

Wolf Families

Wolves live in family groups called packs. A pack is usually made up of a male parent, a female parent and their pups from the last few years. Usually, four to six pups are born together in a litter. The pups in a litter are called litter mates. Their first home is usually a den, which can be a small cave or a hole dug in the ground. It must be big enough to shelter the mother and pups from weather and protect the pups from other animals that may want to hurt them. Packs sometimes use the same den for several years, or they may find a new den each year.



Pups grow inside their mother for about 63 days before they are born. At birth, they weigh only one pound, and their eyes are closed. Pups grow quickly. About 10 to 14 days after they are born, they open their eyes. By two weeks of age, the pups can waddle, and about a week after that, they may come out of the den for the first time. At first, they live only on milk from their mother. By three weeks of age, they start eating meat. Since pups are too young to hunt, adult wolves bring meat to them in their stomachs. The pups lick around the mouth of the adult when it returns from the hunt, and the food comes back up into the adult's mouth. This sounds terrible to us, but wolf pups love it! The pups eat the regurgitated meat within seconds. Any pup who is

less aggressive than his or her brothers and sisters gets less food. If pups are too persistent in their begging for food, adult wolves may growl to warn them to stop. The adults may also leave the area in an attempt to avoid the pups.

All the wolves in a pack help take care of the pups. When the pups are very small, other pack members bring food to the mother so she does not have to leave the den. When the pups are a little larger, pack members take turns bringing them food, playing with them and even baby-sitting. Once the pups are about eight weeks old, the adults leave the den and take the pups to a rendezvous site. In this open area, the wolves gather to sleep, play, eat and just hang out. Until the pups are old enough to go with the adults, they stay at the rendezvous site. Often, one of the adult wolves stays with the pups to watch over them.

Wolf pups love to play. The pups will play with each other and their older brothers and sisters, stalking and pouncing on each other. This type of play will help them all their lives, as it is practice for stalking and killing prey and learning the social interactions of the pack. Pups will also play with "toys" like bones, feathers or the skins of dead animals. They "kill" the toys over and over again and carry them around as trophies. As they get larger, they will use the skills they learned from this play as they begin to hunt small animals, like rabbits. When pups are six months old, they will start hunting larger animals with the rest of the pack.



http://www.wolf.org/wolves/learn/justkids/kids_wolf_families.asp