

How to choose a puppy or kitten to minimise future problems

So. You've decided on the breed you want and have found a litter to choose your future pet from. Now comes the hard bit.

You can avoid a lot of heart ache in the future if you follow some simple guidelines when you visit to choose your new pet.

General

1. Always see the puppy or kitten at its home with the mother. Unless you are getting an animal from a rescue centre, always insist on visiting the animal in the environment it was reared in.

2. Never, never, never agree to meet and buy a pup or kitten at any location other than the breeders' home unless you have already visited the home, seen the animals there and agreed on an individual.

3. Unless the breeder provides documentary evidence of vaccination or the pedigree registration assume this has not been done. If they say they will send this on, be suspicious about whether it has been done.

4. If the breeder will only accept cash and will not provide a receipt be suspicious about any comeback if you have a problem.

5. If in doubt contact your vet for advice BEFORE taking any puppy or kitten.

6. Hard though it is, try not to visit a litter and take one away on the same day. You may regret it for a very long time!

Behavioural

1. If the mother of the litter is unavailable to meet, do not take a pup or kitten.

2. If the mother or father or any of the litter show aggression or are unwilling to come to you, do not agree to take one. Many unwanted behavioural traits displayed by the parents will be passed on to the litter.

3. If a puppy or kitten is not being reared in the house, ensure that you get that animal around 7-8 weeks old to ensure it can be properly acclimatised to its future surroundings.

4. Wherever possible you should avoid puppies over 12 weeks old to minimise future behavioural problems. Pedigree kittens, for instance, are often not released till this age. Ensure animals being sold at over 12 weeks old have been acclimatised to a range of people and noises by the breeder. E.g. If the breeder is an elderly man living on his own the pup or kitten may well not settle well with women or children.

Health

1. Never buy a puppy or kitten displaying any health problems without consulting your vet first. If you want to consider such an animal arrange for your own vet to carry out a health check and make the purchase subject to that exam. Although it is tempting, avoid the smallest in a litter or any slower or weaker individuals.
2. Be careful if the breeder says the animals have been vet checked. Unless they have been individually examined at over 7 weeks of age, many problems cannot be excluded.
3. If the breeder makes claims about vet examination, worming or vaccination find out which vet they have attended and your own vet can contact them to confirm the information.
4. Wherever possible avoid getting the animal vaccinated by the breeder. You will miss out on the vital first vaccination consultation with your own vet at which good advice is given. It will mean a delay in getting the animal examined and checked as they won't be seen until second vaccination. Not all vets use the same vaccine so you may have to restart the course again at your own additional expense and delay.
5. Before you go to look at the litter, research the breed (if you are getting a purebred) and know which tests the breeder should have carried out on the mother and father prior to mating. Eg hip scoring, eye testing, blood tests for heritable disease, heart checks, x-rays of spines in certain breeds. Challenge the breeder on these tests if they haven't done them. Are they interested in the future health of their breed?
6. Is the bitch up to date with vaccination? If this can't be confirmed then the pups may have poor immunity and may need earlier vaccinations. It also calls into question the breeder's commitment to the health and care of their animal and would make you wonder whether other statements about the health of the litter are correct.
7. Try to avoid buying pups from litters which have been bred from very young bitches or queens. Also try to avoid acquiring a pup or kitten where the mother has had repeated litters without rest. Both of these are bad practice and potentially damaging to the mother.