



The Right Dog for You

By Barbara Kahn

Here I am with more than three decades of working professionally with dogs about to discourage some of you from choosing a dog as a family pet. Why? Because in those 36 years of veterinary nursing, shelter work and training dogs, I've seen the tragic and disturbing consequences of choosing a pet for the wrong reasons and of choosing the wrong pet.

A BCW reader recently wrote me that her 10-year-old son desperately wanted a dog. So far so good. He's ten, not two, and should be able to be sensible around a dog. Here's the glitch: the family lives in a condo with no real yard; they have an extremely active sports/social life with lots of commitments; and mom doesn't want a dog that will mess up her lovely home. Naturally, the child longs for either a Siberian Husky or Labrador retriever, two dogs that are 100% inappropriate for this family's life style.

As I told our valued reader, the only dogs I know of that are guaranteed not to mess up her house are either stuffed or ceramic. Real dogs make real messes. They have potty accidents, they throw up when sick, they shed, they chew on stuff, they steal things and are, in general, management challenges until they have matured and have had some sensible training. The breeds her son has selected need enormous investments of time and energy to exercise, shed profusely and are, in general, like living with a bowling ball rolling out of control throughout much of their lives. Since both breeds are outdoorsy, they tend to like inclement weather and track goodies from the yard indoors, shake themselves dry and leave footprints on any reachable surface.

This is also a family that has never owned a dog before. Strike two. Why learn to drive on a Lamborghini when there's a old Toyota sitting in the driveway? Dogs that are high-powered, either energy-wise or temperament-wise, are best owned by people who've cut their teeth on something easier.





As a child, all I ever wanted was a dog. Other kids could have their Barbie Dolls®, bikes and toys. I just wanted a dog! So, I feel for this little boy, believe me. Giving advice in this situation is a challenge since my instincts tell me that a dog is way too labor intensive a pet for these nice folks. Having spent some time educating this single mom on what it's like to actually own and live with a dog, my recommendations were as follows: Understand that although the child wants the dog, mom will do most of the work.

Do not let the child pressure mom into choosing a dog that will not adapt to their lifestyle.

Since the child wants an active, playful kind of dog that will still cuddle and, eventually, be allowed to sleep with him, think about the smaller terriers. They are compact in size, shed very little, require only occasional grooming and are rough and ready to withstand the rigors of living with a young boy. Let WonderDogs help find a responsible breeder since purchasing a pet shop puppy or animal off the internet can be dicey.

Choose an older puppy or young adult whose behavior will probably be more predictable and whose training may already have begun while with the breeder.

When purchasing a dog or puppy from a breeder, expect to answer as many questions and be asked for referrals and to submit to a home inspection as if you were adopting a child. If all the "breeder" asks for is your credit card number, run, don't walk, as fast as you can.

Not all families should own dogs. To be a good home for any canine, you must be willing to adapt your lifestyle as if a new baby were in the home. Dogs must be supervised, trained, exercised, fed at regular intervals, taken out at regular times, socialized effectively and become part of the family unit.





Please consider carefully if a dog is the right pet for you. There's no shame at all in deciding against owning a dog. There are so many dogs that have been dumped, rehomed or euthanized simply because their owners didn't give enough consideration to how much work is involved in owning them.

Having said all this, I must admit that for me, life without (multiple) dogs would be no fun at all.

Considerations

- ❖ Be familiar with breed characteristics
- ❖ Choose a dog that likes the kind of exercise you like
- ❖ Think about rescue
- ❖ Think temperament – not inconsequential details like gender or size

