

## **HOW TO BUY A PUPPY©**

### **For Temperament and Health; Without Being Taken Advantage Of**

Unfortunately and sadly, multitudes of people pay hundreds or thousands of dollars for a puppy having physical and/or behavior problems that will not be apparent for months or years. These dogs could be called salvaged dogs, in that they were obtained from breeders who lacked knowledge or were neglectful breeders.

Being a dog trainer, I know firsthand the many issues people end up with when they obtain puppies from anyone other than a responsible and *knowledgeable* breeder. In my opinion, none of the following should ever be considered a responsible or knowledgeable breeder or, for that matter, selling by a responsible breeder:

- Pet stores
- Puppy breeding operations
- Backyard breeders
- Those conducting internet sales without getting to know the buyers and /or shipping a puppy during the sensitive development period.

*“Most puppy mills, which add 2.5 million puppies to the glut of dogs born annually in this country, are actually small home businesses run by amateurs whose ignorance and carelessness in breeding is a direct cause of much of the rise in congenital and health problems in many breeds.”<sup>1</sup>*

All of the above have one thing in common; their willingness to sell you a salvage dog at an inflated price. Although the puppy has not physically been mistreated or damaged, proper socialization for the puppy has been disregarded, thereby damaging the temperament and personality of the puppy.

My definition of a salvage dog is any dog that:

- Was not raised with compassion and appropriate care
- Was not raised with appropriate socialization from the beginning
- Was not raised in a home environment
- Was not raised in a sensory rich environment
- Was obtained after 8-weeks of age missing the easiest socialization to the family in a new home

Breeding dogs and being knowledgeable about a breed of dogs is not enough. Breeders must fully understand a dog's *physical* and *mental* and *social* development.

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<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, Richard H., DVM, PhD, and Pitcairn, Susan Hubble; *Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide To Natural Health For Dogs & Cats*; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev, and updated ; Rodale; (2005)

*“Improperly socialized dogs may appear to be hyperactive, have less coping skills than other dogs, exhibit anxiety, fear or aggression, display compulsive behaviors (i.e., licking paws, spinning, chewing on themselves), and vocalize more than the average dog.”<sup>2</sup>*

I know there are some who are reading this and saying to themselves that they have purchased or know someone who has purchased a puppy and it did not end up with any health or major behavior problems. Buyer beware, however, the potential for these problems is vastly increased when you purchase a puppy from those who put profit above the puppy’s welfare.

*“puppies who had dysfunctional backgrounds with inadequate socialization were 580 times more likely to end up with fear aggression towards strangers.”<sup>3</sup>*

Purchasing a puppy that is registered; “with papers” is no guarantee that you are getting a great pet dog. Pedigree or pure-breed does not mean better, especially if you are interested in having a good pet and companion.

You can end up paying hundreds or thousands of dollars for puppies that may have behavior problems that will not be appear at the time of purchase when buying puppies from a pet store, backyard breeder, through the internet, newspaper ads, etc.

The dog may;

- Be harder to houstrain
- Consume their own feces
- Be Insecure and fearful / lacking confidence
- Be Fear aggressive
- Be Food aggressive
- Be Aggressive when guarding toys or things it values
- Not good with children
- Play rough with other dogs
- Be Fearful and/or aggressive with other dogs
- Be Fearful of people
- Be Harder to train

Without the proper foundation in the early weeks, these dogs will never be all they could have been if raised in the right environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Silvani, Pia, CPDT and Eckhardt, Lynn; *Raising Puppies & Kids Together: a guide for parents*; T.F.H. Publications, Inc.; Neptune City, NJ (2005)

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of The Cummings School Of Veterinary Medicine At Tufts University; edited by Nicholas Dodman with Lawrence Lindner: *Puppy’s First Steps The Whole Dog Approach to Raising a Happy Healthy Well-behaved Puppy*; Houghton Mifflin Company; New York, NY (2007)

## How Should I buy a puppy?

I would interview several breeders and obtain the following information;

- How many breeds of dogs do they breed?
- How many bitches do they breed and how many litters a year?

If they breed several breeds of dogs, and several bitches a year, I will consider them a breeding operation that is focused on dollars not animal welfare. *I will look elsewhere!*

How many litters have they had? If this is their first, I will consider it an experiment for them and would not purchase. Why; because for the same amount of money I can find someone who is experienced.

They should be able to explain to me the health problems common with the breed. They should screen their dogs for genetic problems and produce proof that the parents of the litter are free of those problems. *If not, I will look elsewhere!*

Breeders can verify health reports and test for genetic disease in dogs to dramatically decrease the incidence of genetic disease in their breeding programs with services like the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). [www.offa.org](http://www.offa.org) Dogs can carry many harmful genes that do not manifest as detectable disease during the breeding age of the dog. These dogs may appear normal but can be affected by diseases that have a late age of onset that is not apparent at the time of breeding.

They should be able to provide me with their veterinarian information and the medical history for the mother. *If not, I will look elsewhere!*

If they present themselves as a professional reputable breeder, do they have a dog from every litter that they bred? *If not, I will look elsewhere!* Breeders who are dedicated to the breed and are aiming to further their breed will keep the best to show and breed from.

I will want to contact one person who purchased from each of the previous litters. *If they cannot provide that information, I will look elsewhere.*

They should be knowledgeable about the breed and its breed characteristics and be concerned that my family is a good match for one of their puppies. *If not, I will look elsewhere!*

I will ask if they will sell me two from the same litter that I will keep together. *If they will, I will look elsewhere!* Puppies from the same litter will already have a strong bond to each other. If they continue to live together their bond will always be stronger than the bond they form with the owners. This results in the owners having less influence over the dogs' behavior.

I will ask if they sell puppies to pet shops, puppy outlets, or through the internet to people that they have not personally met and evaluated. *If they do, I will look elsewhere!*

A reputable breeder is concerned that the puppy goes to a home that is a good match for the puppy. Their primary focus is on the dog's welfare, not making money.

I will inquire if they are willing to take the dog back if needed. *If not, I will look elsewhere!*

Breeders with a motive other than money will always take the dog back at any time and/or assist in finding a new home. If they have screened the adopting family well, this will be a rare occurrence.

Where is the whelping box and where are the puppies kept? *If not in the home, I will look elsewhere!* Puppies that will be companion animals should be raised in a home so they experience and get used to all the smells, sights, and sounds in addition to learning to live with humans.

I will ask them to explain to me what their socialization program consists of. Is the socialization program a planned and structured process? It should be a systematic program that begins from the very first week with nothing more than gentle handling. By 4-weeks of age the puppies should have as much room as possible to roam, explore, and interact with all types of surfaces, textures, novel items, toys, and be exposed to anything they may encounter in life, all without being overwhelmed.

Weeks 3-5, puppies are generally curious and will tend to approach people and will be investigate thing and be more exploratory. They should have toys to investigate and play with and other novel items to explore. Gentle handling should continue and they should be slowly introduced to things they may encounter in life. Smells, sounds, people, objects, etc...

Weeks 6-8, the puppies should be separated from their mother and littermates for about 20 minutes each day and should spend that time with human's having pleasant experiences at a new place every day!<sup>3</sup>

At about 6-weeks the puppies will become more cautious of novel things and new experiences as they approach the "fear period" around 8-10 weeks. During this impressionable time, the puppies become hypersensitive to negative experiences which can have a long-lasting impact on the puppy.

If the breeder does not explain to me a socialization process that is positive and pleasant for the puppy and not forced, *I will look elsewhere!*

*If it does not include the following, I will look elsewhere!*

Have the puppies been exposed to, but not overwhelmed by:

- Children of all ages
- Adults of all types
- Other family pets
- Handling & grooming

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<sup>3</sup> The Enriched Puppy Protocol (EPP) Suzanne Clothier

- Roller skates, skate boards, bicycles
- Baby strollers
- Wheel chairs
- Trash cans
- Car rides
- Umbrellas, canes
- Household noises; vacuums, toasters, oven timers, radio, television, washer and dryers, hair dryers, power tools, etc...

Is there regular positive interaction with the puppies by adults and supervised children? Are the puppies protected from overwhelming experiences which can leave long-lasting negative consequences? Are children allowed to annoy or bother the puppies which will make it more difficult for the puppy to be around children because of past negative experiences?

The whole purpose of the socialization program is to prevent the puppy from developing unreasonable fears during this sensitive period.

**If I receive the answers that I am looking for then I will visit.**

I will want to visit the litter at 4-weeks to observe the puppies and the conditions. *If I cannot, I will look elsewhere.* I will want to verify the information that was obtained above and observe the living conditions, health of all dogs, and the life experiences the puppies are receiving as outlined below.

I will want to meet the mother and all the other dogs on site. *If I cannot, I will look elsewhere.* Nervous traits are usually inherited. Just as important is the fact that the dogs in the household will be the role model that the puppy will learn from during this very impressionable period of puppy development. If the behavior of the other dogs in the household I observe each week is not what I would want my puppy to behave like as an adult, *I will look elsewhere.*

Are the puppies on surfaces like can be found in most homes? (Carpet, wood, tile, or vinyl floors) *If not, I will look elsewhere!*

Are there two surfaces so the puppies will learn to discriminate for housebreaking? *If not, I will look elsewhere!* Puppies have an instinctive desire to leave the sleeping area to relieve themselves. We can maintain that behavior by helping them learn to relieve themselves on a surface other than where they sleep and eat. This will start to happen at about three-weeks of age. Approximately 1/3 of the floor surface should be a surface that is not found in my home. This is the surface for them to eliminate on. It can be a section of the floor covered with newspapers.

Is the mother of the puppies able to leave and return to the puppies *at her choosing* so the puppies learn to be without her for short periods of separation? *If not, I will look elsewhere!*

If the puppies' mother can come and go at her choosing, I have fewer worries about the early weeks of life at the breeder's home contributing to attention seeking behaviors or separation anxiety.<sup>4</sup>

Are there 50% more food and water bowls than there are puppies? *If not, I will look elsewhere.*  
If there are six puppies, I will be looking for nine food and water bowls. I do not want my puppy learning that food and water are a scare resource that must be guarded from others.<sup>5</sup>

Are there toys in with the litter for the puppies? *If not, I will look elsewhere.*

There should be plenty of toys for all the puppies so that they are not considered a scare resource that needs to be guarded from others. Toys can be as important to a dog's development as they are for children. Toys can do more than keep pets entertained and occupied. They can assist dogs with their social and emotional development. The puppies gain more confidence exploring and interacting with new toys. They also learn to play with other dogs with toys, rather than using the other dogs as a toy.

I, as a pet owner, will want to use toys to play with my dog to strengthen the social bond between me and my dog and to assist in training so that I am not limited to using treats for everything.

#### **Rules for Dog Toys:**

No toy is indestructible, anything the dog considers fun can be a toy; toys must be nontoxic, large enough that they cannot be swallowed, destroyed or ingested.

Is there a completely different set of toys in with the litter this week for the puppies? *If not, I will look elsewhere.* Toys should be rotated daily so that the puppies have something new to explore and interact with. This also assists in keeping them from getting bored with the items.

I will want to visit the litter at 5-weeks to observe the puppies and the conditions. *If I cannot, I will look elsewhere.*

Each week I will want to visit the puppies to verify all the items mentioned above. Additionally, I will want to see a different set of toys in with the litter each week for the puppies? *If not, I will look elsewhere.*

I will want to visit the litter at 6-weeks to observe the puppies and the conditions. *If I cannot, I will look elsewhere.*

I want to verify all the items mentioned above and will want to see a completely different set of toys in with the litter this week for the puppies? *If not, I will look elsewhere.*

At 7-8 weeks before the full onset of the "fear period" I would go and observe the puppies and the conditions and would bring my new family member home after the following evaluations. *If I cannot, I will look elsewhere*

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<sup>4</sup> John Rogerson – Puppy Development

<sup>5</sup> The Dog Vinci Code by John Rogerson

During my final visit, I would ask the breeder to handle the puppy and check its teeth and then groom the puppy for ten-minutes. *If the puppy does not accept the handling, I will look elsewhere.*

I will ask the breeder to separate the puppy from the litter and place a bowl of food on the floor. As the puppy eats I will ask the breeder to approach the puppy as he is eating. If the puppy eats faster, freezes, covers/protects his food bowl, or look uncomfortable in any way, *I will look elsewhere.*

I will ask the breeder to stroke each puppy as it is eating. If the puppy's behavior indicates it is not comfortable with or trusting of the breeder while it's eating, *I will look elsewhere.*

If the puppy trusts the breeder around the food bowl I will ask that they place a water bowl on the floor and to do the same exercise.

I will pick up a toy from the puppy area, I want to see the puppies approaching and wanting to play with me with the toy. *If the puppies have no interest, I will look elsewhere.*

I will observe the puppies and watch to see how long it takes them to recover after they have been startled by a sound. If they do not recover quickly, meaning that even if they move away and go hide, I want to see them come out of hiding and at least investigate at a distance in less than a minute. *If not I will look elsewhere!*

Breeders have a responsibility to begin the socialization process by exposing and familiarizing the puppies with anything they are likely to encounter during their life. This is vitally important because the experiences of a puppy between 3-16 weeks will have a lifelong emotional and cognitive impact on the puppy's personality and temperament.

If you get a puppy from any other source other than a responsible and knowledgeable breeder you will now have a much harder time overcoming negative events, or lack of experiences during this sensitive development period. You will now have to overcome negative experiences with a great amount of positive experiences in addition to retraining to overcome previous learned behavior.

If you obtain your puppy at 8-weeks you realistically only have until about 12-weeks before the sensitive socialization period is over. Learning does not come to a complete stop after 12-weeks, but new learning after that time is ingrained less easily.<sup>3</sup>

The breeder can contribute good genetics and proper socialization to your puppy to give him a great start in life, but the work is far from over. The breeder has only laid the foundation. The biggest influence on a dog's character and development will be the family and environment in which he lives. Your work does not end, but it should get much easier by the time your puppy is an adult.



You can get a puppy and ignore the above, but why would you want to overpay for a puppy or dog that you will need to put in a considerable more amount of time and work to rehabilitate its behavior?

All this may seem excessive to many just to get a puppy. But I caution those who would ignore the above warning signs because many behavior problems will not surface until the puppy reaches adulthood.

Millions of families each year adopt a dog, often a puppy. The next year, half of those dogs will be surrendered to shelters because their owners are unhappy with how they turned out, and two of three will be put to sleep. Sadly, almost half of the dogs in the USA never see their second birthday.<sup>6</sup>

For those who believe they can recognize a good puppy based on their own gut feelings or through any number of temperament tests I leave a note of caution. Your gut feelings are no better than chance, and temperament tests are less reliable with younger puppies because their personality is still developing.

The prospective puppy owner, who does not conduct a thorough interview and verify the information obtained from the breeder, is like the carpenter who does not waste his time measuring. Both are set for challenges.

## **References**

**John Rogerson** seminar talks on puppy development. [www.johnrogerson.com](http://www.johnrogerson.com)

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John Rogerson is widely acclaimed as one of the world's leading trainers and behaviourists, and he pioneered many of the techniques that have now become standard practice in behaviour therapy and training. He is much sought after by organisations that are not only involved with training dogs but are also working towards a greater understanding of our canine friends.

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, Richard H., DVM, PhD, and Pitcairn, Susan Hubble; *Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide To Natural Health For Dogs & Cats*; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev, and updated ; Rodale; (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Silvani, Pia, CPDT and Eckhardt, Lynn; *Raising Puppies & Kids Together: a guide for parents*; T.F.H. Publications, Inc.; Neptune City, NJ (2005)

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### **Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)**

**Companion animals - Pedigree dogs** - Saving the pedigree dog

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RSPCA/RSPCARedirect&pg=pedigreedogs>

**Companion animals - Pedigree dogs** - Our position

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RSPCA/RSPCARedirect&pg=pedigreedogs&marker=1&articleId=1233061353310>

### **Puppy Vaccination and Early Socialization Should Go Together**

Anderson, R. K.; Puppy Vaccination and Early Socialization Should Go Together: An Open Letter to My Colleagues in Veterinary Medicine: <http://abrionline.org/article.php?id=75>

HOMESKOOING4DOGS