

Littermates: Are Two Puppies Better than One? **Elizabeth Richards, Owner/PetWorks LLC ©**

More and more dog owners own multiple dogs in an attempt to compensate for the limited hours that today's busy families spend at home. It sounds like a great idea- the dogs can keep each other company (after all, they are pack animals) until the humans come home.

There is an increasing trend for new dog owners to use the same logic and purchase or adopt two puppies at the same time. Some new owners will even obtain puppies from the same litter. The assumption is that the puppies can keep each other company and grow up together.

Most dog trainers DO NOT recommend raising two littermates together. This scenario even has a name: Littermate Syndrome. This term describes the behavioral issues that can occur when pups from the same litter (or pups from different litters of similar ages) grow up together. Problems that are typical include:

- The puppies will bond together, not with their human family. When puppies individually leave their litters they can easily bond with their human family- having a littermate present inhibits this process.
- The puppies may never fully reach their potential as individuals, also called "failure to blossom." A puppy that is dependent upon his littermate will not have the opportunity to grow as an individual and be independent.
- Dogs that fail to mentally grow and gain confidence may exhibit anxiety, destructiveness, fearfulness and even aggression.

How can a dog owner avoid the complications of Littermate Syndrome? The obvious answer is DO NOT adopt two puppies at the same time (many breeders will not sell multiple puppies to a pet home.) If you know that you want two young dogs, a good rule of thumb is to adopt one pup and wait at least one year before adopting another dog.

If you already own two young puppies, many trainers will recommend re-homing one of the dogs unless you can commit to doing "Double Duty" for the pups, which is beyond the capability of most pet parents. Double Duty includes:

- Keeping the puppies in separate cages, ideally in separate rooms
- Playing with the puppies separately
- Training the puppies separately, including training classes
- Walking and pottyng the pups separately
- Taking the pups to the groomer and veterinarian separately

The pups can play together, but the owner's goal MUST be to raise two separate dogs that have their own identities. This separation is the only way to give the puppies a chance to grow to their full potential. The good news is that the "Double Duty" doesn't have to last forever....most experts agree that the dogs can be integrated after 12-14 months.

The best plan of action for families who want multiple young dogs is to obtain your first puppy and enjoy watching it grow and learn and become part of your family. When the puppy has matured, a second pup can be welcomed into the pack.