

# **PUPPY REACTION TEMPERAMENT ASSESSMENT**

## Instructions and assessment pages

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### **ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT**

The exercises are intended to be similar to experiences puppies would normally be exposed to while with the breeder, but with observation of the puppy's specific reaction. They should be carried out on puppies between 7 and 8 weeks of age, and ideally each exercise should be carried out at a convenient time to fit into normal routine, not in a formal manner or all at once, to avoid overwhelming or stressing puppies. The exercises should be approached as normal informal interactions with puppies and puppies should experience them as positive or benign in a safe environment. It may help to film the testing in order to avoid disrupting interaction and observation with note-making.

Some of the exercises require a stranger, and one requires a strange dog. The other exercises should be carried out by the breeder without other people present unless otherwise noted. This is because the presence of other people may distract some puppies, whereas a familiar environment and the presence of the person best known to the puppy is most likely to give an accurate result. The puppies should be observed apart from their littermates and out of sight and sound of their dam. This is to avoid distraction and because puppies in a litter can function rather differently than they do as individuals. There are no right and wrong answers, and the objective is to help breeders match puppies with the most suitable new owners, generate tailored socialisation plans for new owners, and make progress in their breeding programme towards the traits they want to develop.

Refer to the Appendix (p.9-15) for information about the traits. The descriptions of the traits should hopefully be easy for the owner of each parent to identify with and see easily where their dog fits. Choose the description that most resembles the parent. Some of the traits cannot be accurately assessed for young puppies, so the results of the parents will give an indication of which outcome might be most likely. This assessment looks at the puppy's reaction to various situations. Unless it is otherwise noted, the immediate reaction of the puppy is the one that should be recorded.

### **DEFINITIONS:**

The breeder is the person who cares for the puppies on a day-to-day basis.

A stranger and a strange dog are a person and a dog whom the puppies have not encountered before.

Ideally the strange dog belongs to the stranger.

**STEP 1: Go to page 1 of the form and fill in dam and sire details. Save the PDF.**

**STEP 2: Print copies of pages 1-4 of these assessment pages for each puppy you want to test.**

**STEP 3: Test your puppies and enter the results on page 2 of the form.**

**STEP 4: Generate and print socialisation plan for new owner (p.3-8) and appendix (p.9-15)**

## THE EXERCISES

### 1. FOOD MOTIVATION

Time: soon after a meal.

Location: Room in breeder's home, can be in area puppy is familiar with, but out of sight of rest of litter. There should not be toys or other people in the area.

Item: Plain food item. Note: do not use high-value treats (dry plain food only, nothing wet or smelly). Use a plain cracker or similar broken into crumbs. Scatter the crumbs within a small area on the floor. Place the puppy on the floor facing the crumbs.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy investigates and immediately eats food.

**Reaction 2:** Puppy does not eat food immediately, may investigate but not eat, or does something else.

### 2. TOY MOTIVATION 1

Time: While puppies are awake of their own accord, not immediately after meal.

Location: Room in breeder's home, can be in area puppy is familiar with, but out of sight of rest of litter. No people or other toys to be in view.

Item: small ball, preferably shiny and noisy, metal cat toys with bells are ideal (keep ball away from adult dogs who may swallow it).

Place puppy on the floor. Puppy may be given reasonable time to look around surroundings. If puppy wants to interact with you, interact with it until it stops the interaction of its own accord. When puppy is reasonably still, roll the ball in front of the puppy, perpendicular to its line of sight, i.e. in front of the puppy from left to right or right to left.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy runs after, pounces on, or otherwise interacts with the toy.

**Reaction 2:** Anything else (watches toy passively or ignores)

### 3. TOY MOTIVATION 2

Time: After Toy Motivation 1.

Location: As Toy Motivation 1.

Item: Small soft toy, of suitable size for puppy to carry.

Again when puppy is reasonably still, sit on the floor and wave the toy in front of the puppy to try to attract its attention. Let puppy mouth or pounce on toy if it wants. Throw the toy a short distance in front of the puppy. If the puppy interacts with the toy and takes hold of it, try to encourage the puppy to come back with it. You can make as much noise and visual stimulation as you like. If the puppy comes back to you with or without the toy, interact with the puppy by playing, stroking, or whatever else seems natural.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy gets the toy and returns with it to you

**Reaction 2:** Puppy interacts with the toy, but returns without it or does something else with it

**Reaction 3:** Puppy does not chase the toy

### 4. ATTITUDE TO PEOPLE

Time: While puppies are awake of their own accord, not immediately after meal.

Location: Room in breeder's home, can be in area puppy is familiar with, but out of sight of rest of litter. Toys and familiar objects can be in the room.

Item: A stranger

Puppy is allowed to explore the room or interact with the breeder or objects according to its own choice. At a point when the puppy is settled in this environment, the breeder leaves the puppy in the room and exits. No other people are in the room. A stranger to whom the puppy is unknown enters. Immediately after the immediate reaction is observed, proceed immediately to next test to minimise stress to the puppy.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy approaches stranger.

**Reaction 2:** Puppy stands its ground.

**Reaction 3:** Puppy retreats.

Observe only the immediate reaction, e.g. if the puppy stands its ground but then runs away, the correct answer is Reaction 2. Stranger should not interact with the puppy yet but should immediately summon the breeder into the room and proceed to 5.

## **5. ATTITUDE TO PEOPLE + ATTITUDE TO OWNER/FAMILY**

Time: Immediately after Attitude to People.

Location: Same.

Items: Same

The breeder re-enters the room. The stranger if possible positions itself between the breeder and the puppy, but allows room for the puppy to pass without being forced into close proximity (path around the stranger should not be obstructed by furniture or other objects). The breeder calls to the puppy and tries to attract it. If the puppy comes to either person, the person shall interact with the puppy in a normal way by stroking, picking up, etc.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy approaches or remains by the stranger.

**Reaction 2:** Puppy circumnavigates the stranger and approaches the breeder.

**Reaction 3:** Anything else.

## **6. ATTITUDE TO DOGS**

Time: Immediately after Attitude to People + Attitude to Owner/Family

Location: Same

Items: a stranger, and a calm adult dog, who is used to puppies and well-mannered, and unknown to the puppy

The stranger withdraws from the room. The breeder sits on the floor in the middle of the room with the puppy in the breeder's lap. The area around the breeder should not be obstructed by furniture/objects. The stranger re-enters the room with a strange dog on a lead. The strange dog is made to lie down by the stranger. The breeder releases the puppy once the strange dog has lain down. The stranger does not let the strange dog approach the puppy. If the puppy approaches the strange dog, the dog may be allowed to interact appropriately with the puppy. If the puppy does not wish to leave the breeder, the breeder is allowed to stroke or otherwise reassure the puppy.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy approaches the strange dog.

**Reaction 2:** Puppy stays near the breeder.

**Reaction 3:** Puppy retreats.

## 7. GUNSTEADY

Time: any

Location: Normal environment where the puppy is kept. Littermates can be present, provided there are not so many puppies their reactions cannot be accurately observed. Another person whom the puppy is used to seeing on a day-to-day basis can be present to help observe reactions.

While the puppies are engaged in another activity, the breeder bursts a bag filled with air, e.g. a crisp bag.

**Reaction 1:** Any sort of startled reaction: jumping, fleeing, vocalisation, looking around in an agitated manner with wide eyes.

**Reaction 2:** Looks once towards source of noise, or ignores.

Note: Gunsteady puppies who have been socialised to noises while with the breeder may act unconcerned towards sudden noises, to the extent that they sometimes ignore them completely. It should not be assumed that a puppy who reacts in this manner has problems with its hearing. If there are concerns about a puppy's hearing, they should be assessed by a qualified veterinarian.

## 8. AFFINITY FOR WATER (optional)

Time: While puppies are awake of their own accord, not immediately after meal.

Location: In the garden at the breeder's house, if the puppies are used to going in the garden. Note this test may not be possible in some weathers.

Item: a wide shallow receptacle, bigger than the puppies, but that they can get into easily, full of lukewarm water. Water should not be any deeper than the puppies' undercarriages.

Breeder puts the puppy on the lawn with the item and sits in a deck chair etc. nearby. The puppy is observed for 5 minutes. If the puppy comes to the breeder, the breeder may interact with it by talking to it and stroking it, but should not behave in a distracting way (playing with toys etc.) or pick up the puppy so it cannot interact with the water. Do not leave the puppy unsupervised near water.

**Reaction 1:** Puppy gets partly or fully into receptacle.

**Reaction 2:** Puppy does not get into receptacle (drinking from it or looking at it falls under this category).

Note: puppies who have had the opportunity to play in a paddling pool in the garden all summer may not investigate the item because it seems familiar to them. This can give a false negative result, and in these circumstances the breeder should use common sense from previous observations as to whether the puppy likes water or not.

## 9. CAR REACTION (optional)

Time: Not immediately after feeding. This exercise may be stressful to puppies. However, travelling in a vehicle is a normal and inevitable part of life for most dogs, so the majority of breeders opt to socialise their puppies to car travel.

Puppy taken for 10 minute car ride, normal driving, safely contained. Puppies can go in pairs if in a crate, provided someone can observe their separate reactions. Puppy can also be held on a passenger's lap (use of a towel recommended in this case). Passengers can talk to and interact with the puppies.

**Reaction 1:** None.

**Reaction 2:** Puppy has vomited by end of journey, or puppy is wet with saliva.