



Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group

The New Puppy Owner

Why Do We Need The Puppy Plan?

From the moment a litter of puppies is planned, both the breeder, and then later the new owner, want to do everything possible to make sure that each new puppy has the chance to grow up to realise his or her full potential. Thanks to the advances in health testing for both the puppy's parents and later themselves, coupled with responsible breeding, we can do much to make sure puppies are physically healthy and 'fit for function' – but for the vast majority of dogs, no matter what their start in life, this function will be that of a much-loved family dog.

Being a companion is the hardest job we ever ask a dog to do, as our expectations are so high. We want dogs to get on with everybody and everything – not to knock over the children or visitors, nor chase the cat, or bark at the postman (or anyone else). To go everywhere with us when we want but be happy to be left alone without complaint when we don't; to be accepting of loud noises, strangers, other dogs.... The list is endless. So what we need to give puppies in order to give them a good start in life is essential knowledge for any breeder, puppy rearer or new dog owner.

While many breeders understand the principles of raising puppies that are best placed to become excellent family or companion dogs, many are not getting it right. One of the major causes of death in dogs under two years old is euthanasia as a result of behaviour problems. Not only that, but many people find themselves with a dog whose behaviour is difficult to live with. Far too many dogs are ending up in rescue centres, and behaviourists and trainers up and down the country are seeing dogs with problems that could so easily have been prevented if the first 16 weeks of that dog's life had been properly managed and they had been prepared for the life they were going to lead.

Many breeders put a lot of time and effort into making sure their puppies are well socialised but others, while trying to do the very best for their puppies, are not so aware of the importance of this vitally important time or know how

to manage it. In addition, the public are, on the whole, not aware of how important socialisation is, and so do not realise the importance of going to a breeder who makes sure that their puppies get those vital early experiences in their first few weeks that are needed to make sure they are psychologically and therefore behaviourally fit for this function.

Until the puppy-buying public realises how vital this is, they will continue to buy puppies from dubious sources, fuelling the puppy farm business and putting money into the pockets of unscrupulous breeders.

The Puppy Plan is a step-by-step, simple but comprehensive, socialisation plan that starts with the breeder (or the puppy rearer, if different) who works through the first vital eight weeks. When the puppy goes to his new home, the Plan is then passed onto the new owner to continue.

The Science – why it matters

The brain of a 16-week-old puppy has exactly the same number of brain cells as a newly born puppy – but it is roughly 10 times larger. This extraordinary increase in size has nothing to do with the brain cells themselves but the number of connections established between them. These connections are established as a direct result of all the experiences the puppy has in these first critical four months of life (and often much earlier).

Every single thing a puppy sees, hears, feels, smells and tastes, every meeting he has and every new thing he discovers produces literally trillions of new brain connections in those first 16 weeks, and they will last for life. He is learning what things are a part of his new life and his new family, what is safe and who is in his social group. While we can't hope to introduce every single thing a puppy will have to accept later in life, the more positive experiences guided by us he gets in this period, the more accepting he will be of novel things and situations. Not only that, but he will also be developing his learning skills, learning how to problem solve and deal with the inevitable frustrations of life, which in turn will help with his behaviour and training in the future.

A puppy who is properly reared in this period, will be far more likely to grow up to be confident, calm, learn new things more easily, be less likely to respond to new things fearfully or aggressively – and in short, is more likely to become a good family dog. In contrast, a dog who has not had this good start in life is more likely to be over-reactive, unable to concentrate, fearful, a slower learner, develop preventable behaviour problems – and in fact have a less well developed brain than his well socialised brother.

So why is this? All animals are, by instinct, scared of new things. It is this self-preservation instinct that will keep them safe from predators or other unsafe situations. For a newly-born animal to be fearful and cautious however is counter-productive, as everything is new to them and they would be constantly in a state of stress. So in most wild animals, this fearfulness starts at around three weeks old. What an animal hasn't met by then is regarded as

potentially dangerous and as such, they will avoid it, or if unable to do that, are likely to behave defensively.

In domestic dogs this sets in later, at about five to seven weeks old depending on the breed or type. What the puppy hasn't experienced by then, is far more likely to be perceived as potentially dangerous and for this reason, it is vital that breeders work hard to socialise and habituate their puppies long before they go to their new homes.

Up to the first 16 weeks of age, the puppy is also learning who is in his social group, who the people and animals are that form his family, who he is social and friendly to, who he plays with and who he is building a bond with. The new owner has to carry on this socialisation to teach the puppy about his new family and what his life with them is going to contain.

All cells within the body have a predetermined time to start and to stop developing, and at 16 weeks old (in some breeds and individuals much earlier), the window of opportunity for the majority of this brain development rapidly starts to close – and so do the puppy's learning opportunities. Puppies that have not had this socialisation and input in these valuable weeks, because of poor rearing practices or a lack of understanding of this process, will always be playing catch-up, and so much of their potential will never be realised.

Many, if not most, behaviour problems can be prevented through good socialisation and early education at this time – these include aggression, noise phobias, separation anxieties, over-reactivity, poor learning, fearfulness and much more. Waiting until a puppy goes to his new home, or is old enough to start training classes, means that this crucial period is missed.

The Puppy Plan has been developed to try and prevent behaviour problems, owners giving up on their dogs, and reduce the thousands of dogs who are handed over to rescue organisations, returned to breeders, or are euthanised for preventable behaviour problems.

The Puppy Plan aims to be completely inclusive – no matter where the puppy has been bred, whether pure bred or crossbreed, or the circumstances surrounding their birth. It aims to help every dog be the very best he can be, give new owners the confidence to know their puppy has had an excellent 'primary school education' and raise the standard of puppy socialisation throughout the country – and hopefully beyond.

For the breeders or rearers of puppies in their first eight weeks, the Puppy Plan follows an in-depth schedule, as their job is to give a broad-based early education – as they will not know where life will take the puppy and so they should be ready for anything.

Once the puppy goes to his new home, the Puppy Plan can be uniquely customised by the new owner to make sure their puppy fits into his new life and his new family.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW PUPPY!

Puppy's name:

New owner's name:

New photo:

Microchip number (to be added when known):

Welcoming your new puppy to his new home is a very exciting time for all the family.

If your puppy has come from a breeder who follows the Puppy Plan, you already know that he has had a good start in life, and so you know he is well on the way to making a perfect addition to your family. You may already have his own Puppy Plan, hopefully including diary entries and photos to show what a great start he has had.

When you are choosing your puppy, try to find one that has been raised in a home similar to yours, so that he has already been socialised to those things that are a major part of your household – such as children or cats. This will ensure that he has had an early experience with these things so they will not be anything new for him.

Behaviour problems can arise from taking puppies from their mother too early, so make sure the breeder keeps the puppies with their mother until at least seven weeks old.

If he comes from a rescue centre check if they have been using the Puppy Plan from the time he came to them – and you can carry on where they left off.

If your puppy is from a breeder or rescue centre and hasn't had the advantages of the Puppy Plan start in life, check what has been done and start today by following the Puppy Plan from now on, adapted to cater for any gaps in early training, in order for him to get the chance to catch up with a lot of the things he has missed. It is important, however, that all new things are introduced very quietly and slowly, so he accepts them and gets used to them, rather than being frightened by them.

The work that the breeder or rescue have hopefully done in the past eight weeks will mean that your puppy has had a robust upbringing and he has all the skills necessary to become the perfect family dog. If they have followed the Puppy Plan, this will have given him a good primary school education so he knows about the many different things the world has to offer. Now it is up to you to continue his secondary education in the specific environment of his new life. You are also teaching him to bond to his new family – you.

The most unique and exciting thing about the Puppy Plan is that you design it yourself. This is your plan to make sure you have the dog of your dreams. This Plan doesn't tell you what to do, insist you do things that have no bearing

on your life, or waste your valuable time. Instead you create your personal Puppy Plan around your life and the life your new dog will lead.



**Irish Pet Advertising
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**A step forward for the safe
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YOUR PERSONALISED PUPPY PLAN

Week 8 – new home, and making your own personal Puppy Plan

In his first week with you, you are beginning to teach your puppy who his new family are, teaching him to learn to trust them, and begin to want to be with you. This should be a settling-in week.

First Tasks

1. Create your own personal Puppy Plan by thinking about what things may become a part of your dog's life (now or any time in the future). Using the examples below, use the Checklist feature to make a list of all the things that you think are likely to be part of your dog's life – babies, children, different people, other animals, livestock, car, bus and train journeys, pubs, friends' houses, dog shows, vets, traffic.... Everything you can think of that you want your puppy to accept as a normal part of his routine. For the next eight weeks he is still learning about who is part of his social group and who is not. Your job is to make sure he gets plenty of rewarding experiences with the people, animals and things that matter, and unrewarding experiences with those that are not, so he learns to ignore them.

Fill all those different things in on your personal Puppy Plan, and you are ready to go. You can make additions as you go along but try to think of as much as possible to start with.

The checklist is in two parts – one is the things you want your puppy to be friendly towards and interact with, play with and look on as being part of his social group (socialisation), and the other is the things you want your puppy to accept as normal, not worry about and so ignore and pay attention to you instead in their presence (habituation).

Examples of things you may want to include:

Socialisation

People – this should include as many of these as possible (as you want your dog to be friendly to everyone): adult women, adult men, men with beards, people with glasses, tall men, people of different ethnic origins, loud confident people, shy or timid people, people wearing hats, people carrying umbrellas, postmen, elderly people, disabled people, wheelchair users, teenagers, younger children, toddlers and babies. Your puppy should be rewarded and given treats and games etc by these people – or you can reward him for interacting with them positively.

Dogs (and your cats if they are confident and are happy with dogs) – this should include dogs, other puppies, dogs of all colours, shaggy dogs, dogs with flat faces, large dogs, small dogs (as you want your dog to be friendly with all other dogs). Reward your puppy for positive interactions with these. It can also include any household cats.

Habituation

Other animals – unknown cats or your own cats if they are shy, unfriendly or worried about dogs (as they would far prefer the puppy to ignore them!), horses, sheep, cows, other livestock, small furry animals (rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters etc) – or any other animals that will form part of his life or that he may encounter. In these cases you want to be practising rewarding your puppy for ignoring them and listening to you when they are there, not interacting with them.

Places – these can include every room in the house, garden, car, quiet street, busy road, high street, friend's house, outside school, pub, place with slippery floor, park, outdoor market/car boot sale, railway station, trains, bus stops, vet's practice, party, farm, stables... wherever you and your dog may find yourselves in the future. You need to make sure he has happy experiences in these places, and so accepts them as part of his life and nothing unusual or scary. The more places you introduce him to, the more you are ensuring he will take new locations in his stride as going new places is nothing new for him.

Distractions – these can include cars, buses, trains, motorcycles, sirens, noisy machinery, vacuum cleaner... all the things you want to reward your puppy for being non-reactive to.

Others – cyclists, joggers, skateboarders, children running, people playing football, squirrels... again things you want to reward your puppy for ignoring (use a treat or a toy to distract him, and then reward him with the food or a game). Add anything else here that is going to be part of your own puppy's life.

Have a look at the Notes section to decide if your puppy needs extra attention on certain parts of his Puppy Plan, as well as checking if the breeder has passed on any information in their Puppy Plan that they handed over to you or if there is anything missing from your puppy's early education.

Now you have your very own tailor-made Puppy Plan, you are ready for the next few weeks.

If your puppy has come from somewhere that hasn't been practising the Puppy Plan, you can still follow the New Owner's part of the Plan – but don't expect too much from your puppy. Take things a little slower, making sure your puppy is happy and confident at all times – using high value treats or favourite toys to distract him from anything that seems to be worrying him, and then rewarding him for more appropriate behaviour. If you are concerned that your puppy is very fearful or nervous, consider seeing a behaviourist who specialises in puppies (your vet may be able to recommend someone) before this becomes too much of a problem.

1. Find a good puppy party or playgroup in your area run by either a reputable trainer, training group or your veterinary practice and go

along and watch a session. Your puppy is still too young to join as he is unvaccinated and the immunity he has inherited from his mother is now weak, but he will need to socialise with lots of other dogs in the next few weeks if he is to grow up with good social skills. Make sure the class you watch is full of fun, rewards, and a chance for the puppies to play one on one, or in equally matched but very small groups, in a controlled way (not an off-lead free for all – which just teaches pushy puppies to be pushier and shy puppies to be even more fearful and avoid others!). A bad puppy playgroup will undo all your good work – and sadly there are plenty of bad ones out there. If you like what you see, sign your puppy up for as soon as his vaccination status allows him to mix with others. Also if you know of a well-behaved, calm older dog that you know is good with puppies, they are ideal to teach your new puppy how to behave around other dogs. Many puppy classes include these.

2. In the first couple of days, take your puppy to your vet for a check-up. Ask the vet or vet nurse to do nothing to your puppy except have a look at him, handle him gently – and give him treats. This is not the time for vaccinations etc (even if you have to come back in a couple of days' time for that) – you do not want your puppy's first visit to your vet to be anything other than positive! Your vet will thank you for this when your puppy is a large adult dog who likes the vet. This isn't just a health check – it is also a part of his socialisation. Use this time to talk about worming and also his vaccination schedule, as you want him to be out and about as soon as possible.

Your vet may offer an open door arrangement policy to their clients in order to encourage them to bring their puppies to the surgery during quieter times in order for the staff to make a fuss of them and for them to build positive associations. This can have a significant and life-long positive benefit on the dog's perception of veterinary care.

Remember your puppy is not vaccinated and so carry him and do NOT put him on the floor at the vets.

3. Make sure the puppy gets to meet the whole family – and have positive experiences with them so he learns to like and trust you all. That means everyone handles him gently, rewards him, plays with him – and begins to do some basic training with him (even just giving him a reward for coming to them or following them) so he learns to enjoy working for everyone. Download the Dogs Trust iPhone or iPad app You and Your Puppy, or look at www.youtube.com/dogstrustraining to get an idea of how to start your puppy's training at home. Do not let anyone handle him roughly or play boisterous games with him – no matter how excited everyone is about the new arrival.
4. Make sure your puppy is used to wearing his collar and identity disc (the breeder should already have started this, so continue this by

putting it on him when he has his mind on something else (like dinner!). Do not leave it on in a crate or puppy pen.

It is important that your puppy gets used to wearing his collar as the law states that any dog in a public place must wear a collar and tag with the name of the owner and the address clearly on it. A phone number is optional but advisable.

Week 9 – 12 – Learning about the world – safely!

The Science

This is a difficult period for new puppy owners – because they need to spend as much time socialising their puppy to his new life as possible but at this age, he is not yet fully vaccinated. It is a bit of a balancing act – but the benefits of socialisation are too important to ignore especially given that the largest causes of death in dogs under two years old is not disease but euthanasia because of behaviour problems¹. Your puppy's vaccination status doesn't stop you taking him out and about – he just has to be carried, and should only meet dogs whose vaccination status you are 100% sure about. It also doesn't stop you inviting people to come and meet him at home and in the garden, him going out in the car, or him being carried around the town.

Suggested Tasks

1. Try and make sure your puppy meets everything on your personal Puppy Plan three times (or more) in these very important four weeks. Tick each one in the Puppy Plan chart so you can see easily which ones you need to do more work on. These experiences need to be totally positive – so if it is a person, they should give the puppy a treat, and if it is an experience (car, traffic, pub etc) you need to make sure you treat and reward the puppy in that environment (or play a game with him, feed him his dinner there etc). Socialising a young puppy is easy – as most people you meet will want to see him and will be happy to help!
2. Use interactive toys stuffed with food, give him problems to solve, controlled frustration to deal with, and to continue his brain development in his new home. Introduce him to tunnels, steps, things to clamber over, and different surfaces to walk on.
3. Teach him that part of his new life includes being left alone for short periods of time – or not having constant access to you. Do this from the first day you bring him home. Use a dog crate (which can be purchased from a pet shop, and should be made comfortable with bedding) or a baby gate to separate him from you at least once every day at times when there are positive things happening (eating dinner, chewing a stuffed Kong etc). To start with he should still be able to see you (and so not feel deserted).

¹ McKeown and Luescher (1988), Heath (1992), Appleby et al (2002 and 2004), Wells (1996), Overall (1997), Dreschel (2010)

4. Continue to use the noise CD that the breeder has been using (or you can buy one from Amazon) to play unexpected noises (if he hasn't had the benefits of the first 8 week Puppy Plan, start these very quietly at meal times or game times, and slowly build up the volume).
5. Introduce him to friendly healthy vaccinated dogs if you know any. If not, speak to your veterinary practice or your chosen puppy training class – some have days where your pup can meet friendly staff dogs in a safe environment.
6. Encourage him to follow you – rewarding him with a treat or a game when he does (this means a constant supply of treats in the pocket). This will simplify recall training when your puppy is older and also build the social bond between you.
7. Teach your puppy about relaxation, being calm around you etc. This includes being groomed, and being handled around his feet, face, mouth, ears etc (rewarding him all the time when he is still and relaxed). Many owners miss this one in all the excitement and so the dog thinks everything is a game and never keeps still when the owner is around.
8. Encourage periods of quiet time – when he is relaxed and settles down in your presence. Start these as very short periods, using a crate or a play pen beside you if necessary and giving your puppy something to occupy him such as an interactive toy (like a Kong stuffed with food).

Week 13 – 16 – Independence days

Now your Puppy Plan can move up a gear, as your puppy should be fully vaccinated.

Suggested Tasks

1. In this four-week period, once again make sure your puppy experiences everything on your Puppy Plan chart at least three times (tick them off as you go) – but now he is on the floor and under his own steam! He is now seeing things from a different perspective – on the ground – so familiar things might look a little different to him. Make sure all of these meetings are positive and he is well rewarded either by you or the people he meets.
2. Once your puppy is out and about exploring and experiencing all the new things in his life, make sure you get him used to listening to you (for a treat or a game) no matter how big the distractions are. It is an exciting world out there but he should learn that you are the most interesting thing in it. This will help a lot with your training.

3. Start attending the puppy playgroup you found in week 8 so your puppy learns how to socialise with all kinds of other dogs. These social skills are very important – even if you have other dogs in the house, as it is essential that your puppy knows how to interact with other dogs as well as your own. If you have other dogs, regularly take your puppy out to the park or for walks on his own so he learns to be sociable to other dogs.
4. If you are ever going to use a boarding kennel, a groomer etc this is the time to introduce this into your puppy's life. This could include a two hour stay in the boarding kennel (with a nice stuffed Kong), or a gentle brush over by the groomer.
5. Continue his training, problem solving, the 'leaving him for short periods', and also keep exposing him to unpredictable (but controlled by you) noises throughout this period.

Well done – your puppy has completed the Puppy Plan!

The Puppy Plan and life beyond

Teenager 1 – Spreading his wings

While your 16 week Puppy Plan is over, there are a couple of other developmental phases you need to be aware of – otherwise they can come as a shock when suddenly your lovely cuddly puppy turns into a teenager!

The first one comes anywhere between four and eight months and can last anything from a few days to a couple of months. The puppy will begin to wander a little further from you – and instead of coming to you (as he has been doing) he gives a good impression of not having heard you. He may even be difficult to catch or even run away from you.

If this becomes a problem, avoid complete off-lead exercise but keep him on a long line that he can trail behind him (not a retractable lead, which doesn't allow you enough control and can cause injuries if misused) so he can still get plenty of experience, socialise freely with other dogs but you can prevent him ignoring you when you call him. Often this phase doesn't last long!

Be careful with a long line not to get rope burns (put a foot on it rather than grabbing it with your hands) or trip people up!

Use the lead, and plenty of rewards when he comes to you, and this period should not last long. If however he discovers that he can ignore you, this may continue for far longer – or even become a habit.

Consider joining a dog training class to help with further training, and give you support and advice with any problems. Ask your vet for suggestions of good established local clubs, use the Kennel Club website to find a nearby Kennel Club Accredited Instructor, or club teaching the Good Citizen Dog Training Scheme.

Teenager 2 – Is it scary?

The other period that you need to know about happens anywhere between six and 14 months old. In this period, the young dog can start to behave fearfully to things and people that he has previously been interacting with happily. This period coincides with the onset of sexual maturity and the surge of hormones that brings.

As soon as you notice these fear responses starting, revisit your Puppy Plan chart, and give him a refresher socialisation course – aiming to give him plenty of positive experiences with everything that is on the chart using treats, play and fun to overcome his fears.

Adult dog

Having had the best possible upbringing, your adult dog should now have all the skills necessary to be a model canine citizen – and of course a much

loved part of the family. Don't forget though – use it or lose it! Make sure he still gets to mix with other (nice) dogs, go to training classes or have the chance to socialise in a wide variety of situations, and to go exciting places and be a part of your life to keep his social skills well exercised.

NOTES:

Breed and type considerations

Depending on what breed or type you choose (or what breeds make up your puppy), you may find that you have to pay more attention to certain things. Here are some starting points to help you:

Toy/Companion breed – more prone to separation anxieties. Spend more time making sure they are happy being left alone both when you are in the house and then when you leave.

Working breeds – spend lots of time making sure they are well socialised to other dogs and strange people/visitors, and that their natural working instincts are utilised and appropriately channelled onto toys and games.

Hounds – try and encourage them to pay attention to you when there are interesting smells or small animals around. Work hard on recall and following you. Be careful around small animals.

Pastoral/herding breeds – make sure that you provide them with plenty of mental stimulation, and have things to occupy their minds so they do not go self-employed chasing or herding things.

Terriers – use toys and games/yummy treats to distract them from small or fast moving animals and to prevent them ignoring you. Be careful around small animals.

Remember – think about what the breed was originally bred to do – this will give you clues to what you need to socialise for and habituate against.

Insurance

Even if you choose not to have health insurance for your dog, it is a good idea to have third party liability insurance as accidents can happen even with the most well-behaved of dogs and you can easily find yourself liable for compensation or any financial claims made in connection with any damage or injury caused by your dog.

For more information, please visit www.ipaag.com