



About The Puppy Contract

In response to growing concerns about welfare in dog breeding, the Dog Breeding Stakeholder Group was formed in 2008. Comprising APGAW, Animal Welfare Foundation, Blue Cross, British Veterinary Association, DEFRA, Dogs Trust, The Kennel Club, PDSA and the RSPCA, the group sought to look at ways they could work together to address issues relating to dog breeding - and from that The Puppy Contract came into being.

The Puppy Contract has been designed as a tool to encourage the responsible breeding and buying of puppies - ensuring buyers have all of the information they need to make an informed decision when buying a puppy and allowing responsible breeders to set themselves apart by demonstrating the care and attention they have put into breeding puppies with the best chance of being happy and healthy.

The principles that underpin The Puppy Contract are:

- Every dog should be born with the best possible chance of living a healthy and happy life.
- All those who breed dogs should prioritise health, welfare and temperament over appearance to protect the welfare of both the parents and offspring.
- All those who benefit from dogs have a collective responsibility to work together to protect dog welfare.
- Both the buyer and breeder have an obligation to protect the welfare of the animals in their care.

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TEN STEPS TO BUYING A PUPPY

IS A PUPPY THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOU?

Puppies are cute - but they do take a lot of time and commitment, so before starting the process of buying a puppy, it's important to take the time to consider whether it's the right choice for both you and the puppy. Sit down and think through all the implications first as a dog is a life-changing commitment and a puppy should never be bought on impulse.

The five welfare needs

The Five Welfare Needs are set out in the Animal Welfare Act to ensure that animals have their basic needs fulfilled by those who care for them. As a dog owner you have a legal responsibility to ensure the welfare needs of your pet are met at each life stage, bearing in mind that these needs may change as they get older.

1. The need for a suitable environment

A comfortable place to rest and somewhere to be separate from others with space to exercise and explore

2. The need for a suitable diet

Appropriate diet for the dog's life stage. Feeding the right amount to prevent obesity or malnourishment. Access to fresh clean water. Avoiding food that may be poisonous or harmful (Seek advice from your local vet on specific dietary needs).

3. The need to exhibit natural behaviour

Exploring outside the house

Play and mental stimulation

Run / Dig / Jump

The right type and amount of exercise

4. The need to be housed with or apart from other animals

To be housed with or apart from other dogs and people according to the dog's needs

The chance to interact with other dogs and people as appropriate

5. The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Access to veterinary treatment if they become ill or injured

Mental well-being: appropriate socialisation and training and protection from situations that may cause prolonged anxiety or fear.

(Register with a vet to ensure health needs are met, i.e. worming, vaccines, health checks and consider taking out an appropriate level of pet insurance)

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2. CONSIDER THE LONG TERM COSTS

Taking on a dog is a long-term commitment. In addition to the initial costs of buying or rehoming a dog you also need to consider the following:

- Vaccinations
- Veterinary care
- Puppy socialisation classes
- Training classes and training aids
- Worming and flea control
- Neutering
- Toys
- Insurance
- Bedding
- Food
- Collar and leads
- Ensuring your house and garden are suitably safe and enclosed
- Harness and crates for travelling in the car
- Puppy training indoor kennel or play pen
- Care for when you're away
- Dog walker / pet sitter

These are just some of the costs - there may be more.

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3. DECIDING WHICH TYPE OF DOG TO GET

Whilst you may have a favourite type of dog, it's important to consider which breed is best suited to your situation and whether you can meet its specific needs. Do lots of research into the different types of dog that you are interested in. Some veterinary practices offer pre-purchase consultations and are a good source of information. They will have experience of different breeds and will usually be willing to discuss which type of dog is best suited to your lifestyle. You could also speak to people who own the breed you are interested in, to get an idea of what to expect before making a decision. Breed clubs or local vets may be able to help you with this.

Fitting in with your home and lifestyle

Make sure there is enough space in your home to accommodate the size of dog that you want. All dogs need regular exercise, training, play and interaction with other dogs. If you're out at work all day, you'll need to ensure that there is someone who can take your dog for walks. The amount of exercise needed will vary between different types of dogs - so if work commitments take up most of your time you're better off not considering a type of dog that has been bred to work all day and needs lots of exercise such as a Border Collie, Springer Spaniel, Jack Russell Terrier, Malamute, Akita or Husky.

Breed health

It is important to be aware of the health issues associated with certain breeds, for example some breeds are prone to joint problems, breathing difficulties, skin infections etc. A good breeder will carry out health testing and screening on the parents before deciding whether to breed from them. By using the Puppy Contract you should receive the relevant health testing information and results for your chosen breed. Speak to a vet if you need help in interpreting the results.



4. WHERE TO GET YOUR PUPPY FROM

At this stage it is important to carefully consider where to get your puppy from.

Direct from the breeder

Do your research into the breeder. A responsible breeder should have extensive knowledge on their particular breed. They will be happy to discuss how the puppies are kept and any health checks that have been conducted (on the puppy and its parents). The breeder may also ask you questions about your experience and suitability for owning a dog.

All responsible breeders should invite you to visit them and meet the parents and puppies before committing to buy. This is a good time to ask the breeder whether they use a contract or are willing to use the Puppy Contract.

Rehoming charities

Many rehoming centres (such as the RSPCA, Dogs Trust or Battersea Dogs & Cats Home) often have puppies as well as adult dogs available for rehoming. There are many reasons for getting your dog from a rehoming charity. A good rehoming centre will check your suitability first and usually use an adoption contract. They will help you choose the right dog for you and give you advice on caring for your new pet.

Never buy a puppy from a puppy farm (a place where puppies are bred for sale in large numbers) or directly from an advertisement where you meet the breeder to collect the puppy from somewhere other than where the puppy was born (for example a motorway service station or carpark). Some unscrupulous breeders may even offer to deliver the puppy to your house, which is not recommended.

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5. PHONE BEFORE YOU VISIT AND KNOW THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK

Always call a breeder first and try to visit before the puppies are born. When you see a litter of cute puppies in front of you it's easy to let your emotions take over and forget all the questions you had ready and it can be difficult to say "no" to a puppy which may in reality be unsuitable for you or from a puppy farm. It's helpful to write your questions down before calling or visiting a breeder. As mentioned, a responsible breeder should be happy to answer any of your questions for you.

Some questions you may want to ask the breeder include:

- Where are the puppies kept? For example is this inside the house in a busy kitchen where there is lots of interaction with the puppies?
- Have any of the puppies had health problems? Have either of the parents had any health issues?
- Has the breeder used any routine veterinary treatments for the puppies such as wormers?
- Has or will the puppies be given their first vaccinations prior to homing?
- Will the puppies be microchipped at 8 weeks?
- Have the parents been screened to check for the absence of any inherited diseases that can be tested in that breed? If so - what were the results? To make sure the breeder has interpreted the results correctly you will want to run them past a vet to check them.
- Has or will the breeder start to house train and socialise the puppies before they are homed?
- Have the puppies met and been handled by a range of different people?
- How many people interact with the puppies? Is it normal for the puppies to experience people coming and going to prepare them for normal household experiences?
- Are the puppies with people during the day, or do they only have contact at particular times (e.g. only for periods of play and feeding?)
- Have the puppies been microchipped?

A responsible breeder will want to know that their puppies are going to a good home, so be prepared to answer questions about your lifestyle, home environment and experience with dogs.

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6. GO AND VISIT THE PUPPY AND KNOW WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Never agree to meet the breeder halfway or arrange for the puppy to be delivered to you - always make sure you visit the puppy more than once in the place where it was bred. This will enable you to picture the type of environment the puppy has already encountered, compare this to your own home environment and prepare appropriate socialisation accordingly.

Look at where the puppy lives. Try to match the environment to your own. For example, if you have a busy household with children, it is better to look for a puppy from a similar environment.

Look for evidence that the place you are viewing the puppy is where it has been reared, such as the presence of a whelping pen, food bowls and bedding. Some breeders may change environments for viewing, especially if they've been reared outdoors.

Puppies that are very over-excited and boisterous with you may have only experienced interaction with people in short exciting bursts – for example, if they are kept in a pen in a back room, and brought out for energetic bouts of play when visitors come round. Such puppies are not the best choice for an inexperienced or first time owner. Puppies that spend a lot of time with the breeder's family, during both loud and quiet periods, may be calmer.

Puppies that withdraw from you or seem fearful may have had limited interaction with people. Whilst such puppies can learn to be confident, especially with experienced owners, they would not be a good choice for a first time or inexperienced owner.

Visiting the puppy more than once is a good idea and will help you identify potential problems more easily. For example if the puppy is sleepy and inactive when you visit for the first time, you can check this is not due to a health problem. Taking the time to visit puppies in their own home will be time well spent.

Meet the parents

It is essential to meet the mother and the siblings and, if possible, the father. If it is not possible to see the father - ask if you can to speak to the owner of the father. Ask lots of questions about the mother's health, background and personality. As well as inheriting aspects of their parents' personality, puppies also learn from their mother during the early weeks of life and if she is wary of strangers, they may learn the same response. Ideally the mother should greet you in a calm, friendly manner.

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Unscrupulous vendors may try to pass off another dog as the puppy's mother, so check for signs that she has recently given birth such as enlarged/very noticeable mammary glands.

Check the puppy's health

Regardless of whether you are getting your puppy from a breeder or a rehoming centre, you should always check they are healthy before committing to buy.

These are just some visible signs to look out for that suggest the puppy may have an underlying health condition:

- Visible ribs
- Dull, scruffy coat
- Sore patches of skin
- Red or crusty eyes
- Runny eyes or nose
- Coughing
- Signs of diarrhoea, staining around the tail / bottom
- Signs of external parasites (e.g. fleas), such as black flecks in the fur, scratching, areas of hair loss, or thickened skin, for example around the ear edges or at the tail base.
- Weakness, wobbliness or difficulty standing up
- Becoming tired very quickly on interaction or play
- Noisy or laboured breathing
- Limping, difficulty walking or lifting legs
- A hunched or crouched body posture.
- Straining when passing faeces or urine

If you have any concerns whatsoever - consult a vet prior to committing to take the puppy.

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7. CHECK THE RECORD

Where vaccinations and/or microchipping have been claimed by the breeder, ask to see the records of these.

- The breeder should supply you with microchip paperwork which includes your puppy's individual identification number and database they are registered with.
- Vaccination records should be stamped by the veterinary practice and signed by a veterinary surgeon.

Also ask to see the results of any screening tests. Details of all tests will be noted in the Puppy Contract and copies of these tests should be given to you along with the Puppy Contract before or at the point of sale.

8. CHOOSE THE PUPPY WITHIN THE LITTER THATS RIGHT FOR YOU

When faced with a bundle of cute puppies it can be difficult to choose between them. Assessing the temperament of a puppy is something that even experts find difficult.

However, you should try to select a puppy that fits with your lifestyle, abilities, experience and expectations. Sit down amongst the puppies and observe their reaction to you. Each puppy in a litter will have a different 'personality'. These differences may be small but will have an impact on their behaviour as an adult.

Here are some things that you can look out for:

- Experience during the very early weeks of life has a huge influence on your puppy's behaviour as an adult. Seeing the puppy's home will help you to tell whether the breeder's interpretation of 'wide experience' is accurate. Has the puppy encountered loud noises, other dogs or unfamiliar visitors?
- Some puppies may be confident, curious and relatively 'fearless' about meeting new people. However, an overly active puppy may need careful training to ensure that problems such as over-boisterous play or attention seeking do not develop into aggression as it matures.
- Some puppies may be nervous and fearful or reluctant to interact. A puppy that doesn't approach you freely, particularly if it shows signs of anxiety such as cowering or backing away, will need careful socialisation and desensitisation. It takes lots of patience to ensure that any fear or anxiety do not develop into behavioural problems as the puppy becomes an adult. As a general rule, a curious and confident puppy will be more suited to an inexperienced owner. More subdued puppies need a lot more time, attention and careful socialisation.

Don't base your decision on looks alone. If you purchase a well socialised, healthy puppy from a responsible source, you are far more likely to have a healthy, happy and long-lived companion.

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9. DON'T BUY A PUPPY ON THE FIRST VISIT

Don't buy a puppy on the first visit - if possible leave your wallet at home when you first go to visit the puppies so you're not tempted to make an impulse purchase. If you can walk in and buy a puppy the same day, walk away. It's always a good idea to spend some time considering your choice, talking to friends and family members and weighing up all the information before making the big commitment.

If you are unsure about any of the information you've been given - ask a vet or vet nurse for advice.

Visit more than once. Spend plenty of time with all the puppies - you won't be able to accurately make an assessment in 5 minutes. On the second visit ask if you can take the puppy to a different part of the house to see how it responds. If you have children in your household - the second visit is a perfect opportunity to see how the puppy reacts to them and vice versa.

Ask the breeder to provide you with a completed Puppy Contract so that you have time to review it and seek a vet's advice if necessary, before committing to purchase.

Don't be tempted to purchase a puppy (or any other animal) because you feel sorry for it. If you have any concerns for the welfare of the puppies you have seen, please call the RSPCA on 0300 1234 999. A breeder or seller who doesn't meet an animal's basic welfare needs is breaking the law and can be investigated.

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10. YOU'VE CHOSEN YOUR PUPPY!

Congratulations! You've done your research to make sure you can meet a dog's needs and have found a healthy puppy that is suitable for you.

If you are happy with the information given, you can now sign the Puppy Contract and make your purchase.

- Before you take your puppy home - make sure you have everything ready for them. For example, you will need to purchase things such as a bed, toys, food, water bowls, collar and lead in advance. It is also a good idea to buy a puppy crate or playpen to help you train the puppy to be separated from you and have quiet time. You will also need a supply of the diet the puppy has been fed by the breeder.
- It is essential that you register your puppy with a vet and book them in for a check-up and first set of vaccinations as soon as possible. If this is your first dog - visit several vets in your local area or speak to local dog walkers to select a practice that suits your needs.
- By law, the puppy must already be microchipped before it leaves the breeder. Make sure you change the owner details to your own as soon as you take the puppy home as it is a legal requirement to keep these details up to date.
- Check insurance providers in advance as well. Some charities and breeders may provide a short period of insurance cover which you can either take over and extend or arrange an alternative policy. Where this is not provided, it is a good idea to arrange for an insurance policy to start as soon as you pick the puppy up.
- Make sure you have everything arranged for transportation. A carrier and towels is a good idea – having a puppy on your lap is not a safe way to transport it, and the puppy may also suffer travel sickness on its first journey.
- Remember that however carefully you have chosen, no puppy is perfect and there will be an adjustment period for you, your family, other pets you have and your new puppy. Puppies are all unique individuals that quickly learn and adapt to the world around them, and you will need to make sure that you guide and train them to develop into a happy and much-loved companion for you and your family.