

Animal Friends Presents You Have Puppy Fever—Now What?

Imagine a puppy under the Christmas tree, complete with a red bow around his neck. It's a classic image used time and time again in commercials, on television shows and in the movies. But what's the reality behind the cute little puppy and the big red bow? It's important to remember that when you add a puppy to the mix, you've permanently changed the lives—and routines—of everyone in your household.

The idea of having a puppy is very exciting, and there are many wonderful reasons to adopt a puppy. They're cute and cuddly. Puppies provide unconditional love to their families. No matter what else is happening, a puppy adores the members of his family. The bond that forms between children and their beloved pet is unique and helps to teach the children responsibility and respect for all creatures. Children who are exposed to dogs at home usually grow up understanding that while they have to respect dogs, there's no need to feel anxious around them. Many medical studies report that children raised with pets grow up with fewer allergies. Finally, the family can bond and learn more about themselves while researching various breeds to determine which one is right for them. This step is important in order to make sure everyone in the family feels comfortable and to ensure that the puppy goes to a home that's just perfect for him.

However, having a puppy requires a great deal of time, responsibility and financial resources. There are many things to consider when trying to decide whether to get a puppy. Here are a few things to consider:

Before you bring Puppy home, you should plan a family shopping trip (perhaps to Animal Friends' on-site supply shop) to get the things the puppy will need. Among your purchases should be a good quality puppy food, treats, bowls, a properly sized crate, a collar, a leash, toys, kongs for chewing, bedding for his crate and a bed for resting outside of his crate. Remember that some of these expenses, like food, will be ongoing for the rest of his life.

Your puppy will need food and fresh water on a regular basis. An adult will have to take responsibility to make sure that this very basic need is fulfilled every day.

Most likely, your new puppy will not be housetrained yet, and this is a labor-intensive process. Puppy must be kept where you can see him at all times, and you must take him outside to take care of his bathroom duties regularly, both day and night. If you are unable to watch him closely, he should be confined inside his crate. He should not be left alone for long periods of time and can only be expected to hold his bladder for a limited amount of time—he is a baby, after all. Remember that if you get a puppy for Christmas, you will be doing all this "outside work" during the coldest season of the year. Mistakes will happen, but Puppy can't be held responsible—he's just learning!

Much like babies, puppies explore the world with their mouths. This can mean chewing on everything from furniture, to your children's favorite toys, to the family! Responsible puppy parents respond to the chewing habit in a positive way, by giving puppies appropriate, alternative things to chew, like Kongs. Chewing on people, also known as mouthing, must be kindly but firmly discouraged with positive training methods.



Veterinary care is expensive, but an absolutely necessary part of life for a dog owner. All puppies should make their first visit to a vet as soon as possible after they are adopted. If you did not adopt your puppy, ready-to-go, from Animal Friends, your puppy will likely need to be de-wormed and vaccinated at their first vet visit, and can be microchipped to help you find him again if he is ever lost. Please, also spay or neuter your puppy to prevent unwanted births and to help protect your puppy against bad habits and possible health problems in the future. Puppy will also need preventative heartworm and flea and tick medication. As with any living being, it is always possible that an unexpected medical problem could develop during your puppy's lifetime. Are you willing and able to spend the money it will take to make your puppy healthy again? What about as he ages? Even with pet insurance, trips to the vet can be very costly and you should consider whether your family has the resources to absorb this kind of financial impact.

Most puppies require some form of grooming, whether with a professional or simply through a simple bath and brushing at home. The cost of grooming should be kept in mind when trying to decide what kind of puppy to adopt.

Exercising and spending time with your puppy might be the last thing you want to do after a long day of work and caring for your family, but remember that he waits all day for a few moments of your time. Even when you're tired, Puppy needs a walk, playtime and affection. He is a living creature can only thrive with proper attention.

Obedience classes will take time, but are an important part of making your puppy a good canine citizen. Both you and Puppy can learn the basics that will make everyone in the household happy. It is absolutely imperative that you use only positive reinforcement techniques with your puppy. Harsh punishments can not only harm your puppy physically, but can also leave him with lasting anxiety and permanent behavior problems. Obedience classes will also provide needed mental stimulation for Puppy. Once you join a class, you will be able to talk to other "puppy people" and will have access to an instructor who can steer you in the right direction when you have "puppy issues."

Finally, puppies should be socialized and exposed to a variety of people, other dogs and situations. Obedience classes help with this, but you should also expose your puppy to as many kinds of situations as possible. Failure to do this can result in a dog who is nervous in unfamiliar situations.

After reviewing all the facts and deciding that a puppy is right for your family, there are many places where you can get one. Of course, Animal Friends is an excellent place to adopt a puppy! Always do as much research as possible and feel free to ask as many questions as you like. Responsible shelters, like Animal Friends, will be more than willing to help you make the right match for your family.

Adopting a puppy is a wonderful idea, but it is a decision that requires careful thought and consideration. This decision will impact your family's life for the next 10-15 years, and will help to form your children's attitudes toward animals.

While there will be bumps in the road and it will take time for everyone to adjust, it is incredibly fulfilling to raise a puppy and see him through to his old age. That being said, if a puppy seems like too much work for your family, you may want to consider adopting an adult dog who has outgrown many of the "bad habits" of puppyhood.

To learn more or to meet adoptable puppies and dogs, visit www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org.