



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Thinking about getting two puppies?

The idea of raising two puppies from the same litter (or from different litters) together does seem quite tempting. They'll look after each other, they'll be best friends, they'll keep each other entertained all day, and they'll never be lonely. While on the surface these ideas may seem fantastic, the reality is that it doesn't always work out in this way! The main issues that face new "parents" of littermates involve the way the puppies form relationships, the changes that will occur as the pups mature, and the social hierarchy of their new home.



MYTH: "They'll keep each other company!"

While littermates may play and live with each other quite happily while they are very young, the idea that they will look after and entertain each other for their whole lives is a dangerous one for several reasons.

Firstly, raising littermates together past the age of 8 weeks can cause serious dependency issues. Dogs who are never separated for the first four months of their life (often how long it is before a dog is fully vaccinated and can go out) find it quite a shock to the system to be out without their brother or sister. Young siblings may become so focused on the whereabouts of the other that vet visits, walks, even trips to the front yard may be too difficult for them to cope with on their own.

Secondly, it is even more concerning that the puppies are forming an extremely close bond with each other, at the time when they should be bonding strongly with you, their new owner. This will make training more challenging, as your dog will not have a strong focus on you - after all, why would they? They've got an alternate point of focus (their sibling) who is with them 24/7. Other puppies don't go off to work, don't sleep in a separate bed, don't eat at different times. Having two pups live their lives constantly together creates an alarming and harmful co-dependency. While it may be "cute" that your dogs "miss each other," as they mature their inability to function when separated can cause serious stress related behaviour issues.

MYTH: "They're siblings, so we know they'll get along!"

Research has shown that the contributing factors to aggression in dogs in the same household are: same/similar age, size, and sex (Stabler 2003).

As dogs mature, they go through many hormonal and physical changes. The chemicals in their brains alter, and their behaviour will change from that of an infant to an adult. Just because two puppies play together well when they are very young, it is not true that their relationship will remain unaltered for the duration of their life. (After all, little else about them stays the same!)



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What most frequently occurs is that two puppies go through the most challenging stages of life at exactly the same time. They'll both be cranky and sore from teething; they'll both have raging hormones as they reach sexual maturity. Suddenly cute puppy play will turn aggressive and things like toys and food will become more and more valuable, and worth guarding from each other. (Of course, separating your dogs would be appropriate here, if they were happy to be kept away from one another. Unfortunately, as by this stage most littermates are entirely inter-dependent, many do not cope with this step.)

In short - there is no guarantee that just because dogs are related, they will get along their whole life. Can you imagine being with your adult brother or sister 24/7? Just as it's not something we'd enjoy, it's not a healthy situation for our dogs.

Cost

Remember that having two puppies means double vet bills, food bills, training costs and boarding costs.

So, what now?

If you were merely considering getting two puppies, hopefully you've got a better idea of challenges that this situation involves. A good breeder should be aware of these issues and will not sell you two pups from the one litter. Their concern should be with the welfare of the dogs, not their bank balance. A breeder who is keen to sell you more than one pup, as "company" or "because no one else will take it" is not motivated by concern for their animals, but is merely trying to make money, or get rid of their pups more quickly.

If you already have two puppies and things seem to be working well, to set up good guidelines we suggest a program where you focus on gradually teaching the puppies to be alone and independent.

References and reading:

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