

PUPPY'S FIRST NIGHTS.....AND DAYS!

The day you fetch your new puppy is exciting for the whole family. He will have many new experiences on the first day, even if he has met you and your family several times before. He may have had a long journey and be in a completely different environment than he is used to, with many new scents, sounds and sights. By bedtime, he is likely to be completely exhausted.

Your puppy will almost certainly never have been alone, as he will have been with his mother and siblings until you came to collect him. He will be used to sleeping in a huddle with the other puppies. The old advice to 'start as you mean to go on' and leave a puppy on his own in a place of your choice from the first night, while ignoring any crying and other signs of distress that he might show, is no longer considered to be humane or appropriate.

Puppies are all individuals, and some will cope with being alone sooner than others. Even if they fall asleep due to exhaustion, new puppies are likely to wake later in the night and find themselves alone, which could cause them to panic and experience extreme distress. This can be avoided by sleeping in close proximity to your puppy for the first few nights so that he feels safe and secure. You'll also be able to take him out for the toilet when he wakes so that you can continue toilet training overnight. You can either sleep downstairs with your puppy or let him sleep close to you in your bedroom. He could be in a crate or pen that is close enough for you to touch him and reassure him in the night, or you could sleep in physical contact with him initially. As he gains confidence, you can gradually withdraw your presence or move his bed or crate somewhere more convenient, at a pace he can cope with.

Pens, crates and child-gates

Your puppy will need somewhere that he can spend time when not being fully supervised, which has a suitable floor surface to cope with puppy 'accidents' and where valuable and dangerous things are out of reach. For most households the kitchen is most appropriate. It is useful to install a child-gate in the doorway of the kitchen so you can see your puppy, and he can see you, when you are in an adjacent room. An alternative is to set up a puppy pen to restrict your pup to one area of the kitchen or other suitable room. Crates can be a useful management aid, and good way to provide a safe 'den' for your puppy but are not essential. Your puppy should have access to a comfortable dog bed, either in a crate or in a quiet corner of the room. When he is in his bed he should be left alone, especially by children. Some puppies will have been used to spending time in a crate at their breeders, so may be comfortable inside one with the door closed, but most will need to get used to a crate before they are happy to be shut in it. Putting toys and food inside the crate will encourage your puppy to go into it, and comfortable bedding will encourage him to rest there.

Alone time

Dogs are social animals, and very young puppies show signs of distress if separated from their mother and siblings. When they are in their new home, puppies need to gradually get used to being on their own for short periods. Initially you can spend some time on the other side of a child-gate from your puppy when he is sleepy and relaxed. If he remains relaxed when you are visible but physically separated in this way, you can start to go through a door without him for a few seconds and then return. You can then gradually build up the time you are on the other side of the door as long as he doesn't show any signs of panic such as frantically barking, whining or scrabbling at the door. If he does panic in this situation, you will need to work more slowly and not leave him alone until he is able to deal with it, otherwise he may become increasingly anxious when anticipating being left.