

My two puppies are littermates and are now fighting all the time - what should I do?

Answer from Canine Behavioural School & CLEAR Dog Training)



Bringing home two puppies to keep each other company might seem a good idea but, as well as double cost and time involved, there are lots of hidden traps. In fact, many experienced breeders will not allow two littermates to go to the same home due to the problems that can easily develop.

These problems are sometimes referred to as '*littermate syndrome*' and often include:

- 🕒 The puppies bond closer to each other than they do to their human family.
- 🕒 Two puppies are much harder to house train – as a result of which they are soon put outside and become yard dogs.
- 🕒 Puppies that are inseparable often don't learn their own name properly and so learning to respond to simple words such as 'sit' or 'come' is more difficult.
- 🕒 Training is much harder with two puppies as they are a constant distraction to each other during lessons and so have to be kept apart during training sessions.
- 🕒 If they are ever separated from each other – as when one puppy is hospitalised – they can become anxious and, as a result, house soil, bark or destroy furniture.
- 🕒 As the puppies mature, playful fighting can develop into rivalry and serious aggression problems – especially between females; this often leads to the distressful choice of which dog to have re-homed.

Although it is good for your puppies to do things together, it is imperative that they also have the chance to develop as unique individuals by doing things separately as well. Problems don't **always** happen but, if you already own two puppies, these suggestions will make a difference.

- 🕒 Have separate sleeping areas
- 🕒 Feed them separately
- 🕒 Have separate crates
- 🕒 Play with them separately – with the other puppy out of sight
- 🕒 Have separate toys for each puppy
- 🕒 If a puppy misbehaves never use physical punishment, simply take away what s/he wants – usually your attention.
- 🕒 Use remote punishment as a last resort – such as spraying forbidden objects with something that tastes unpleasant.

- ☹️ Allow lots of daily play with each other, but use playing as a reward for doing something good for you first
- ☹️ Take them in the car separately
- ☹️ Take them to the vet separately
- ☹️ Take them to puppy school separately
- ☹️ Train them at home separately – with the other puppy out of sight
- ☹️ Train them at separate group classes
- ☹️ Take them for walks separately



Separately or together, your puppies need to be unique individuals and they will not have this opportunity if they are ALWAYS together. It is more work to do this but it will have long term benefits for you and your dogs.