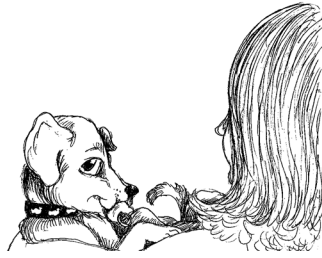


Part I

Puppyhood: Eight Weeks to Five Months



One

Choosing a Puppy

Some people want a puppy; others want to rescue an adult or simply don't want the hassle of houstraining (though just like potty training, it's probably not going to be your biggest challenge). Choosing between a puppy and an adult dog is really a matter of personal preference. For me, a big part of the decision has to do with the human end. If you have children younger than six years of age, any new dog is going to be a challenge, to put it mildly. If you're good at management, then you'll be able to handle pups, adolescents, or adults.

If you're considering acquiring a puppy, I suggest you first take stock of your life to see whether you're a good candidate for one of these furry dynamos. Families and homes best suited for raising a puppy meet most of the following criteria:

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- ◆ The parent or caretaker is home much of the time. (No workaholics allowed—pups can't handle 8, 10, or 12 hours alone, certainly not without being lonely and destructive.)
- ◆ The house has areas that can be barricaded or fenced off from other areas.
- ◆ Keeping your house clean is not your primary focus in life.
- ◆ You're not attached to your things in their current condition.

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- ◆ You have a lot of patience, and you don't get angry easily.
- ◆ You understand that dogs do not speak or understand English, Spanish, or Swahili.
- ◆ You realize that puppyhood lasts longer than you want (about five months), and that adolescence lasts even longer (up to three years).

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THE RIGHT PUPPY FOR YOU

Before you pick out a puppy, you need to know a few things about them. First, they're cute, cuddly, and adorable. You will most likely fall in love with the first one you see. However, that doesn't necessarily mean you *should* adopt that one. Just as children are born with certain temperamental traits, so too are dogs. One human baby might be fairly placid, with an easygoing personality, pretty tolerant of loud noises, and able to fall asleep easily. One might be like quicksilver, nervous and oversensitive, with seemingly no need for rest. In the same way, some puppies are very tolerant of handling and noises, while others are sensitive, needy, and overreactive. Still others might be independent and intolerant. You can find out some of the puppy's traits by spending some time with him, but you have to hold your emotions in check—don't go by the cuteness factor!

Temperament

By and large, tolerant puppies grow up to be tolerant dogs, and sensitive pups grow up to be sensitive dogs. If you have a growing human family, you might want the former rather than the latter, no matter what the pup actually looks like. (After all, he won't look like that for long.) When you go puppy visiting, try to see more than one puppy in a litter, and try to see at least one parent, but preferably both. In fact, try to see the adults *first* so you know what you're getting into. This is very important because a puppy not only inherits his looks from his parents; he also inherits their temperaments. If the human parent of the mother dog says she's not good with people, you might want to check out another litter, just to play it safe. Because you're planning to spend the next 12 to 14 years on average with this dog, it's wise to set yourself up for success. You don't get to pick the

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temperament of your kids, but you do have the luxury of trying to pick out the best puppy for your family.

It's great if the puppy lives in the house with the breeder/parent. It's even better if the breeder/parent has children who have been playing with the puppies since shortly after they were born. Certainly, the puppies should have been handled extensively to help them bond with people. Whether they have been or not, you should evaluate them as objectively as possible. (This is not an easy task, because you probably started falling in love the second you saw them.)

There are a number of temperament evaluation tests to predict the behavior of dogs. So far, none have been proven to be an effective predictor of behavior. However, until there *is* a proven test, you might consider taking him through a few quick moves:

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- ◆ After the initial meeting, ask if you can socialize the puppy alone, or without interference, in a room with which the puppy is not familiar. Let the puppy explore and get used to your presence and smell. Then, draw him to you and pet him quite a bit—try to see if he enjoys it. Abruptly stop petting him and just observe his reaction. If he comes back for more, that's good. If he shakes you off and walks away, that's not so good. Do this a couple of times to see if you can get him to like it. The puppy who walks away is not necessarily a bad puppy; he may just be independent or reserved. This characteristic tends to run in certain breeds or breed types, such as northern dogs (Huskies and Malamutes), guard dogs (Great Pyrenees or Kuvasz), or sighthounds (Greyhounds, Salukis, and Afghans). However, dogs don't have to be a certain breed or breed type to be independent.
- ◆ Hold him by the collar and restrain him gently. This isn't supposed to hurt; you're just holding him in place against his will. If he doesn't have a collar on, hold him with both your hands around his middle. If he's small enough, turn him on his back in your arms (as though he were a baby). If he struggles briefly or not at all, then looks at you questioningly or relaxes, that's very good. If he tries like crazy to get away, or if he mouths or bites you in an attempt to remove your hand and arm from his body, that's

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not so good. Cuddle him a few times to see if he gets used to it or begins to like it.

- ◆ Next, let him relax, and when he's investigating something other than you, clap your hands and tell him he's a bad boy—act angry. (I know this is hard!) If he turns to you and offers a submissive posture (like dropping to the ground, curling and wagging his tail low, or licking you) that's great. If he walks away without "hearing" you, that's not so great. If he growls at you, maybe you should consider leaving that puppy for another parent.
- ◆ Check his natural interest in retrieving a ball. Ball orientation is a major plus in all dogs because it helps maintain dependence, which is desirable in a dog. It's also a great way to exercise a dog when you don't have much time. Roll a ball away from you, making sure the dog sees it. If he chases it and brings it back, you have a winner. If he chases it, catches it, and takes it under a chair or table, not to worry. That can be worked with. If he's not interested, he may never be, or you may have a lot of work to do to get him jazzed about retrieving. Once again, certain breed types are more suitable for this kind of play. Retrievers, of course, and herding dogs (Border Collies, shepherds) tend to be the most fixated. Northern breeds usually couldn't care less.

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A good family dog will want to be with you, will act apologetic when you get angry (even if he has no idea what caused your irrational outburst), and will relax when you hold him close. There are other tests you can do, but these are the easiest, and they do help you get a handle on the puppy's temperament.

Leaders and Followers

If you are lucky enough to be able to observe an entire litter, you can usually figure out what role each puppy is playing with the other pups. In every group, there's a leader, there are middle dogs, and there's an omega (the guy at the bottom of the pack). Many people either like the leader because of his confident behavior, or they like the one sitting in the corner, just looking at them. My suggestion would be to pick one of the dogs in the middle rather than either of these.

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The leader puppy probably got that way by pushing the other puppies away from the food bowl, by grabbing toys and other “valuable” items, and often by bullying the other pups in play. He might be a great dog, but he’s likely to be a challenging pet. The shy puppy in the corner will probably cringe when you try to pet him or pick him up. When you do hold him, he may burrow into your arms (and heart) and appear affectionate. Endearing he may be, but dogs with this type of temperament often learn to use growling or snapping to keep other dogs or people away from them. In fact, in my experience, timid dogs have a very good chance of becoming defensively aggressive. Bully-type dogs can be aggressive, too.

The most important thing for you to do as a potential parent is to withhold judgment until you’ve really observed the puppy. It’s just so easy to get hooked on the idea that this is the dog for you just because he’s available *now*.

Small Dogs or Multiples

I meet many people who want a small dog because of space constraints in their house or because their kids want a little dog. Often, small dogs aren’t suitable for a family, just because they *are* small. They feel vulnerable and can learn to growl or bark to keep people from stepping on them. As an experiment, try spending half an hour with your head on the floor looking up, and you’ll see why they might do that. If a small dog is what you want, be *very* careful during the choosing process. For instance, terriers can be adorable (I have one myself), but they often have short tempers and can be difficult to train unless you explain very carefully what’s in it for them. Chihuahuas are small and look cuddly, but they often don’t *like* to be cuddled.

Sometimes it’s very difficult to choose just one puppy. You might fall in love with two pups in the litter. However, *resist the urge*. It may be easier on you to get the houstraining over with in one fell swoop, but there are far more minuses than pluses to owning siblings. The first is that the puppies tend to bond first with each other, much as twins often do in the human world. They won’t think they need you, and they’ll have a horrible time being separated (which has to happen sometimes!). They’re often twice as difficult to train just because of

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those two factors. And if you think one puppy can be destructive, just wait until you see what two can do!

PUPPY PERSONALITIES

Everything children do is practice for adulthood, which is why it's important to instill values and some habits as soon as they are ready for them. For some children, the nurturing instinct, as evidenced through play with dolls, may point to a future parental role. Other children, who are fascinated with tools or building utensils, may develop an interest in architecture later in life. Still other children, who display more dominant personalities at a young age, may hold other positions of power as adults. The same idea holds true with dogs; they're preparing for their future role in life, whether it's to be the perpetual child, the worker, or the boss.

Here are some child/puppy correlations you might encounter, perhaps in your own puppy!

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Mommy's (or Daddy's) Girl/Boy

- ◆ Child—He/she seems to want to please you and tends to follow you around. He/she doesn't want you to be angry and will do virtually anything to prevent that. Even as a youngster, he/she may want to cook meals and often parents his/her own toys. He/she seems easy and compliant, but there's a manipulative component here—he/she is getting attention in his/her own fashion and loves it. He/she will also use your presence to order other children around.
- ◆ Puppy—He'll follow you around, sometimes sitting underfoot. If you act in an angry fashion, he'll drop down to the floor, wiggling, maybe flipping over and urinating. He acts as though he wants to do everything you say. He seems to be submissive, but he's getting you to do what he wants by working you. And he wants attention! He may also use your presence to increase his courage and growl or snap at other dogs who come too close to you.

The Bully

- ◆ Child—Likes to play rough! He/she often has a vast amount of energy and doesn't particularly want to play alone. If not

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monitored, he/she could hurt other children. He/she is not necessarily mean but is pretty insensitive and lacks empathy.

- ◆ **Puppy**—Likes to play rough! He's often object oriented and mouthy. He'll jump up on tables and chairs and chew and destroy anything he can get his mouth on. He tends to body slam (run into) other puppies in play. He's not mean, but he needs to be monitored to avoid future problems.

The Sensitive One

- ◆ **Child**—His/her feelings are easily hurt, and he/she overreacts to other kids and adults. Loud noises can upset him/her. He/she likes to play quietly, often alone.
- ◆ **Puppy**—He plays normally, but it doesn't take much to stop him from doing something you don't like. Usually just a disappointed voice will work. He might like playing with other puppies, but one bump from another puppy will make him scream as though he's been injured.

The Mediator

- ◆ **Child**—Usually what we think of as a “sensible” kid, he/she understands that he/she can't hog all the attention (though he/she tries to by being “good”). He/she doesn't like disagreements and will try to intervene if people seem to be losing their temper.
- ◆ **Puppy**—Often an easy puppy to be around, he likes to please and will check in often. If he's playing with other puppies and they get too rough, he may well put himself between the two and try to stop the altercation. This can be cute, or it can get him into trouble if the other dogs start to pick on him.

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SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Should you alter your dog? And if so, when? The answers are usually “yes,” unless you have a breeding plan (not just a vague wish to have puppies). Oftentimes people are quite happy to have their females spayed, as twice yearly heat cycles are a major pain. The surgery doesn't usually change a female dog's personality because their hormones surge so rarely. (The only times I've seen major changes are in very dominant, confident females who appear to need

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estrogen to keep them balanced. These dogs can become what we call “doggie bitches.” That is, after spaying they tend to act like males—lifting their legs to urinate and doing so often, as well as engaging in more frequent posturing).

Neutering a male seems to stir more of an emotional response from us. After all, we wouldn’t consider doing such a thing to our children! However, it’s usually a very good idea. There are health benefits to altering males or females, primarily those having to do with infections and various cancers, and there are definite benefits to neutering a male. Aggression is just one.¹ Neutering also helps strengthen the bond between human and dog, as the dog will no longer feel the urge to go out on the town looking for an exciting partner. Certainly, you can have a great relationship with an intact dog—it’s just easier with a neutered one. Finally, tens of thousands of dogs are killed every year because they’re unwanted. We should all do our part to improve those horrible numbers.

It’s a good idea to check with your vet to determine when might be the best time to alter your dog. Some shelters spay and neuter as young as eight weeks, while many vets recommend waiting until your dog is over six months of age.

Puppyhood doesn’t really last for long. In just 12 weeks, your two-month-old puppy will become a five-month-old adolescent, and you’ll have a whole new set of challenges.

¹ Eight out of ten aggressive incidents reported in this country involved male dogs. Six out of ten involved intact (unneutered) male dogs. (Source: Humane Society of the United States & American Dog Trainers Network)