



MY FIRST BEST FRIEND

How to ensure your child's first puppy is a success



FOR THE DOG IN YOUR LIFE | SINCE 2001



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Introduction

There's nothing more rewarding for a child than forging a friendship with a dog. For many young boys and girls, it is one of the most important and intense relationships of their lives. Owning a dog provides children with so much companionship and fun. But it also teaches them valuable life lessons – from compassion to responsibility. A puppy can be much more than a best friend, it can be one of the best teachers a child can have.

This eBook has been specially created to guide you through the process of acquiring a puppy for your child. It begins by asking whether your child is ready to take on the serious responsibility that comes with dog ownership. We also take a look at the preparations that you need to make, from selecting the right breed to getting your home ready for the arrival of the vibrant ball of energy that is your puppy.

We also looks at the potential pitfalls, in particular, how to stop your child being bitten by a dog.

This is presented in a simple, easy-to-digest format that your child will be able to read and enjoy as well. We hope it marks the beginning of a beautiful relationship for you, your child and their first best friend.



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Is my child ready for a dog?

It's a dilemma that has faced countless mums and dads. What do you do when your child asks for their first dog? What do you say when it seems like you can't walk through the local park without your little boy or girl seeing a cute, playful puppy and turning to you with a look that says: "oh please can I have one". As a good mother or father, you want to give your child all he or she wants in the world. But as a responsible parent you also want to make sure that both you and your child are ready for a dog. So how do you achieve that?

The truth is that we can't expect a young child to understand all the factors that need to be taken into consideration when you bring a new dog into a home. So it falls to us, their parents, to weigh them up instead. To do that we have to ask ourselves some questions.

- 🐾 Why does our child want a dog?
- 🐾 Do they really understand what it means?
- 🐾 Are they capable of looking after a puppy?



By answering these questions we, as parents, will be able to decide whether to say yes or no.

Now to business. Check out our comprehensive guide to the questions that will help you decide whether your child is ready for their very own furry friend.

Do you want a dog too?

If you are getting a dog purely to please your child, then the chances are it's the wrong decision. You need to want a dog yourself. After all, when your child is asleep and at school, it's going to be your responsibility to look after it. If the idea of having a dog in the house is something that's strongly opposed by you or your partner, then you really should think again. It may upset your child in the short term, but that will be outweighed by the long term unhappiness it may cause your family.

Why does your child want a dog?

It's really important that you understand your child's motivation for having a dog. Are they asking for one purely because a friend has one? Is it something they've talked about consistently? Or is it a recent "fad"? Do they talk about the responsibilities that come with dog ownership – grooming, bathing, taking it for regular walks, checking its general health? Do they understand that a dog is for life, not just for the time when it is a playful puppy?



Why do you want your child to have a dog?

Ask yourself why you want your child to have a dog. Again, if you are getting a dog purely to placate your son or daughter, to stop them constantly nagging you for a puppy, then you are making a mistake. This is no reason for getting a dog. If, on the other hand, you feel that you want your child to experience the unique pleasure and companionship that comes from owning a dog, that's another matter. Equally, if you want your child to learn responsibility through dog ownership, that too is a positive.

Is this a long term decision?

Are you sure that this is something that your child – and your family as a whole – is going to be committed to for the long term? It's the easiest thing in the world to fall for a puppy. Anyone can go aaaah and fawn over a cute, eight-week-old dog. But dogs don't live for a week. They can live for fifteen years – and more. Will your child be there for the dog in a month, a year or a decade from now?



Is your child good with animals?

Many children are comfortable around animals. Some, however, are not. It's important that you think about this in advance of getting a dog. If your child has shown an interest in other people's dogs or perhaps looked after a friend's pet, that is a good indication that they may be suited to owning a dog. If you're in doubt about their rapport with dogs, ask a friend if you can borrow their pet for a day or two. See how your child reacts and behaves around the dog. This will give you a strong indication of how they would be around their own dog. Also, think about how your child is around other animals, such as cats, horses or farm animals. Do they seem scared or intimidated by them? Do they shy away from them? If so, it's a sign that they are not a natural „animal person“ and may not be suited to a dog.



Does your child get easily bored?

Is your child someone who sticks at things? Or does he or she tend to go through phases, being obsessed with toys, tv programmes or friends for a week or two before dropping them forever? If it's the latter, then getting a dog may not be the right thing for your child. The chances are they will get bored with it too.

Is your son or daughter a sensible child?

The way your child behaves around their dog is going to be crucial. For instance, if they are going to treat it like a toy and squeeze its nose and tug at its tail, then the relationship with the dog is going to end badly – and quickly. If, on the other hand, your child has a grown-up and responsible attitude to dogs, there's a good chance they will make a great dog owner. Again, seeing your child inter-acting with a friend or family member's dog will give you a good clue.



Is your child a quick learner?

Some dog training principles can be understood by children. For instance, the “pack leader” methods taught by trainers such as Cesar Milan and Jan Fennell, can easily be grasped by even the youngest members of the family. In Fennell’s method, for example, to establish their leadership of the pack, the human members of the household make a point of eating in front of their dogs before giving them their meals. (Dogs associate the eating order with leadership.) Children can easily understand this – and apply it. The faster they are to learn, the better.

Have you sought out advice?

You should read as much as you can about children owning dogs. There are many quality books out there and, of course, the web is full of great advice. In addition you should talk to people. Chat to friends, family, local dog owners, especially those with young children. Ask them about their experience. Listen and draw on their advice.



A friendship that is second to none

Having a dog can be a brilliant, life-affirming experience for a child. A faithful, good-natured dog can provide young people with love and affection, friendship and devotion that is second to none. It can also teach them important lessons about responsibility and show them how to empathize and understand the creatures with whom they share the world.

Choosing the right time to give your child his or her first dog is crucial. Get the timing wrong and you could ruin their chances of ever forming a strong relationship with a dog. Get it right and it could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

By asking yourself – and your child – the right questions, you can go a long way to ensuring that you get it right every time.



How to choose the right dog for your child

Everyone has their favourite breed of dog, whether it's a lovable [Labrador](#) or a cute Corgi. But you must be careful not to choose your dog purely on looks alone. There are other important factors to consider. Before choosing the breed, here are several practical factors that you need to weigh up.



How much space do you have in your home?

Dogs require space to live and breathe and grow. And the bigger the dog, the more space it is going to need. If you live in the countryside or a rural setting with lots of open space, this is not going to be an issue. But if you live in a city and don't have a garden or some open space, then it is something you should consider. For instance, keeping a large breed of dog, say a [St Bernard](#)'s or a [German Shepherd](#), in a small flat is not a good idea. Similarly some dogs have been bred to be more athletic and energetic than others. Gundogs or sporting dogs, such as Springers, [Pointers](#) and [Setters](#), for instance, will tend to demand a lot of exercise. They also tend to love water and may be drawn to retrieve or chase birds, because of generations of breeding. In the same vein, pastoral or herding breeds like the [Collie](#) or [German Shepherd](#) tend to be attracted to other species of animals and may instinctively try to herd them. You should be prepared to give these dogs a proper outlet for their considerable energies. They need homes that are going to be up to the challenge of giving them plenty of exercise and play time.

If space is a problem for you, then you may be better advised to get a smaller breed, perhaps a toy, such as a [Pekingese](#) or [Shih Tzu](#). If you do go down this line, however, you must also consider your children and their age, as we will explain later.

How much free time do you have?

Dogs are demanding, especially those that need a lot of grooming or exercise. So you need to be sure that you have the time to be able to do things like walk your dog every day and groom it properly once a week.

You also need to have the time to let it run free in a local park or open space on a regular basis. If you think you don't have the time to do these things, then you really should think carefully about whether a dog is right for you.

Being short of time needn't necessarily mean you can't have a dog. You may be able to ask a friend or preferably a professional dog walker to give your pet the regular exercise it needs. If you have the resources, you can also take your dog to a grooming parlour.



Is the breed you are choosing the right temperament for your family?

Some dogs suit young families better than others. For example, toy dogs aren't a good idea if you have very young children who are still spending a lot of time crawling around the floor. Toy dogs can react to small children, sometimes badly. Behaviourists think this is because dogs associate height with authority and see „small people“ as a challenge to their status. By contrast, some breeds are known to be particularly friendly towards children. Some examples include:

- 🐾 [English Bulldogs](#), for instance, are acknowledged as one of the most amiable breeds. Despite its gloomy appearance, the bulldog is a placid and dignified dog and is generally friendly with strangers and familiar family members alike.
- 🐾 [Labrador Retrievers](#) are the world's favourite dog breed for a reason. They are not aggressive or hyper dogs and are almost always playful, patient and easygoing. They are also real pleasers, which makes them an ideal pet for a child or family.

- 🐾 Golden Retrievers have a similar personality to the Lab. They too are mild mannered and enjoy being around people, which makes them ideal as a family pet or a first dog for a child. They particularly love playing games with children.
- 🐾 Poodles are mild and protective dogs and aren't generally aggressive as a breed. They are friendly and sometimes reserved around people and make ideal pets for children for this reason.



Are you allergic to dogs?

This may seem a silly question to ask, but many people are allergic to dogs. Generally people react to the dog's saliva or dander – the tiny particles released from the hair and skin – which can get captured in upholstery and carpets.

You'll know if you are allergic to this because you will start sneezing and sniffing and your eyes will start running like taps. It's not pleasant at all, and should be avoided if at all possible. You can also be tested by your doctor for canine allergies.

If you are allergic, however, it needn't necessarily be the end of your hopes of owning a dog. There are certain breeds that are believed to produce less dander and therefore less of a risk to people who are allergic. These include the Bedlington Terrier, the [Schnauzer](#), the [Maltese](#), [Bichon Frise](#) and the [Portuguese Water Dog](#).



Preparing for and dealing with the arrival of your dog

The arrival of a new dog in your home is a special moment. The sense of excitement you and your family experience will be huge. But amid all the excitement, there are a few boring, practical considerations. If you are to get off to the right start, you need to prepare for the dog's arrival and be ready to deal with a number of issues.



Before your puppy's arrival - making your home "puppy proof"

Puppies are balls of exuberant energy. They will want to explore every nook and cranny of your home. You will find this entertaining – until, that is, they break or chew something precious or valuable. You will then regret not having made your home “puppy proof”. So the first thing you need to do in advance of your puppy’s arrival is to clear away items that you would normally keep at floor level within the house. For instance, you should move floor plants and ornaments. You should also put away shoes or slippers. Puppies love nothing more than chewing on these.

You should also remove anything precious or breakable that is at or below tail height. If you’re in any doubt, take it out. You will only have yourself to blame if a precious heirloom or valuable ornament gets broken by your puppy. If you have valuable furniture made of wood, you should consider moving it to a place where your puppy won’t be able to reach it. Puppies love testing their new teeth on wood – if you don’t want your antique table chewed, remove it. You should also clear away in the kitchen and bathroom areas. Make sure nothing hazardous is within range of your puppy, for example, cleaning fluids and disinfectants. A mouthful of a poisonous substance could result in tragedy. Equally, make sure you secure phone wires and electric cords. Puppies love gnawing away at everything and cables are no exception. They can easily deliver themselves electric shocks.



Make sure you put away your children's toys along with all the accessories and parts that go with them. A puppy could easily choke on them.

Finally, don't forget to check out the outdoor areas in your home as well. These are going to be as much a part of your puppy's environment as the interior of the house. If you have a swimming pool in your outdoor areas, make sure that too is secure. It's also vitally important that you check for escape routes from your garden or outdoor areas. During its first weeks, your puppy will not know right from wrong. It could easily squeeze its way out of your property and run away.



Make sure everyone knows the rules

It's vital that your family presents a united front in sharing their home with their new puppy. So you must make sure that everyone knows the timetable and the rules relating to the new arrival. Everyone should know details such as mealtimes and when the puppy needs to be let out to do its toilet. They should also be aware of the boundaries you have set the puppy, i.e. where it is allowed to go and what it is allowed to play with. It is vital that everyone sticks to the same hymn sheet. If a puppy senses a weakness in the discipline you can be certain it will exploit the opportunity!

If you have children, it's important that they have been taught the importance of respecting their new dog. They need to understand the etiquette of being a dog owner. They need to understand it is not a new toy to be tugged at and pulled around the house. It's a living, breathing creature.



Make sure you have all the supplies you need for your new puppy

There is a basic list of items that all owners need to have. These include a collar and a leash, for walking and training, complete with a name tag and indestructible chewing toys such as rope toys or “chewies”. You also need to have grooming tools, such as a brush and comb, dishes for the dog’s food and water and a comfortable dog crate or bed for it to sleep in.



Give your dog a name

One of the most important things you need to do early on is settle on your dog's name. It needs to learn to recognize and respond to this name when you begin training, so the sooner you introduce the name the better. One little tip, keep the name simple - if possible one or two syllables. That way you will be able to use it quickly and effectively, something which will be vital when the dog goes out into the dangerous world beyond your four walls.

Travelling home with your puppy

Keep your puppy in a crate or a box while travelling home from the breeder, kennels or animal sanctuary where you acquired the dog. You haven't begun to train it yet so it will not have any discipline within the car. It could urinate on your seats, eat the upholstery or even jump around distracting you while you drive. Keep it in a warm, box or crate - preferably with a passenger keeping an eye on it and reassuring it that it is safe.

Arriving home with your puppy

An eight week old puppy has spent its life so far within the safety of its family unit, probably with its mother and the siblings within its litter. So it's no surprise that it will initially be nervous and perhaps even a little anxious about its new environment. It's your first task to make the dog feel comfortable and safe. So you should give it as much attention and reassurance as you can during its first 24 hours. Show it where it is going to eat, sleep and to do its toileting. If it doesn't settle down to sleep on the first night, don't be afraid to place its sleeping box near you. It's OK for the first night.

Introduce your dog to other pets in the house as soon as you can. Be sure to do this under supervision. If there are other dogs in the house, make sure the existing dogs are on a lead and not able to attack the new dog. It's quite possible they will feel threatened. Be prepared to deal with this.

Beyond the first days

Once you have all these things under control you can begin looking forward to the next phase of your life with your new puppy. You will soon, for instance, be taking it to the vet for its first vaccinations and examinations. The groundwork you do at home during the first days and weeks will go a long way towards deciding how successful you will be.

Summing up, the arrival of a new dog in your home is a wonderful and memorable time in the life of your family. But it does require preparation and forethought. Without proper planning all sorts of problems can arise. And the longer those problems continue the more difficult it is going to be for you to gain control of your dog. Your mantra should be – start as you mean to go on.

How to make sure your puppy doesn't bite anyone

The arrival of a new dog in your home is a special moment. The sense of excitement you and your family experience will be huge. But amid all the excitement, there are a few boring, practical considerations. If you are to get off to the right start, you need to prepare for the dog's arrival and be ready to deal with a number of issues.

Serious incidents of dogs biting – or worse attacking – children in the home are rare. Dogs can be aggressive, however, especially in situations where they feel anxious or threatened. The dog's response in such situations is always the same: it will do one of three things - fight, freeze or flee. In many dogs, the most common reaction is to “fight” and be aggressive. In the vast majority of instances the biting takes the form of snapping or nipping at people, children in particular. This can be very upsetting and endanger the family's relationship with the dog. Here we look at some of the common causes of biting in dogs, and outline some of the simplest and most reliable ways of avoiding the problem.

Don't tease, frighten or threaten

As we have explained, dogs react to any situation in which they feel threatened or anxious in one of three ways. They will fight, freeze or take flight. None of these is desirable, in particular the fight instinct. So it's vital that you don't do anything that makes your dog feel threatened. Teasing a dog is a common way of making it feel anxious, for instance, so avoid this at all costs. You should also avoid giving your dogs shocks or unnecessary surprises. So, for instance, you should avoid running past your dog or making sudden or dramatic movements around it, especially when it is resting or lying still. It is also not advisable to interfere with dogs while they are sleeping. When they wake up suddenly they will feel disoriented and anxious. Biting is often the result.

Don't interfere with its meals

Mealtimes are hugely important periods for dogs – and not just because they are hungry. They are also deeply connected to their sense of where they belong in the pack. (This is why you should always eat before your dog and in its presence, so that it knows you are its superior within the domestic pack.) So you must never interfere with or attempt to remove a dog's food while it is eating. This will almost certainly result in aggression and perhaps a bite. If you have an older dog that has given birth, it is also advisable to stay away when it is feeding its litter. Dogs feel very protective of their litters, for obvious reasons. So it is a very bad idea indeed to try to interfere with an older, female dog while it is feeding a litter.

Don't let a small child lie on the floor with a dog

Dogs relate their position in relation to other members of their household with power. So if you place yourself in a position physically below a dog it can misinterpret this as you being inferior or subordinate to it. This can lead to aggression. The most common instance of this is when a child lies on a floor with its face close to a dog's face. This can easily result in the dog trying to assert its perceived authority over the child and, if the child reacts wrongly to this, in a bite or a nip. This is one of the most common causes of bites to children and must be avoided at all costs.



Never leave dogs alone with babies

For the reasons outlined above, dogs regard little babies as subordinate to them. They are also threatened and become anxious by the noises and cries they make. Think about it, they don't behave in the same way as the other adults or children in the household. They don't walk, they don't talk, and they spend a lot of their time screaming and crying! Wouldn't you feel anxious and even aggressive towards a strange creature in those circumstances?

Don't invade your dog's space when it is anxious

If a dog has become frightened and opted to remove itself from a situation, then you must leave it alone. Chasing after a dog or trying to placate it when it has taken flight is not a good idea. People will, for instance, try to pull a dog from under a bed or the furniture when it is anxious or uncomfortable. This will almost inevitably result in it biting or being aggressive. Leave the dog alone while it calms down and deals with its anxieties in peace.



Socialize your dog

During its first days away from its litter, your new puppy is getting used to a very different world to the one in which it has spent the first two months or so of its life. It is a big adjustment to make. It is meeting a range of new people and perhaps other animals. It is no surprise that it displays anxiety and – at times – aggression. However, the sooner it gets used to meeting a variety of people, dogs and other animals the better. The best way to do this is to slowly introduce it to more people. During its first days, confine its circle to family members and other pets in the house. But after a while invite friends and family around to meet the dog. Later on introduce the dog to other dogs in its neighbourhood, always being careful to maintain close control of your dog when doing so. The more it socializes, the more comfortable it will be in meeting people.



Train your dog

The best way to ensure your dog doesn't bite or display aggressive behaviour towards your children or other people is to train it. The better trained it is the more command you have over its behaviour. You will be able to get it to sit, stay, come and perform other functions at your command. This will help you enormously in situations where a dog feels anxious and may be liable to bite or be aggressive.

Keep your dog healthy

Just like humans, dogs feel vulnerable and can be anxious when they feel ill. If your dog is carrying a wound or has a sore part of its anatomy, for instance, it will not take kindly to people poking and prodding it. So the best way to avoid this situation is to monitor its health and to make sure it has all the right vaccinations and treatments it needs from the vet.



Neuter your dog

This is a controversial area, but there is some strong scientific evidence to suggest that dogs that have been neutered are less aggressive. This is something you need to think about carefully. Consult your vet if you are unsure about this. He or she should give you the advice you need to make the right decision. However, if you are certain that you don't want puppies from your dog, both your family and your dog are probably better off if it is neutered. The most obvious benefits are decreased tendency to wander away and to be aggressive, but most of all neutering is the only fool proof way of avoiding unwanted litters.

Always stay calm if a dog is aggressive

If a dog threatens you, remain calm. Avoid eye contact and stand still. If the dog is rearing up at you or jumping up, try to back out of the situation slowly. In the unlikely event that you are knocked over by a dog, lie down curl into a ball and protect your face with your arms and fists.



If you are bitten – see a doctor

Finally, if you are bitten by a dog, find out immediately whether it has received all its necessary vaccinations. In particular, ask for proof of rabies vaccinations if you live in a country where rabies is an issue.

Consult your doctor if you have any concerns. Even if you don't have any concerns about the dog, make sure you clean and protect any wounds you receive with hot water and soap. Carefully monitor the wound for a few days afterwards as well.

In general, dogs are docile, friendly and loving creatures. They usually don't bite humans, unless they have a very good reason for doing so. By following the above advice, you should ensure that you don't give your dog a reason to be aggressive towards you or your children. Instead you should develop a warm and loving bond between you and your best animal friend.

How dogs can help teach your children responsibility

In this final chapter we will look in more detail at the benefits a dog can bring young children. We will look at some of the physical and mental benefits that are associated with dog ownership. But in particular we will focus on how looking after a dog can teach young people important lessons about responsibility.

Humans have been keeping dogs for many thousands of years. Scientists think the first domesticated wolves entered human camps 15,000 years ago. Back then the benefits of having a dog were mainly practical. Dogs provided a superior sense of smell which helped during hunting. They also acted as useful sentries and guard dogs. In the centuries since then, however, dogs have evolved into a very different type of companion. Their role as hunters is almost non-existent in the modern world. Yet dog ownership is more popular than ever. This is because owning a dog today brings a range of very different benefits.



Health benefits

Medical researchers have discovered evidence that owning a dog is good for your general physical and mental wellbeing. Sharing your life with a pet can, for instance, reduce stress, lower blood pressure and even help allergies, some studies have found. There are also the more obvious fitness benefits that come from regularly taking your dog out for a walk or to play in the park.

Dogs also help reduce loneliness and depression. This applies as much to children as it does to adults. A dog can be a companion and faithful friend to which children can turn at times of stress or anxiety. The fact that they don't judge or express an opinion is a real asset at times of emotional insecurity. Dog's really can be a man's or a boy's best friend.



Bonding the family

Dogs also provide a focus for a family, a shared experience that brings parents and children together in a positive way. Raising a new puppy can be a great project for the family to share. Families can learn a lot together during the process of training and introducing a dog to their home. The new family member can act as a way of bonding everyone together.



Teaching responsibility

Perhaps the greatest, long-term benefit of dog ownership from a child's point of view, however, is the way that it introduces them to a sense of responsibility. Dogs provide this in several ways: A sense of routine

Maintaining a dog requires regular work and a real sense of routine. Walking your [English bulldog](#) or exercising your Cocker Spaniel should not be a random event. It should be part of the daily timetable, something that happens at least once or twice on a daily basis. This is an important concept for young children to grasp.

Similarly, feeding your dog is another daily event. Giving children responsibility for this part of the timetable can be particularly useful. Some dog trainers, in particular Jan Fennell, place emphasis on using feeding time as a way to establish authority over the dog. This can help a child get used to the idea of „leadership“ and instill a sense of responsibility within the household ”pecking order“. So feeding their [Labrador Retriever](#) can be much more than a bit of fun each morning and evening.

The same applies to other important aspects of caring for a dog, such as grooming and making regular health checks of eyes, ears and feet. This again instils in the child the idea of having a role within the family, and in particular of being a parent to the family pet.



Junior parenting

Children are used to being cared for by their parents. They take it for granted that someone is there for them - 24 hours a day. Having a dog introduces children to the idea of being in charge themselves. They begin to understand the responsibilities that come when the roles are reversed and they are the person making the decisions. They learn to become a junior parent within the home.

Financial education

Owning a dog can be useful for teaching children about simple finance. Children can be introduced to budgeting and money management via their dogs. You can, for instance, give them a set amount of money each week or month to devote to their dog. They can use this to buy food, toys or treats or to take their dog out on walks. Under your supervision, they will learn how to spend this money wisely and effectively.

Self esteem

All adults like being told they are doing a good job. Children are no different. If they get positive feedback, say from a vet or other canine professional, it will encourage them and help build their self esteem. This will encourage them to take more responsibility and help them make an important step forward in their development.



Conclusion

For centuries, dogs have been referred to as man's best friend. There is a special relationship between us and the canine. It's a mysterious and – at times – magical bond, one unlike any other.

What's even more magical is the fact that this relationship can be forged at a very young age – for both the human and the dog. A child and a puppy can form a friendship that is more intense, loving and lasting than almost any other they have in their lives. How many of us forget the memories of our first dog? Very few indeed.

As this eBook has illustrated, acquiring that first puppy is a big step. It's something that needs to be thought about carefully and planned with precision. Rush into it without giving it enough thought and you could live to regret it. But approach it sensibly, responsibly and with all the important factors at the forefront of your mind, and you will be rewarded with something wonderful – a friend for life.

We hope that with the help of this eBook, you have been able to decide whether a dog is right for your family. If the answer is yes, you will find [Factors to consider when picking your perfect puppy](#) immensely useful. It is a FREE eBook pointing out the most essential issues of buying a puppy in a brief and easy to digest format.

If you have further questions about buying that special puppy, please visit our website at www.europuppy.com and do not hesitate to get in touch with one of our expert colleagues, who will be happy to assist you.

