

Make the Commitment

Okay, you have picked your puppy, now it's time to make a commitment and prepare:

10. **Get It in Writing**

Information about the sale or adoption should be in writing. The contract should include, for example, details regarding any fees, spay-neuter agreements, health guarantees, terms of co-ownership, restrictions on breeding, and living arrangements. It should also include instructions on what to do if the dog, despite your best efforts, simply doesn't work out for you or your family. Most responsible breeders (and shelters) will insist that the dog be returned to them. If you purchase from an AKC breeder, get your papers and register your dog.

Take a Deep Breath and Get Ready

1. **Prepare Yourself**

It is stressful transition for a puppy to leave their mom and littermates. Make the transition easier by preparing for your pup. Breeders usually recommend and give an adequate supply of dog food. Buy food, treats, a collar and leash, toys, grooming tools and other necessities in advance. This should include a crate and/or designated area for the pup to sleep comfortably and for you to be able to take the pup out for regular elimination vigils.

2. **Make a Schedule**

You and your family members should decide who will be responsible for food, water, walking, exercise, clean-up and grooming. Post a schedule of tasks in a visible area. **Dog-Proof Your Home** before your new dog arrives. Move breakables or "chewables" to higher ground. Make electrical cords inaccessible to curious paws and noses. Block off any area of the house that you want off-limits to the dog. Put the lid down on your toilet, on garbage and your shoes in your closet. Block access to any house or garden plants that may be toxic to dogs.

3. **Set a Containment Policy**

It is essential that you have a secure method of keeping your dog on your property. Check your fence for spots vulnerable to chewing or digging. If your yard is not fenced, consider a large dog run or invisible fencing. If your property is not secure. Stress to family members that the dog must be leashed at all times when taken outdoors.

4. **Get a Collar**

Your dog should wear a flat nylon collar with a buckle at all times, except when in a crate. (The buckle can catch on the crate and cause injury.) The collar should be tight enough that it will not slide over the dog's ears, but loose enough that you can fit two fingers between the collar and the dog's neck. Check the fit of the collar often, especially if you have a fast-growing puppy.

5. **Make a Bed (*Safe Haven for the Dog*)**

Every dog needs a quiet place to call his own. Create a comfortable area, whether a crate, a mat or a pile of blankets, for your dog to go to when he needs rest or privacy.

6. **Buy Some Toys (*Have a Toy Box*)**

Provide your dog with a variety of toys to prevent him from playing with your socks and shoes, your morning paper, or your child's favorite doll. Get some indestructible toys of hard rubber and some that you and your dog can play with together, such as balls, Kongs and a durable stuffy. Kongs can be stuffed with kibble to keep him amused when you are away. Never leave a puppy unattended or alone for long periods of time. Up to 6-months, pups need to eliminate every couple of hours.

7. **Slow, Careful Introductions & Adjustments**

Be mindful that this is a big adjustment for a pup and many older adopted dogs. Introduce family members slowly. Introduce other pets one at a time in a safe place, preferably outside of the home on neutral ground. Save introductions for multiple family members, friends and neighbors for your puppy PAWTY, where each can enter slowly and offer a treat when your pup sits.

8. **Find a Veterinarian Ahead of Time**

You should choose a veterinarian for your dog as soon as possible. Have your dog examined by the Vet within a few days of his arrival. Give your Vet copies of the dog's health records, and set up a vaccination and Wellness Schedule.

9. **Find a Good Positive Reward Based Certified Training (CPDT)**

Basic training can begin as early as 12 week in the right environment. Find a good training coach who has experience with many breeds and ages, invites families to class and does a careful evaluation. Positive training is the only training a puppy should have. They are learning!



Responsible Dog Ownership

**Awareness
Education
Relationship
Well-Being**

**Dog Talk
Training and Wellness
Sanctuary**

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Enjoy the Journey!

Among companion animals, dogs are unmatched in their devotion, loyalty and friendship to humankind. Anyone who has ever loved a dog can attest to its reward in return for efforts. The excitement your dog shows when you come home, the wagging tail at the sound of the leash being taken from its hook, the delight in the tossing of a tennis ball, the head nestled in your lap and the unconditional friendship that we receive are only some of the rewards of having a canine companion.

Owning a dog is not just a privilege—it's a responsibility. Dogs (and other pets) depend on us for, at minimum, food and shelter, and deserve much more. If you are considering taking a dog into your life, you need to think seriously about the commitment that dog ownership entails. If you already have a dog, you need to consider if you are fulfilling all your obligations as its owner.

We are committed to helping dog owners raise happy, healthy dogs. The list below is certainly not exhaustive, but it contains some of the essential ways you can be the best dog owner you can be.

Think & Plan First

1. **Recognize the Commitment**

Dog ownership is not something to be entered into lightly. Owning a dog is a long-term emotional and financial commitment. Before deciding that a certain dog is right for you, you must make an honest assessment as to whether your home, family and lifestyle is suitable.

2. **Evaluate Your Lifestyle**

If you get a dog, s/he will become a part of your life. For example, if you are athletic, you may not be happy with a dog who has a low energy level. If you are extremely neat or allergic, you will probably want a dog that doesn't shed much. All aspects of your family's life including hobbies, activities, personalities, schedules and finances should be evaluated before you get a dog.

1. **Make a List**

Based on your evaluation, determine what qualities you want in a dog. Consider size, energy level, grooming needs, trainability and temperament. Do you want a guard dog, a lap dog or both? Is it important that your dog get along with children or other dogs? Do you have pets (like cats) to consider in this equation? If you rent your home, are there restrictions on height, weight or breed? Answering these questions will prevent future heartache.

2. **Choose a Breed**

Once you have made your list of ideal characteristics, do some research to find which breeds (or mixes) fit that profile. Go to your local library, attend a dog show, and visit the AKC website. Talk to others with the breeds you are considering. Narrow your choices to the breed that seems right for you. Consider adopting, as there are many beautiful mixed breeds at shelters. Gather as much history as you can.

3. **Get a Referral**

You have a much better chance of being satisfied if you get your dog from a responsible, ethical breeder whose primary concern is to produce dogs of high quality, good health and stable temperament. The AKC has a Breeder Referral contact for each recognized breed. These individuals can put you in contact with breeders or rescue organizations in your area. A good shelter will have questionnaires and go through a screening evaluation to ensure that a dog is a good match for you.

4. **Make Contact**

Get in touch with the breed contacts and shelters in your area. Let them know what you are interested in. Then visit the breeders and shelters. Don't get discouraged if the first person you talk to does not have puppies available. That person may know another referral and will keep you on a waiting list within the region.

5. **Ask Questions**

Ask the breeder any questions you can think of about the breed. When you find a breeder you're comfortable with, ask to visit the kennel and view the dogs on the breeder's premises. Inquire about health problems of the breed, and what can be done to prevent or control

them. Find out what kinds of activities the breeder's dogs participate in and enjoy. Good breeders will provide you with valuable information about the breed, exercise, nutrition and grooming requirements. The breeder's dogs are a preview of what your dog will be.

6. **Consider an Older Dog**

Puppies aren't for everyone. If an older dog better fits your lifestyle, check the AKC website for breed rescue groups and Senior Adoption Networks. These organizations rescue dogs that have been lost, abandoned or surrendered due to the death or illness of their owners. Most rescue dogs have been spayed or neutered and are screened for health and temperament. Rescue is also a way to save the life of a dog in need, although my belief is that any dog is a living being and deserves the care and respect.

7. **Expect Questions**

A responsible breeder or rescue contact will ask you extensive questions about the type of home you can offer a dog. These people are as committed as you are to making the right match. Give honest answers to their questions. Remember that, due to their experience with various breeds, they know what issues are important in placing one of their dogs.

8. **Skip the Holidays**

Many people try to buy puppies as Christmas gifts for children or other family members. Most breeders, Veterinarians and Behaviorists do not recommend this. You should be prepared to give a new puppy your undivided attention, and that is rarely possible during the busy holiday season. A better idea is to give dog-related gifts - toys, leashes, grooming tools - and then bring your puppy home when all the excitement has died down.

9. **Pick Your Pet**

When the time has come to select your pet, consider your options carefully. Respect your breeder's input about which puppy is right for you. If you are rescuing an older dog, ask your contact person for information on its health, temperament, behavior and history.