

## TO GET A DOG OR NOT TO GET A DOG: 3 Things to Consider

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As the American family continues to evolve, we see that more and more people choose to add a four-legged family member as a source of companionship, love and fun. As with any relationship, you've heard it's important to look before you leap. If you live in an apartment building, will you (or your neighbors) tolerate barking? Do you have the time to walk a large dog several times a day?

It is so important to select for success. People need to ask themselves the hard questions up front, so that the dog they bring home has the best chance to survive – and thrive – in her new human family.

Following are some basic considerations that you and other people in your household should think about before you make that leap!

1. **“Know thyself!”** How well do you *really* know yourself? When thinking of bringing a new dog home, think carefully about your own lifestyle. What is your energy level? How much time can you commit to your dog? What are the limitations of your living space? Do you have any financial constraints? Who else lives with you? Do you already have any other pets? What kind of temperament do you want in a dog?
2. **Looks aren't everything!** Choosing a life partner on looks alone is highly risky; choosing a dog that way is, too! A great resource to read about general traits and behaviors of certain breeds of dogs is *Paws to Consider: Choosing the Right Dog for you and your Family* by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson. Another strong source of information is other owners who have a breed that you envision in your home. If you find that their dog is particularly well behaved, take the next step and ask where they got their dog and how they trained him. Behavior is largely influenced by a dog's parentage as well as how it is raised. Many mixed-breeds make wonderful companions, so be sure to consider them as well.
3. **Getting a puppy vs. getting an older dog.** With a puppy, you will have the chance to create a firm foundation of positive training and truly “mold” him into a happy, confident, well-behaved dog. Raising a puppy, however, requires lots of time and energy. If you adopt an older dog, you may find that she is already trained, and may be calmer. But there are no guarantees in either case, so select your dog carefully.

