

First Night Nerves – an owner guide to peaceful nights with your new puppy

It's completely normal for most puppies to feel a little uncertain on their first night at home with their new family. After all, they are suddenly away from their mum and littermates and your home is full of new sounds, smells and sights.

Different pups react in different ways on the first few nights – some are confident and are happy to simply go straight to sleep wherever you choose, but others are more sensitive, and need a lot more emotional security if they are to settle down.

First things first. What you do during the daytime will have a big impact on how your pup behaves at bedtime.

During the daytime:

1. Don't allow your puppy to constantly follow you from room-to-room. While it might be flattering to have a little shadow, it can create over-attachment, and it's unrealistic to expect a puppy to be with you constantly during the day only to be suddenly separated from you for 7 hours during the night. Use a baby gate to create a little distance between you even when you are in the house and moving from room to room– and close the door when you are in the bathroom!
2. Make sure your pup has a bed of his own, or a comfortable crate, with snuggly blankets inside. Your new puppy will need a lot of sleep – even during the day – and typically this allows you to have 6 or 7 practise sessions before night falls. So, during the day when your puppy falls asleep, pick him up and put him in the bed or crate – and then leave him there. This way it won't be a shock to be left in bed when it comes to bedtime. Position the bed or crate where you will want the dog to rest at night. (Have another downstairs if necessary.) Make sure the bed is comfy, warm, and in a quiet place.
3. Give your pup sufficient mental stimulation and physical exercise during the day, so that he or she is ready for bed at night. Make sure he has been to the toilet last thing – stay out there with him or her until you know they have been. Do not allow your pup to become over-stimulated or excited before bed – just like kids they can then find it difficult to calm down and go to sleep.



The sleep set-up:

Although it's traditional for dogs to sleep downstairs in the kitchen on their own, many puppies find this sudden separation very upsetting, and may cry, howl, bark or become distressed. It's also a nightmare if you have young children, or near neighbours!

For most pups, sleeping nearer their owners in the first couple of weeks eases the transition and helps them to feel secure – it also means that you can hear when they need to go out to go to the toilet (most young pups can't make it all the way through the night) – which means you can get up and take them out – which helps their house training too.

A crate or dog bed in your bedroom, or just outside in a hallway for example, can work really well. You can always move this little by little to where you would prefer your dog sleeps, over a period of days or weeks.

Sleeping near you doesn't mean sleeping under the duvet though – the dog should have his own bed or be in a comfy crate for safety.



Bedtime routines:

- Try to establish a bedtime routine quickly and then stick to it so that your pup starts to predict it.
- The last hour should be calm and quiet.
- Take your pup outside to the toilet, stay with him or her to make sure he has been.
- Take your pup to his bed and settle him down. For some very small or worried pups, putting the crate up on a surface level with your bed means they can see you as well as hear you when you are lying down.
- Some owners swear by a heated pad or hot water bottle for new pups, and a ticking clock to represent their mother's heartbeat. The 'SnugglePuppie' (available on Amazon for about £29) is a commercial 'soft toy' which does the same thing – but beware that the heat pad provided needs regular replacement, and it's not designed for chewing!
- If your pup wakes in the night, get up and take him out to the toilet. Praise gently if he goes, but don't be too exciting. Don't play with him, allow him to play outside, or stay up with him downstairs if he doesn't seem ready to go back to sleep.
- Pop him back into his crate or bed, speak soothingly, but resist the temptation to pet him or allow him in the bed – or you may find he craves attention at 2am every night!

Morning!

Be prepared for the fact that most puppies aren't going to let you have a lie in! Once they are up (and most need to get up early to go out to the loo first thing when they awake) they are really up – ready to explore the new day and not wanting to waste a minute. Enjoy!

