

THE FIRST Eight Weeks

Thoughtful
beginnings.
Stronger
futures.

A GUIDE & CHECKLIST FOR BREEDERS & PUPPY FAMILIES

DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS EARLY. *Every week matters.*

0 - 2 WEEKS



A WORLD OF WARMTH,
SCENT & TOUCH



- 🐾 Eyes and ears closed
- 🐾 Warmth, nursing & rest
- 🐾 Scent and touch are the primary experiences
- 🐾 Gentle handling & observation
- 🐾 Health & weight monitoring
- 🐾 Clean, safe environment

More stimulation isn't better. Keep it simple, safe & age-appropriate.

2 - 3 WEEKS



THE WORLD BEGINS
TO OPEN



- 🐾 Eyes and ears begin working
- 🐾 Notice littermates, people, sounds, light, movement
- 🐾 Mobility increases
- 🐾 Early communication begins
- 🐾 Continue plenty of rest

New sights and sounds start building the foundation for learning.

3 - 5 WEEKS



CURIOSITY
TAKES OFF



- 🐾 Explore, play & interact
- 🐾 Develop coordination
- 🐾 New surfaces, objects, sounds & smells
- 🐾 Gentle handling & individual attention
- 🐾 Introduce age-appropriate challenges & enrichment

Positive, manageable experiences help puppies learn, explore & recover.

5 - 8 WEEKS



PREPARING FOR
A BIGGER WORLD



- 🐾 More independent & coordinated
- 🐾 Expand experiences
- 🐾 Crate familiarity
- 🐾 Short separations
- 🐾 Grooming & nail care
- 🐾 Car rides & new environments
- 🐾 Continue socialization & enrichment

Sleep, play, rest & time with mom & littermates are still essential.

SOCIALIZATION IS MORE THAN MEETING PEOPLE



Good socialization includes exposure to many everyday experiences in positive, age-appropriate ways.

- 🐾 People
- 🐾 Sounds
- 🐾 Surfaces
- 🐾 Objects
- 🐾 Environments
- 🐾 Movements
- 🐾 Smells
- 🐾 Activities

Quality matters more than quantity. Watch the puppy, not the checklist.



THE MOTHER STILL MATTERS

Mom's role continues as puppies grow. She also needs breaks.

Protect her welfare while allowing normal, appropriate interactions.



Puppy development should never come at the expense of the mother's well-being.



THE LITTER IS A CLASSROOM

Puppies learn from their mother and littermates through play, communication, and interaction.

Observe each puppy.

- 🐾 Who explores?
- 🐾 Who watches first?
- 🐾 Who seeks people?
- 🐾 Who persists with a challenge?
- 🐾 Who prefers independence?

Use observations to help match puppies with the right families.



ENRICHMENT SHOULD HAVE A PURPOSE

Good enrichment gives puppies safe opportunities to explore, think, move, investigate & problem-solve.

- 🐾 Textures & surfaces
- 🐾 Tunnels, boxes & obstacles
- 🐾 Toys & novel objects
- 🐾 Food-based problem solving
- 🐾 Outdoor experiences
- 🐾 Climb, balance, investigate & choose



Age-appropriate, supervised, safe & purposeful.



HANDLING & COOPERATIVE CARE BEGIN EARLY

Early, gentle experiences help prepare puppies for lifetime care.

- 🐾 Paws, ears, mouth
- 🐾 Brushing & nail care
- 🐾 Being picked up
- 🐾 Standing on surfaces
- 🐾 Brief restraint & release
- 🐾 Calm individual attention



Teach that handling can be predictable, safe & rewarding.



HEALTH & VET CARE MATTER TOO

Developmental experiences go hand-in-hand with responsible medical care.

- 🐾 Monitor growth
- 🐾 Physical exams
- 🐾 Parasite control
- 🐾 Vaccination planning
- 🐾 Health records
- 🐾 Vet care when needed



Families should receive clear information about all care puppies have received.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE CHOOSING A BREEDER

Use this checklist to learn about the first eight weeks.

- ☐ Where are the puppies raised?
- ☐ How are the puppies handled?
- ☐ What types of enrichment do they experience?
- ☐ What sounds and surfaces are introduced?
- ☐ Do puppies spend time individually as well as with the litter?
- ☐ Are they introduced to crates?
- ☐ How does the breeder approach socialization?
- ☐ How do they respond when a puppy is fearful?
- ☐ What veterinary care do puppies receive?
- ☐ How are individual temperaments evaluated?
- ☐ How are puppies matched with families?
- ☐ What information will go home with the puppy?



The answers reveal the thought, time, and care behind the litter.



WHAT RESPONSIBLE SOCIALIZATION IS NOT

More is not better. Quality & thoughtful experiences matter.

- ✗ Exposing puppies to everything all at once
- ✗ Forcing frightened puppies to interact
- ✗ Prioritizing social media content over puppy comfort
- ✗ Passing puppies from person to person without rest
- ✗ Allowing unsafe exposure to disease
- ✗ Expecting every puppy to react the same way
- ✗ Eliminating all frustration or challenge
- ✗ Treating a checklist like a race

Puppies need experiences—AND sleep, safety, choice, recovery, and time to be puppies.

EVERY PUPPY IS AN INDIVIDUAL

Different personalities.
Different strengths.
Different preferences.

There is no "best" puppy—only the best fit.



BREEDERS BUILD THE FOUNDATION. FAMILIES BUILD ON IT.

Eight weeks of thoughtful raising is an important beginning, not the finish line. Thoughtful starts help build confident dogs, prepared families, and stronger futures.

*Our dogs are family.
Our choices leave a legacy.*

Thoughtful starts can help build confident dogs, prepared families, and stronger futures.

TAKE THIS GUIDE WITH YOU

Use this guide as a quick reference during your puppy journey!

DOWNLOAD & PRINT

Keep it in your binder, on your fridge, or in your wheeling area as a helpful reminder.