

VIEWPOINTS

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One-day gift for a lifetime

It is so tempting, I know.

Christmas is coming up and what a Hallmark moment it is to see a child or significant other tear off the wrapping to find a wiggling little puppy underneath. However, as an animal lover and positive reinforcement dog trainer, I'd like to share some thoughts before you make your purchase.

Puppies are not toys. They are living, breathing, chewing, playing, barking, eating, urinating, beings who will come into your life with a lot of needs.



Lisa Desatnik
COMMUNITY PRESS
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The first six months of your puppy's life will be critical when it comes to socialization, teaching it all of the many life skills to set it (and you) up for success. As its

parents, family, and teachers, you will have a huge role in developing your dog's lifelong behavior.

Do you have the knowledge, the tools and the time to supervise young children around the puppy in order to prevent interaction that may cause tension (that may lead to aggression) and instead foster joy and trust; to teach error-free house training,

impulse control, or basic behaviors such as sitting; or to introduce it to many different people and other puppies?

Can you afford a puppy? In its first year alone, you will have veterinary bills including vaccines, spay or neuter or possible illness. You will also need to budget for a dog crate, exercise pen or baby gate, chew toys, an ongoing supply of treats, high quality dog food, a comfy bed, a leash and collar (halter or Martingale or gentle leader), and training.

You may need to fence in your yard.

Depending on your dog, it may require regular grooming. If you take a vacation, you will need to budget for doggy care.

Affording a puppy is not just a measure of money. Ask yourself this, "Realistically, how much time can I give my dog to exercise it not just now but for a long time to come?"

In general, sporting, hounds, herding and terrier breeds will require more daily exercise than guardian or companion breeds. (However, all dogs will benefit from exercise.)

If you think that is expensive, consider that your puppy will grow into adulthood and will more than likely be your responsibility for well over 10 years.

Please do not buy a puppy on

an impulse or because you saw a breed of dog down the street or in a movie, and you want one just like that. While it is important to choose a dog's breed (or breeds if it is mixed) with the general characteristics that will fit your lifestyle, remember even among puppies in the same litter there are a wide range of temperaments.

There is no such thing as a ready-made, well behaved dog. Once you bring your little guy home, it is your responsibility to teach it so that it can grow to its fullest potential and adapt successfully to your lifestyle, your family, and your home.

You can find a good starter search for breed specific information on the American Kennel Club's website at www.akc.org.

If you have considered all of this and you think the time is right to add a new bouncing puppy to your household, how about giving a gift certificate or a gift basket filled with pet toys and supplies instead? Then, when the stress and chaos of the season is over, you can have fun picking out your gift together.

Lisa Desatnik is a positive reinforcement dog trainer with So Much Potential. Visit her website at www.SoMuchPETential.com.