward to a successful, lifelong friendship.

When deciding on a puppy, many things should come to mind.

- Is someone going to be home all day (If not, can you go home at least every four- hours to let the puppy out of his crate or the area where you are keeping him, or do you have a neighbor who would help with this?)
- Why do you want a puppy?
- Who is going to train the puppy? Puppies need lots of supervision, just like a small child, and they need training and guidance.
- Will you breed the dog? If not, can you afford to spay or neuter your dog? -Do you have the time and money to meet a puppy's needs - good food, exercise and activities, vaccinations and veterinary care? -If you have children, what are their ages? Does everyone in the household want the dog?

If you and the members of your household agree that you are ready for a Puppy, your next step is to decide what type of dog you want. Do you want a purebred or would you like a mixed breed, maybe adopted from an animal shelter? Remember to consider the size of the adult dog when choosing a Puppy. If you choose a purebred dog, learn about the temperament typical of the breed, and the type of work it was bred to do. A dog bred to herd sheep, for instance, may take to herding cars, bicycles or your children if not given proper training and an alternative activity.

If you have a family with children, you should look for a dog who will be tolerant and submissive, not dominant and aggressive or shy and antisocial. Avoid the rambunctious and aggressive puppy, and don't let Yourself fall in love with a very slay puppy who hides in a corner and won't come Out to see you. Look for a puppy who follows you, looks happy, wags his tail and hold his head up and ears alert.

If you have already brought home a puppy who is either very aggressive or very shy, think seriously about exchanging him for another before you get too attached. There are lots of wonderful puppies who need homes, and it is heartbreaking to families to have to find a new home or put down a dog because it can't be trusted with children.

Wherever you live, if you own a dog you owe it the best you can give to make sure that it has as long and as happy a life as possible. There are many people who don't love dogs as we do and view them as tremendous social nuisance. Train your dog to be a good citizen. Obnoxious dogs are not at fault for their behavior; they are acting on their instincts and have not been trained to act otherwise.

Don't let your dog run loose. You should walk your dog on a leash, or keep it in a safe, fenced area. Whether you paid a lot for your dog or got him for free, your love for him should make a secure environment a good investment.

Spay or neuter your dog. Unless you are a serious hobby breeder, you and your dog will both be better off. Millions of dogs and puppies are euthanized every year for want of a good home. Lives that never happen, never suffer.

Take the time and make the effort to understand your dog's behavior. Lassie and the canine heroes of the movies may seem like super creatures, but in truth they were far from that. (Their mistakes ended up on the floor in the editing room!) When not filming movies, most of them were in nice safe kennels or fenced runs.

Your dog looks to you as his benevolent leader depending on you for protection and security. Be worthy of his trust.