



WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE GETTING A DOG

TOOLKIT

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RED FLAGS COMMON TO PUPPY MILLS, BROKERS, IRRESPONSIBLE BREEDERS AND SCAMMERS

- Not requiring you to visit them and their dogs.
- Not asking you anything about your experience with dogs, your lifestyle, etc.
- Offering to ship or deliver the puppy to you or meet you in a public place to hand them over. They may initially talk about you coming to pick up the puppy but, at the last minute, they suggest saving you the trouble and just meeting you somewhere.
- Offering puppies of many different breeds.
- Requires you to send money to another country.
- If you do visit, they bring out the puppy to you so you don't see the mother, litter mates or where the dogs live. Keep an eye out for barns and sheds on the property that could be used for mass-breeding dogs.
- Doesn't know anything about typical genetic disorders for the breed and doesn't have their dogs screened by veterinary specialists (including: hip x-rays, ophthalmologist, cardiologist, etc.).
- Provides no guarantee of the puppy's health or only a guarantee that requires you to send the puppy back.





HOW TO IDENTIFY A PUPPY MILL

Puppy mills (also called puppy farms) are horrendous places that churn out as many puppies as possible, in the shortest amount of time and at the lowest expense. That means terrible, filthy, crowded housing, minimal human contact, no veterinary care and unspeakable suffering. Their main focus is to profit from the sale of the puppies with no regard for the animals' well-being.

Common features of puppy mills:

- Animals kept in crowded, filthy barns, sheds or basements
- Often, cages are piled in stacks and the waste from the upper levels falls onto the dogs beneath
- Unbearable stench of ammonia from the build-up of urine and feces
- Animals are fed the cheapest food
- Breeding dogs are bred continuously from a young age till they can no longer produce enough to make it worth keeping them
- Physical and mental suffering from long-term, extreme confinement and deprivation
- Animals receive little to no veterinary care
- No positive human interaction
- No toys, no exercise, no stimulation
- Puppies are not socialized to people, other dogs, household noises, etc.



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK A BREEDER

1. How long have you been breeding dogs?

The more experience and involvement in breed clubs, shows and competitions, the better. Beware of breeders who breed dogs of more than one or two breeds.

2. How many litters have you bred?

Experience here is a very good thing too, though more than 4-5 litters per year would be a warning sign.

If they are new to breeding, they should talk about their mentor(s) who have helped them establish a breeding program.

3. Will the puppies be registered with the Canadian or American Kennel Club?

This establishes the puppy's status as a purebred. In Canada puppies are most commonly registered with the Canadian Kennel Club. Other registries also recognized by the Animal Pedigree Act are the Canine Federation of Canada, Canadian Border Collie Association, and Working Canine Association of Canada. Beware of bogus registries that are not recognized by the Animal Pedigree Act.

If you are traveling to visit a breeder in the U.S., they should register their puppies with the American Kennel Club. It is the breeder's responsibility to forward the certificate within 6 months of the sale to the new owner; they are not allowed to charge an additional fee for this service. The certificate includes the dog's registered name, breed and date of birth, as well as the names of the dog's sire and dam.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK A BREEDER

4. Can I see where the puppies and dam(s) are being housed?

The best way to raise a puppy is in a home environment so it will get lots of handling and human contact. Facilities should be clean and spacious.

5. Are the puppies raised in your home from birth?

Puppies should be raised in the home from birth. They should be kept clean, warm, well fed, and with their mother until they are weaned.

6. Were the sire and dam screened for genetic disorders common to this breed?

Good breeders have all their breeding stock screened for relevant genetic disorders, and remove affected animals from their breeding programs. Affected animals are spayed/neutered and may be placed as companion animals as long as health issues are disclosed to buyers/adopters. The breeder should include copies of the genetic screening results in the papers given to buyers.

7. When do you start breeding a dam, and when is she retired?

The breeder should not be breeding dogs that are younger than 18 months, and should stop breeding them by middle age, which will vary depending on the breed. They should stop breeding any female dog once it has delivered 3 to 4 litters if it's a large breed, or 5 to 6 litters if it's a small breed.

8. What were your goals for this litter?

A good breeder has clear goals when selecting the sire and dam. If the goal is to produce working dogs and both the sire and dam are high drive dogs, it might not be the best choice for someone seeking a nice, calm companion. However, it would be perfect for someone looking for a hunting companion. There will be a variety of temperaments in every litter and the breeder should speak knowledgeably about temperaments in her dogs and puppies.

Good breeders will talk openly about their breeding program and breeding practices.

9. Is the dam current on her vaccines?

If the vaccines are not up to date, the puppies' ability to resist disease will be compromised. The breeder should include copies of vaccination certificates in the papers given to the buyer.



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK A BREEDER

10. At what age will the puppies be ready to leave?

Puppies should not go to their new homes before 8 weeks old. Any earlier and they may have issues with other dogs in the future; any longer than 10 weeks and they may not bond as well with people.

11. Will you be able to help me with care and training issues once I get my puppy home?

Good breeders want to stay in touch and help their puppy buyers with any health, training, or minor behavioural issues. The breeder should also ask you questions to ensure your lifestyle, knowledge of dogs and attitude are a good fit for one of their puppies.

12. What kind of guarantee do you offer?

A good breeder will offer a detailed health guarantee that specifically addresses genetic disorders and offers more than just a replacement puppy. Beware of a breeder that requires you to return the puppy in order to get a refund or replacement.

13. Have the puppies been seen by a vet?

Puppies need to be dewormed and vaccinated before leaving the breeder. (You will also need to follow up with your own veterinarian so the puppy gets boosters at appropriate intervals and the risk of it contracting a life-threatening illness is lessened.)

14. Can you provide some references?



WARNING SIGNS WHEN BUYING ONLINE



Stay away from breeders whose ads or websites that show any of these warning signs:

- Sells puppies of many different breeds, rather than just one or two breeds
- Sells puppies that are younger than 8 weeks old
- Offers to ship or deliver the puppy to buyers
- Does not require buyers to visit them and their dogs
- Sells puppies with breeding rights rather than expecting you to spay/neuter your puppy
- Does not have a written guarantee that spells out their or the buyer's responsibilities
- Selling "pure bred" puppies at a discount without papers (this is illegal in Canada)
- Requires you to send money to another country

REPUTABLE PET STORES

Are there any good pet stores?

Yes! There are many good pet supply stores that don't sell animals. And there are many stores that operate "satellite adoption centres" for humane societies, SPCAs and rescue groups. Instead of selling cats and dogs, they house and display adoptable animals in their stores. Customers who express an interest in the animals must go through the adoption procedure via the humane society, SPCA or rescue group. By supporting these types of pet stores, you are adopting an animal, saving a life and sending a clear message to other pet stores that the humane option is to operate a satellite adoption centre rather than selling animals.

If a store is not operating a satellite adoption centre, where do the puppies come from?

Many puppies sold in pet stores come from puppy mills, which are horrible breeding operations where dogs are kept in cramped, filthy cages their whole lives, deprived of adequate food, attention and veterinary care, and forced to give birth to litter after litter of puppies until they are too old, ill or injured to continue.

While it's unlikely that all breeders who supply pet stores treat their dogs quite as terribly as described above, any breeder who sells puppies to a pet store falls short on one important measure of a good breeder: they do not care enough about the puppies they produce to make sure each is placed in an appropriate home with an owner who has been screened to make sure they are capable of caring for the dog.

Be wary of stores that tell you their puppies all come from caring, reputable breeders – almost every pet store that sells puppies will tell you this. Just remember that no registered breeder would ever allow their puppies to be sold this way. Good breeders want to build a relationship with people who buy their puppies, and they want to stay in contact in order to be a resource for them because they care deeply about their dogs and the health of the breed.



REPUTABLE PET STORES

Who is the pet store's greatest ally?

People who don't do their research and make impulse decisions based on the adorable puppies in the window. These are the people who keep cruel puppy mills in business. Pet buyers who are well-intentioned but are not aware of the wonderful socialized, healthy puppies that could be waiting for homes at their local humane society, SPCA or rescue or who don't have the knowledge required to find a responsible breeder. So, please get informed so that you can make a smart, humane decision.

Those puppies need homes too, so why shouldn't I buy one?

When people buy a puppy from a store that sells dogs, it only makes space for another puppy from a puppy mill or backyard breeder. This perpetuates the cycle of bad breeding, neglect and outright cruelty because it's about supply, demand and profit. If people didn't buy those puppies, this multi-million dollar industry would not exist.





IMPORTING A DOG

Canada has animal health requirements for the commercial import of dogs that are less than 8 months of age but it is possible that dogs bred for commercial sale may have been exposed to zoonotic diseases (those transmissible to humans) or parasites that are not apparent when they are imported.

Searching for a dog on classified ads site is not the ideal place to look for your companion animal (unless a humane society, SPCA, or reputable rescue is utilizing said platform to adopt out their animals)

Before taking a dog home, you should consider asking for:

- the dog's vaccination records and other veterinary medical history
- additional information about where the dog was located before being offered for sale
- information about policies on returns or assistance with medical bills if health issues are found after buying or adopting

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT SHELTER DOGS

They're all mutts (aka mixed breed)

Actually, shelters commonly report that about a quarter of their dogs are purebred. There are also many breed-specific rescue groups. If you have your heart set on a specific breed of dog, chances are there is a rescue group for that breed. A good place to find one is www.petfinder.com, where you can search for adoptable pets by breed. Or you can look for the national breed club website where they should have information about rescue dogs that are available for adoption.

If they ended up in a shelter, they must have behaviour problems

Dogs end up in shelters for many reasons: their owner died or had to move overseas, they were lost or born homeless, they were seized from an owner who wasn't taking good care of them...the reasons are endless. Most have nothing to do with the personality or behaviour of the dog itself. Some may have minor behavioural issues that can be addressed. All responsible humane societies, SPCAs and rescue groups give their dogs a temperament test, and those with serious behaviour problems, such as aggression, are not put up for adoption.

They are all old and untrainable

Most dogs in shelters are less than 2 years old, and some are even puppies. Dogs are incredibly adaptable creatures - with guidance, patience, love and good leadership, most shelter dogs become well-adjusted and gentle companions.

Shelter animals are inferior to purebreds

Purebred dogs are not smarter, healthier or more even-tempered than canines of mixed breeding. In fact, the reverse is often true.

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT SHELTER DOGS

Animals from abusive homes don't make good pets because they've been mistreated

With proper care, attention and leadership, most animals from abusive homes are able to make a full emotional recovery. They are often so grateful to be rescued from the abuse and anxiety that they become extremely devoted and loyal.

All shelter animals are sickly or unhealthy

Most shelter animals are healthy and have been vaccinated and checked by a veterinarian before being adopted out. Some may have medical problems, but the shelter will tell you about them before you make the decision to adopt.

Shelters only let you adopt if you're the "perfect" owner

The dogs in shelters have already been abandoned at least once. Shelters want to prevent that from happening again. So they make sure that you're informed, prepared and committed - and that it's a good match for both of you. They ask many questions of potential adopters to ensure that you can make a long-term commitment to take care of the animal's physical, emotional and behavioural needs.

Shelters are depressing

Most shelters are stretched to the limit in terms of finances and space. It can be hard to see the animals in cages, but think of the shelter as a place of hope and second chances. Good-hearted people are working there, and they save animal lives every single day.

THE ADOPTION PROCESS

When you visit a shelter, keep in mind that you are not seeing the animals at their best. They are in a strange environment, surrounded by other animals they don't know. Some will be very excited, jumping and barking as you approach. Others will be quiet and a bit scared – but don't be too quick to judge them, as they will adjust once they're settled into a family. It's best for everyone in your household to be part of the adoption process – in fact, many shelters require that.

Ask the staff for more information about the animal(s) that interest you. Ask if the dog is good with children, with other dogs, with cats, etc. It's also a good idea to ask if the dog has any known triggers or traumas. It's best if you can interact with the dog outside or in a separate area away from the stress of the animal rooms. If you already have a dog, you should bring him or her to meet a potential sibling in a neutral setting to make sure they're compatible before adopting.

You will be asked to complete an adoption questionnaire and meet with shelter staff to discuss your expectations and lifestyle in order to find the best match. Don't take it personally if you are not accepted for adoption, or for the particular dog you wanted. This may be a sign that you're not ready for a dog yet – or just not right for that dog.

You might be wondering: what's the difference between a humane society, SPCA, rescue group and municipal shelter?

Humane Society/SPCA

This is an organization dedicated to the betterment of animal welfare. They usually run a shelter and an animal adoption program to find new homes for abandoned, mistreated and/or surrendered animals. They also conduct education in their community and are often mandated to enforce provincial and federal animal cruelty laws.

Shelter

Refers to the physical building where animals are held when they are being put up for adoption. It is usually run by an organization such as a humane society, SPCA or municipal animal services.

Rescue organization

Animal rescue organizations are usually run out of an individual's home or by a network of individuals who foster animals until they are ready to be adopted. Some may concentrate on a certain breed of dog or cat.

Pound

This is a municipal animal shelter. Some municipalities contract their local humane society or SPCA to provide the pound service and some are run independent of the local humane society or SPCA. Pounds generally take in stray animals and usually keep them for 3 business days to give owners a chance to claim their lost animals.

Satellite Adoption Centre

A satellite adoption centre is a pet store or other location that does not sell cats and dogs, but instead displays cats and dogs that are available for adoption from a Humane Society, SPCA or rescue organization.

The bottom line is, healthy, adoptable pets in need of homes can be found through any of these sources, so in most areas, there is no shortage of options for finding your perfect adoptable dog.

WHY ADOPT?

Here are some key reasons for adopting from a shelter!

- **Reward.** An obvious benefit is the rewarding experience of having saved an animal's life.
- **Value.** The cost of adopting a pet at an animal shelter is a fraction of what you'd pay to buy from a breeder or pet store. In fact, it's often "cheaper" than getting an animal for free because the adoption fee usually includes spay/neuter surgery, a complete veterinary check-up, vaccinations and a microchip ID. These services would cost you at least \$500 if you had to pay for them yourself.
- **A match made for you.** All reputable humane societies, SPCAs and rescue groups conduct temperament tests on the dogs to ensure they are safe to be adopted out, and many also have programs to match up adopters with dogs whose personalities will best fit their lifestyles and preferences.
- **Making a difference.** Adopting from a shelter means you are helping rather than contributing to the pet overpopulation problem.
- **Adult = less hassle!** While shelters do sometimes have puppies up for adoption, adolescent or adult dogs are much more common. Adopting an adult dog means that you don't have to go through the trials and tribulations of house-training and raising a puppy.
- **What you see is what you get.** Unlike a puppy, an adult dog's personality and temperament are already well-established. They have also reached their full adult size, and their coat has come in, so you get a better idea of what it would be like to live with the dog.



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