

Trudi Thorpe runs dogLOGIC Dog Training based in Sydney and specialises in Individual Behavioural Strategies, Puppy Pre-School and Adult Dog Classes. She is an AABP Professional Dog Trainer, Accredited Delta CGC Instructor, Accredited Delta CGC Assessor and a Certified Dog Behavioural Trainer. She is a member of the Delta Professional Dog Trainers Association, The Association of Animal Behaviour Professionals and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

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Dear Trudi,

I have an odd question! We don't yet have a dog but we have decided that it would be great for the kids to get one, so I was wondering if you could advise us on what kind of things we should be looking for in order to help us decide what breed would be best for us. My husband had a Labrador growing up and I had mixed breed scruffy that we rescued from the RSPCA, but neither of us has had a dog as adults. Our kids are five and seven years old, we live in a typical-sized Inner West terrace in Sydney, and we have our hearts set on a puppy rather than an adult dog. We are an active, outdoorsy type family which regularly goes to different parks and would be happy to take the dog with us. Outside of that, we would walk the dog every day around the neighbourhood and let him play with other dogs in our local dog park.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts. Sarah McGrath

Hi Sarah,

This is a great question! Appropriate breed selection is paramount to a successful human-dog relationship. All too often we see the disastrous consequences of dogs which have been chosen with little or no research and/or without the person's current and future circumstances considered. All dogs were originally bred for a functional purpose (eg herding, hunting etc), and understanding that purpose will give you a great deal of insight into whether or not that particular breed is going to fit into your lifestyle. A British Bull Dog is possibly not the best breed for someone who wants a jogging buddy to keep up with them on a 20km run each morning, and a Border Collie is not going to do well with a person who works long hours and has little time to exercise it.

You need to take into consideration your daily activities and how much time you will actually have for a dog. If you only have an hour a day to devote to a dog, but he is allowed inside whenever someone is home, that accounts for a lot more than a dog that is outside all of the time with little or no contact from family members. Dogs are social animals, they live in social groups. They are not solitary animals that live by themselves. Leaving them out the back with only an hour or so's interaction per day is not optimal to their social and physical wellbeing, and it may be better to get a different type of pet instead – maybe a cat or rabbit.



Size is another factor. The size of the dog really needs to be age appropriate to the kids. Don't forget, that cute little ball of excitement

may well grow into 30 kgs of raw enthusiasm. How are your kids going to cope with that, or more importantly, their little friends who come over on a play date? Is the dog going to knock them all flying in his quest for attention? And if so, is he then going to be relegated out the back or locked away when anyone is over? So maybe a small-medium size dog is more appropriate for a family with young children. The size of your backyard is irrelevant as long as your dog gets out and about on a walk each day.

Breed characteristics should also be considered when choosing a breed of dog. Research what the breed was originally bred to do and what type of selective breeding went into developing that breed. Was he originally developed to chase birds or hunt out rats? Was he selectively bred to bark or herd anything that moves? Is he a water hound that will lie in every puddle or jump in any river?

If you own a rabbit for instance, a greyhound is possibly not the best breed of dog for you.

Coat type may also influence your choice of breed. There are a number of hypo-allergenic dogs with coats that don't shed, such as poodles, schnauzers and some of the 'oodles' (labradoodles, cavoodles, schnoodles, groodies, spoodles etc) for people who may be allergic to dogs. These dogs require some type of clipping or grooming, which can be an unexpected ongoing expense, (and they're not all non-shedding). Other breeds shed varying amounts of hair – ask any Dalmatian owner about dog hair if you want an expert opinion about profuse shedding! Rule of thumb, the shorter the coat the quicker it falls out. Longer haired dogs tend to shed maybe once or twice a year but they lose it all at once which amounts to a lot of hair throughout the house!

I guess the last thing would be choosing between a pedigree or mixed breed dog, and this choice is entirely up to the individual. There are pros and cons in both corners – with a pedigree dog you have some idea of breed characteristic, temperament, breed-specific health issues, appropriate health screens from the breeder and a good understanding of activity level, size and coat type. A mixed breed dog can be a bit of a mystery, but may not be predisposed to breed-specific health issues, and while you may not have the background to his existence, a mixed breed dog may go further and live longer.

Either way, researching your breed and being practical in your choices, ie selecting a dog that is an appropriate size and temperament for your situation (particularly when you have young children), rather than what you might personally prefer, will inevitably guide you in the right direction of finding that perfect new family member.