



Adopting Littermates: Not a Good Idea

Puppies! So you're thinking about adopting one—how about two? Two is double the love, and they'll keep each other entertained, right? Sure! But it's also double the work, training, expenses, and responsibility. Not to mention, there are behavioral concerns to think about, issues that can arise when raising littermates. A canine behaviorist, dog trainer, or veterinarian who is knowledgeable about puppy development and canine behavior will strongly advise you to rethink this decision. Dogs need to develop individually without constant competition with a littermate. At seven to eight weeks of age, they are ready to look to the outside world for bonding and individuality. Keeping puppies from the same litter together can interfere with their ability to bond with humans and develop as individuals.

"Littermate Syndrome" is a real problem that can be mild or severe. Mild cases often go unnoticed or are barely noticeable to most dog owners. The owner might experience some minor scuffles between littermates or minor anxiety when the dogs are separated. Severe cases of Littermate Syndrome will lead to constant fighting between the dogs, to the extent that they cause physical harm to one another. The fights can appear to come out of nowhere, and usually only escalate as the dogs mature. It is commonly thought that these fights occur because, normally, the littermates would no longer be living together after they are a couple of months old, yet they are being forced to share their space and resources.

Not only is there a concern for the relationship between the dog and the owner, but keeping littermates together can affect their relationships and interactions with other dogs. People often assume that having two puppies of the same age that play together and live together will satisfy their socialization needs with other canines. However, they often don't learn how to properly and positively socialize with other puppies, adolescents, or adult dogs because all they know is how to interact with a dog that is the exact same as them.

Most canine professionals would agree that it's best to adopt one puppy at a time. They recommend focusing on training, socializing, and raising the new puppy to be a well-rounded adult dog, and then later adding another member to your family, possibly one to three years down the line. If an owner is ready for the challenge and the upbringing of two puppies at the same time, then it's recommended that they consider adopting puppies from two separate litters, and of opposite sexes. Even then, it will be very important that the two new puppies have play, training, and bonding time separate from each other, to help their individual personalities blossom.

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team
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Additional links and resources:

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/adopting-littermates-dont>

<http://blog.betternaturedogtraining.com/2013/07/18/littermate-syndrome/>

<http://www.vetstreet.com/dr-marty-becker/is-it-a-good-idea-to-adopt-two-puppies-at-the-same-time>

http://www.whole-dog-journal.com/issues/13_1/features/Problems-Adopting-Two-Puppies-At-Once_16190-1.html?pg=2