

# Puppies as part of the family

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Inside Bay Area

IF you're like most families searching for a puppy, you've spent hours researching reputable breeders and visiting local animal rescue groups and shelters until you have found the perfect match for your family.

Now that you have that little bundle of fur home, you will need to spend that same amount of energy and time - if not more — integrating that puppy into your home.

It's not always easy and can take hours of time, consistency and patience. Knowing beforehand what is involved in taking care of a puppy will set realistic expectations for both you and your children.

Most breeders and rescue groups recommend that you visit a veterinarian for a health check within in the first week. This is important to identify problems like heart murmurs or weight abnormalities and to establish a preventative health plan. To that appointment, you should bring a stool sample.

It will be processed and screened for intestinal parasites.

Individuals with compromised or immature immune systems (including pregnant moms and children) should not be in contact with fecal material especially if diarrhea is present. There are bacterial, (campylobacter) and parasitic infections (worms, giardia and coccidia) that can cross from animals to people and can cause a variety of symptoms.

Your veterinarian can prescribe medications for your puppy if one of these infections is identified.

Adult supervision is important at all times — to protect both child and puppy. This is especially important with visiting children who might not be used to dogs. If you're worried your children might be too young for a pup, the reality is that introducing puppies into families who have babies, toddlers or younger children will reduce the fear of dogs that can sometimes develop in older children who have never been exposed to dogs or other animals.

Children should be encouraged to be part of your new dog's care. Feeding and brushing are great ways to keep kids involved — even the youngest family members can be a part of this routine. When children take part in daily feedings, the puppy will begin to look to them for food and will consider himself their subordinate.

If your puppy has had several days to get settled in, it's not too early for children to gently begin teaching him to 'sit' before he gets a treat. A high quality diet is important with a moderate amount of training treats.

Puppies — like children — learn the ways of the world by exploring with their mouth and chewing. Chew toys like Kong toys filled with treats, rope toys, safe bones and sturdy balls will keep your puppy busy and away from your belongings.

Crate training is very helpful with housetraining and keeping both your puppy and belongings safe. Puppies can be crated anywhere in your home, but some families choose to allow the eldest child the privilege of having the puppy crated in their room. This allows child and puppy to bond while easing the puppies' fear of being alone. Your puppy will find it easier to get used to the crate because he will be able to see, hear and smell you or your child - wherever you decide he can sleep.

Obedience training should be a family affair. Look for a trainer who encourages your whole family be involved. I have been impressed that kids are a great part of the process. They are used to following instructions and routines.

Once your puppy has been fully vaccinated, you can start exploring the world together. Puppies, like children, receive a series of vaccinations from the time they are about eight weeks old until approximately 16 weeks of age. Rabies vaccination is important for your puppy's health.

Other vaccinations help to prevent some life-threatening infections for your puppy, including distemper and parvo virus infection. There are some vaccinations that will be recommended by your veterinarian based upon your puppy's exposure. Preventative medications for intestinal parasites, fleas, ticks and heartworms should be started if they are a risk in your area. These are generally started by six months of age.

Spaying or neutering your pet is generally recommended at six months of age.

Spaying and neutering prevents unwanted litters, and pets that are "fixed" are much easier to live with. There are no heat cycles and less roaming behavior. Microchipping is an easy and fairly inexpensive way to permanently identify your pet in case they become separated from you. There is nothing worse than explaining to a child that their family pet is gone - this simple step can help you find your dog if they've been picked up and taken to a local shelter.

So, now you have the basics - you're off to a good start. Enjoy your new family member.

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