



**OPERATION
KINDNESS**

Littermate Syndrome

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It can be difficult to imagine adopting just one puppy when you see them with their littermates. But many experts agree that bringing home littermates is not necessarily what's best for the puppies.

"Littermate Syndrome" is the term used to describe the anecdotal observations of many pet professionals, rescues, breeders and pet owners of siblings that develop behavior issues when being raised in the same home.

Adopting littermates can cause many issues including an unwillingness or inability to socialize with other dogs and people and an unhealthy bond that can cause severe separation anxiety. Adopting two puppies from the same litter also increases the chances of aggression between the dogs.

If you are considering adopting littermates, there are a few things that you should be prepared to do to increase the likelihood that you will end up with two well-adjusted adult dogs. Even if you are able to fulfill all of the following, it does not guarantee that littermates growing up in the same home will not develop severe behavior issues stemming from an unhealthy attachment to each other.

1. **Provide each puppy their own crate.** You can keep the crates close together at first but gradually move them away from each other so that the dogs become comfortable and relaxed when separated from each other. The crates can be put in bedrooms so that the puppies can be close to family members at nighttime.
2. **Take both dogs to training separately.** Training each dog separately ensures that you have the puppy's undivided attention. If you are attending the same training class with both puppies, have them each handled by separate people and keep the dogs away from each other so they can stay focused on their handlers rather than each other. Group training classes provide an opportunity to learn how to communicate with you as well as experience appropriate interactions with other dogs and people. Many puppy classes will allow puppy socialization time where the dogs get to play with each other.
3. **Separate play times.** If you always play with the puppies together you may find that they will end up playing with each other and leave you out of the play time. Make sure that each dog is getting your attention and the ability to learn how to play with people when separated from each other.

For behavior and training advice, please contact Operation Kindness at behavior@operationkindness.org or visit www.operationkindness.org/training.

Additional Resources:

- <https://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2015/12/28/littermate-syndrome.aspx> by Dr. Karen Becker, DVM
- <https://moderndogmagazine.com/articles/littermate-syndrome/80050> By Nicole Wilde, CPDT-KA and published author of many dog behavior books
- <https://thebark.com/content/dont-take-two-littermates> By Jeff Stallings, CPDT-KA
- <https://www.thehonestkitchen.com/blog/what-is-littermate-syndrome/>
- <https://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/adopting-littermates-dont> By Patricia McConnell, PhD, CAAB
- <https://blog.betternaturedogtraining.com/2013/07/18/littermate-syndrome/> By Jeff Stallings, CPDT-KA
- <https://paws4udogs.wordpress.com/2012/03/30/littermate-syndrome/> By Sara Reusche, CPDT-KA, CVT, ANWI
- <https://www.petful.com/behaviors/littermate-syndrome/> By Dr. Debra Lichtenberg, VMD
- <https://www.successjustclicks.com/littermate-syndrome/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/doctor.karen.becker/posts/littermate-syndrome-is-when-two-puppies-adopted-from-the-same-litter-give-more-a/10155019036232748/> By Dr. Karen Becker, DVM