

## **Siblings - what you need to know**

Good breeders/providers of puppies will generally not allow two puppies from the same litter to go together because this not only means twice as much work, but requires even more knowledge from owners as often there is a much higher increase of inter dog aggression in the home between two dogs of the same litter. This increases, interestingly, often with two bitches.

Even where two puppies are taken on from different litters - the best advice is to have 6 months between them and for most people to then have one male and one female.

If dogs grow up well and relatively trouble free, the other things that owners often struggle with are that their dogs seem to “mind read” each other and listen less when out and about. They tend to play with each other rather than other dogs and become even more bonded. Their recall is usually much worse and a bit like a little gang, egg each other on even more than other household dogs. They either become a little over confident and form what seems like a mini-pack (although pack theory is a whole other ball game and is not what most people thought it was)... or they are much more timid and wary and cling to each other. This in turn can also lead to more dog/dog aggression or reactivity to other dogs.

Either way, it is not helpful or healthy for the dogs. In my opinion and from personal experience, until the age of 2 (Stan Rawlinson in his work quoted below says 12-14 months) these dogs should ideally be socialised, walked, trained and pretty much do everything individually and they should do a lot of things on their own - including walking. If they attend day care, they should go at different times and/or different days - but not together. When it comes to spaying and neutering, the LESS confident (and I hesitate to say it because the word is misused - dominant) should be the one that is neutered - the exact opposite of what most people are told. This is because it creates a greater differential between the two personalities.

It is really useful to work through the Learn to Earn programme with each individual dog and do this in and around the home and on walks. This helps develop more confidence and independence and means the dogs work for “you” rather than competing with each other. Using the tether work outlined in the programme, this can also build more independence because one dog has to wait patiently and calmly and is rewarded randomly while the other dog is working for doing so. Then they swap.

Learn to Earn is the single most effective way of settling in pretty much all dogs and puppies, rescues and dealing with pretty much all behaviour issues - it is also the fastest and most effective way for “non-trainers” ie owners to help their dogs and doesn’t require them to have perfect timing or honed training skills.

For information - I have two full sisters, Ridgebacks, from the same litter and I worked them as much as possible according to the above and they have lived happily with each other. However, they still “mind read” and I get much better responses from them when working them as individuals. I only got to have two puppies from the same litter because of the job I do - otherwise the breeder would not have allowed this. Also the two dogs are complete opposites in character/ personality.

Another consideration is that at some point - one of the dogs is likely to die before the other or could get sick and leave this world before the sibling. This makes it very, VERY hard on the dog! Therefore, training individually and giving the dogs different jobs or tasks or even classes as an individual becomes even more important - providing the skill to be able to cope alone.

## **Further Information on Bringing up Litter Mates - quoted from the Dog Listener Stan Rawlinson's Site:**

***Getting all the foundations set in place before puberty and by sending dogs to day care/creches separately from each other will greatly contribute to avoiding some of the common problems outlined below (Leadchanges).***

Called "***Littermate Syndrome***" by some, we need to look out for where one of the dogs will appear bold and the other timid. In reality, the bold one is actually somewhat withdrawn and timid when his littermate is not there to give support.

Unfortunately, it is normally a false boldness, in reality, he has been emboldened by the others sibling's timidity. They often bark and yap at other dogs, and may either pretend to attack or actually attack to chase the other dogs away. This is normally fear based. They become so engrossed with each other that all other dogs are seen as a threat to their mutual alliance.

They often bark in the home when left, or even when the owner is still present and someone comes in or to the door. They become super attuned to anything that may be invading their territory. Often just soft sounds can trigger noise and warning barks. Normally it is just one of the dogs that start this behaviour, then the other one joins in acting almost as a mimic.

Without the right work the pair may come to fear all other dogs and unknown people, plus any situation where they are separated from each other. The stress this causes can often then spill over into aggression against each other culminating in fighting, in some cases causing serious injury or even death, known as "Sibling Rivalry" Strangely enough the worst fights are normally between bitches who can fight to the death.

Although nothing is set in stone, generally bringing together dogs with too many similar qualities, ie age, size, sex, temperament, and breed, may spark a conflict.

***Massive over-bonding can occur.*** The inter-relationship of siblings can become so intense that it controls everything they do. They suffer when separated, even for small periods of time. The relationship they have with their owners may also decline and they start to look inwards rather than outwards.

Siblings are also more difficult to train and in many cases will start fighting when they get to the onset of puberty.

We see this with human twins. Parents are advised from a young age to stimulate and play with twins separately, helping them to become more rounded adults rather than a symbiotic double act. I have twin brothers and twin grandchildren, so I do have some experience of this phenomenon.

### **Castration**

If you have to neuter ***whatever you do you must not spay or castrate both dogs.*** Read my article on neutering, it is not as simple or clear-cut as people imagine.

***Never neuter both dogs especially if these dogs are male.*** If you are going to castrate, it must always be the less dominant (be alert to this terminology and this doesn't relate to

“dominance theory” which is inaccurate in the complex world of dog social structure) of the pair that is done.

With females, it is even more complex. Neutering can increase the level of aggression rather than diminish it. Taking away vital calming hormones such as Oestrogen and Progesterone can fuel the level of aggression to the point that they could fight to the death.

## Two Choices

To my mind you have two choices with siblings from the same litter or two young pups from different breeds. Whilst I believe the first solution is the most practicable, ***which is to re-home one of them***, I am also aware it is the hardest and most difficult for the owners.

***Your second choice is to create two individual dogs, with two separate identities and personalities, without the total reliance on each other that normally happens in these situations. To do this you will need to work twice as hard because all the things you did together you will now need to do totally apart.***

## Things you must do

Everything must now be done independently to allow for the Siblings to have any chance of becoming separate entities instead of the reduced sum of the whole.

- Walk them separately
- Feed them separately
- Train them separately
- Crate them separately
- Play with them separately

Literally, everything you do should be separate. That includes Puppy and Training classes if possible, take them to a trainer that understands the inherent difficulties of raising two puppies together. Take them on separate nights if that is available, hopefully to the same trainer. ***They can play together but only at strict designated times and for a period of no more than 15 minutes each designated playtime.***

This regime will not be for life, as the pups will after a period of about 12 to 14 months have formed their own personalities and temperaments; at this age, they will have become confident of their own individual abilities. Not as in most cases total inter-dependence on each other when they are raised, trained, and fed together.

Without the total reliance on their sibling for constant support, they will grow and blossom into much rounder and less aggressive and fearful individuals. ***I cannot stress how important it is to separate the siblings until they are older. It will produce two individuals rather than an impaired two parts of the whole.***

***It is worth stating that it is not only siblings that have these problems. If you raise two young pups from different litters or even breeds, you can have similar problems.***