

Are You Ready For A Dog?

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West Wind Dog Training

Everyone thinks their breed or cross is the greatest. However, what is best for one family may not be the best for yours. Before you run out and get a dog, you must stop and look at your lifestyle. Take a moment and read the following to help you decide if a dog will fit into your life.

Are you prepared for a puppy or dog?

1) **Time Commitment:** How much time each day do you have to devote to the animal? Are you willing to commit to the dog for the dog's life? What if you have to move? Puppies require far more work than adults do. You must make time for classes, training, socializing, and activities. To get a puppy or dog and then leave him in a backyard with no socialization or effort on your part is cruel. Dogs are social animals and do best when part of the family. If you cannot devote time to raising baby, ensuring your dog is well trained and socialized for the next ten to fifteen years or more, do not get one. Remember that one series of obedience classes does not a trained dog make. Training and learning lasts the life of the dog.

2) **Human Medical Issues:** Are there any allergies or medical conditions in your family that could cause issues resulting in having to get rid of the dog? No breed is truly hypoallergenic. People with serious problems may not be able to tolerate ANY breed – regardless of what someone does and would lead you to believe. If there are suspected health concerns, consult a doctor before considering a pet.

3) **Cost:** Can you afford a dog? Getting the puppy or dog is not the big expense. It is what follows that can drain your wallet: buying the crate and other necessary supplies; puppy inoculations every few weeks while the puppy is young; training classes (any where from \$30 to over \$100 depending on where you go); annual wellness checks and inoculations; feeding (the bigger the dog the bigger the food bill); medical emergencies (can easily run hundreds of dollars if not more). I spent \$100 to adopt a dog and closer to \$300 getting a big enough crate, enrolling in classes (yes, even instructors take their dogs to classes), vet checks, leash, collar, and extra toys... The dog was the cheap part!

4) **Housing:** Can you properly house the dog? Being chained in the back yard with a hut and water is not proper housing. Dogs are social animals and pets really should be part of the family pack. If you cannot make a dog a family member, keep him safely inside when you are not home and let him have plenty of exercise in a safely fenced area, reconsider. It is cruel to a dog to leave him outside all the time. In addition, these dogs are more prone to become nuisance barkers and victims of "pranks" or theft.

5) **Lifestyle:** What is your lifestyle like? Are you an active family that spends time hiking and camping or going for long walks? Are you more sedentary? Some breeds require a

lot of exercise daily – both physical and mental. The half hour walk given to a Bulldog is far from adequate for a Border Collie. A Bulldog will not be able to handle the strenuous hours of daily workouts a Border Collie requires. Research any breed thoroughly before getting – use several different sources as well. What one person or even a vet says about a breed may be erroneous. Look at books devoted to the breed; many breed-specific dog clubs have websites with plenty of information, etc. If you are looking at a cross, research the breeds you know are in the cross to give you an idea of what you are getting. Moreover, bear in mind that small does not equal less energy. Some giant breeds have lower activity level than many smaller breeds. Size is not always relevant when it comes to how much energy and exercise a dog requires.

6) **Grooming:** What about grooming? All dogs need grooming – even hairless breeds! Some breeds are quite a bit for the average person to handle and may require professional work (Poodles and Bichon Frisés for example). Others require only a few minutes of going over with a brush once a week as well as regular attention to teeth, ears and nails. All dogs shed to some extent. Even supposed "no shed" breeds will lose hair. Hair falls out of follicles – look at your own brush or how often do you pluck a strand off your jacket. Some breeds shed less than others. If you are a neat freak and cannot stand dust bunnies, consider a lower shedding breed. Coat length does not mean a breed will shed more or less. A short-coated breed can shed just as much as a medium to long coated one.

7) **Need:** Why do you want a dog? Companionship, participating in sports, protection? Again, you must research the breed or cross in regards to what you want. If you want a dog that can be trained for duck hunting a Collie may not be the right breed.

8) **Experience:** Are you an experienced dog owner or is this your first one? Many breeds are not appropriate for a novice for one reason or another. Many people see Border Collies (*Babe*) and Jack Russell Terriers (*Frasier*, *Wishbone*) and must have one. What about those 101 Dalmatians? Obviously, these dogs must be great if they are in Hollywood! WRONG! What makes dogs excel in acting, Agility and other things often makes them more (sometimes FAR more) than the novice dog owner is prepared to handle. Thousands of Dalmatians, Border Collies and Jack Russells (now called Parson's Russells) found themselves given up by owners who HAD to get on because of the image Hollywood gave them. Some breeds are self-willed and can be a challenge to work with. Not that these dogs are bad but owners needs to understand the breed. No breed is untrainable – regardless of what some surveys would have you think. Knowing the breed (or breeds that went into a cross) is a big step to understanding the dog and working with it.

9) **Long Term:** What will happen to the dog if you start a family? Are you just going to dump the dog or do what it takes to ensure he is ready for the new arrival? What if you have to move? Thousands of pets are given up because of a new child or move. Have you thought about the long-term needs of the dog?

10) **Golden Years:** What when the dog ages? Are you prepared to cope with the onset of old age or when the dog is no longer "useful" will you get rid of it? Can you handle the

increased health issues that can go along with a senior dog? A dog will spend his life trying to please an owner. The least we can do is make their Golden years truly golden.

If you can commit to all there, then maybe you are ready to commit to a dog.