

How to Choose a Responsible Breeder

If you choose to purchase a puppy from a breeder, it's critical for the physical and behavioral health of your future pet to work with a responsible breeder. A responsible breeder is one who selects the right parents initially, properly cares for both mother and pups, and carefully socializes the pups. Here are some good signs and some red flags to look for, to help you ensure you're working with a responsible breeder.



When you visit the litter: What to look for

The most surefire way to ensure that the breeder you choose is a responsible one is to visit the litter yourself. Responsible breeders are proud of their dogs, and happy to show you their puppy-raising environment, which has been carefully set up.

- 🐾 Puppies should be raised in a clean, safe environment, free from major stressors. If they will be living in a home, they should be raised in a home and safely exposed to household sounds like vacuum cleaners, kitchen noises, TVs, etc.
- 🐾 The breeder should take great care to ensure the puppies receive positive and proactive socialization.

Here are some examples:

- Breeder invites many types of people to visit the puppies over several weeks for positive, supervised encounters (including children, people of different heights and ages, and with varying physical appearances).
- Puppies have seen/met safe adult dogs and been positively exposed to animals of different species in a non-stressful way.
- The puppies' environment includes many types of enrichment and exploration opportunities (e.g. novel surfaces, things that wobble or tip, several types of toys, chews, indoor and outdoor spaces, etc.).
- Puppies might be taken on safe outings or "field trips" away from home.
- Puppies are introduced to crates and/or brief periods of non-stressful separation from littermates.
- You should be able to meet at least the puppies' mother (the dam). She should be sociable and friendly, and not showing serious signs of fear, shyness, or aggression.
 - *It is common for the father (the sire) not to live on the premises, but the breeder should be able to provide photos/videos, and answer questions about the puppies' father.*
- Once puppies are mobile and playing (beginning around 3-5 weeks old), they should be fairly outgoing and curious. It's common for them to want to climb all over you, play-bite your clothing or shoelaces, and follow you and/or their breeder around. They should be playful with each other, and generally interested in interacting with humans, and not showing serious fear, shyness, or aggression.

Good signs

- ✓ Breeder provides health records on the puppy, as well as vaccination and deworming schedules.
- ✓ Breeder invites you to meet the puppies' parents (or at least the mother), AND visit the home or place where the puppies are raised.
- ✓ Breeder encourages communication on any issues, including health or behavioral concerns, that may arise, including those into adulthood of the dog. A good breeder will want to be informed.
- ✓ Breeder offers resources, including referrals to vetted and trusted professionals, such as trainers, veterinarians, and/or educational resources.
- ✓ If you cannot keep the dog for any reason, the breeder requests that you return the dog to them.
- ✓ Breeder provides proof of health clearances on both parents. Typically, at least hips and elbows are tested. You may see the terms "OFA hips/elbows" Penn-HIP, or CERF – these are all good signs.
- ✓ One or both parents are working dogs, or are active in some type of dog sport, training, conformation, or regular physical activity.
- ✓ Breeder has LOTS of questions about your family's lifestyle, and wants to know your goals for the individual pup (for example, an active/sporty home vs. a home with young children or elderly people).
- ✓ Breeder is willing to answer questions you have for them and is extremely knowledgeable about their breed.
- ✓ You will be required to sign an agreement or contract. This means the breeder is invested in what happens to their puppies as adults.
- ✓ Puppies do not go to new homes until at least 8 weeks of age.



Red flags

- ✗ You are not able to meet either of the parents.
- ✗ There is no evidence of parents being screened for genetic conditions such as hip or elbow dysplasia or other defects.
- ✗ Breeder will not take the puppy back if something is wrong or provide any type of health guarantee.
- ✗ Mother dog is bred before she is 2 years of age.
- ✗ Mother dog is bred 2 heat cycles in a row (it's preferable to give the mother at least one cycle off between litters).
- ✗ One or both parents is showing severe signs of fear, shyness, aggression, or other concerning behavior.
- ✗ You are not able to see where the puppies were raised.

FEAR FREE
HAPPY
H  **MES**