



HOW TO PRODUCE EMOTIONALLY WELL-BALANCED PUPPIES

Most dogs live as pets in a home and puppies need to be prepared for this kind of life. Early life experiences have a huge impact on the emotional stability and future behaviour of dogs, so breeders have a responsibility to ensure that these experiences are appropriate and adequate for the puppies they bring into the world.

The process of breeding temperamentally and behaviourally sound puppies starts well before their birth. The first step is to decide which dogs to breed from. If owners want to breed their pet dog, it is important to consider whether she would be an appropriate mother and, if so, which dog to choose as a father for her puppies. For other breeders, the temperament of potential breeding stock should be as important a consideration as their physical traits when choosing dogs to breed from.

A tendency to anxiety and fearfulness can be inherited by puppies from both parents so anxious fearful individuals (who may show aggressive behaviour as a result) should not be bred from. In addition to her genetic influence, a fearful mother's reaction to new people and other stimuli in the nursing environment can also influence her puppies' emotional response to them.

The next step, after deciding to breed a dog and arranging a mating, is to ensure that the mother dog is protected from stressful experiences during her pregnancy. She should be kept in a familiar environment, and changes to the home avoided. If a pregnant bitch is stressed, her stress hormones affect her developing puppies, so that they are less able to cope with stress in later life. If she is relaxed and experiences affectionate contact with humans during pregnancy, her puppies are more likely to be tolerant of handling as they grow up.



The first 2 weeks - When puppies are born, they already have olfactory sense and can detect touch and warmth. Most of their first two weeks are spent suckling and sleeping, as they bond with their mother. Bitches who are relaxed with their carers, and are themselves comfortable with handling will probably be tolerant of having their puppies removed to be handled for short periods. For bitches who are anxious about having their puppies handled, handling can be restricted to times

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when she has left them for a toilet trip outside. The puppies will benefit from gentle handling as it allows them to get used to the scents of the people in the home as well as the feeling of being handled.



The third week - By two weeks, puppies eyes have just opened and their ear canals open a few days later. They can now start to learn about the environment with their two new senses, as well as those of touch and smell. They will start to get used to all the sounds around them such as human speech, doors opening and closing, household appliances turning on and off, telephones and other household sounds. Their eyesight is rudimentary at this age, but they can see people and objects moving past their whelping box/pen without being able to make out much of their detail. They are learning that the sights, sounds and scents they are experiencing are a normal part of the



environment, and nothing to be scared of.

At this stage the puppies can be provided with substrates of different textures to move over, as well as safe soft objects to interact with. They can also be stroked with different material such as woollen and rubber gloves as they continue to be gently handled every day.



If their mother is comfortable with the other household dogs and cats, and the pups have not already met them, the third week is a good time to start these introductions.

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The fourth week - From 3 weeks of age until about 14 weeks (the 'sensitive period') is the most critical time in puppies' development. During this time they learn most rapidly and develop a lasting impression of their physical and social environment.

The mother dog should be allowed to come and go as she wants to, and from the time the puppies are 2-3 weeks of age she will spend more time away from them. At this time they learn how to deal with frustration, as their mother sometimes gets up while they are suckling which interrupts their feeding.

By this age, puppies are able to move from their bed area to pass urine and faeces. This can be facilitated by dividing the whelping box/pen into two parts, with a suitable substrate for toileting in one of them.

Exposure to new stimuli should continue throughout the time the puppies are with the breeder and different objects and materials can be put in the whelping box/pen every day. Scrunched up packaging and cardboard boxes with holes cut in the sides are useful for this, as are toys such as Kongs and safe household objects. Having things to walk over, climb over, drag around, tug with their littermates and burrow into helps the pups develop strength and coordination. Play with their littermates also becomes more important at this age and helps the puppies develop their social skills and frustration tolerance.

During the fourth week, individual puppies should have short periods away from their mother and siblings, starting with a minute or so and building up to 10 minutes. This helps them to become independent and is a further opportunity to handle them.

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From the fifth week, puppies should encounter a range of new people to continue their socialisation with humans. As well as getting used to visitors, they can be sent cloths that have been worn next to the skin of new people (and which thus bear their scent). When the weather is suitable, puppies can also have their first experiences of the garden and learning to toilet outside. Weaning can also start at this age as the puppies gradually become more independent of their mother. Individual puppies can also be taken away from their mother and siblings for increasing amounts of time and allowed to explore a new environment on their own. They can also be accustomed to gentle restraint by being held on the floor between a person's legs with a hand preventing them moving forwards. As weaning progresses, interactions with people can be made more rewarding by allowing puppies to lick tasty food from fingers.



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Exposure to sounds should also continue throughout the time the puppies spend with the breeder. For access to sounds other than those happening within the household, the Dogs Trust provide recorded sounds('Sounds Scary' etc.) on their website. These are free to download and can be played for a few minutes at a time, starting at a low volume and gradually increasing.

By 8 weeks puppies should have been habituated to sitting in a car, going for short journeys and being carried to new places where they can experience new sights, sounds and scents, such as from traffic. They will continue to benefit from gentle exposure to people and from play with their siblings and mother. They should be microchipped before going to their new homes.



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