

Tips for Adopting a Shelter Dog

If you've been considering adding a canine member to your family, there's no better time to check your local animal shelter. People are often surprised by the variety of dogs that can be found at local shelters.

Moreover, adopting a dog from a shelter comes with added benefits. Most shelters will include vaccinations, deworming, heartworm testing, spaying or neutering, microchipping and even a training DVD with their adoptions. However, before committing to dog adoption, there are many factors pet parents should consider — after all, there's far more to caring for a dog than merely providing food, water and shelter:

Before You Adopt

When deciding whether or not to adopt a dog, potential pet parents must assess their personal lives and consider the following:

Are you ready to make a long-term commitment?

How much time do you have daily to dedicate to your new dog? Be sure to assess how often you are home, how much time you have to spend for training, playtime, exercise and potty walks. You'll need to select a dog that fits your lifestyle. Busy families may want to consider a mature dog that is already trained, while other families are more likely to have the extra time and attention necessary for training younger, more active dogs and puppies.

Are you financially able to provide for your dog's needs? The costs associated with caring for a dog will vary. Pet parents should also factor in the variable cost of veterinary visits and training classes. So make sure you account for these expenses when determining if you can afford to care for your dog.

Selecting the Right Shelter Dog for Your Family

A common mistake many adopters make is choosing a dog based on his looks or breed rather than his personality. Do plenty of research before you go to the shelter to determine if the energy level, trainability and behaviors of certain breeds are best suited for your lifestyle. Consider your living arrangements and think about what doggie personality will be best for your home.

The animal shelter's staff and volunteers strive to provide the best possible care to their animals, but it's not the same as having a loving home. While interacting with the dogs in the shelter, keep in mind that many of them act differently in the kennel environment. As a result, you should ask to spend some time with the dog in a quiet area. This will give the dog a chance to relax and show more of his true personality.

Items to Have on Hand

Once you have found the right dog to fit your lifestyle, it is time to stock up on the right tools that will ease the transition from shelter to your home. Some of those tools which are good to have on hand include:

- Flat or buckle collar with an ID tag
- Six-foot leash
- High-quality dog food
- Some durable chew toys and doggie puzzles
- Properly sized dog crate
- Food and water bowls
- Treats for training

Homeward Bound!

Now that you've brought your dog home, you will need to designate a dog-safe area that's just for him, like an area in your kitchen or laundry room. Choose a place where he can go and be by himself, without the stress that sometimes comes from being around kids or other pets. Your dog-safe area should include a water dish, a few safe and durable chew toys and a dog crate as his bed.

While he's getting comfortable, if you have children in the home, take a moment to talk with them about how to treat the family's newest member. Also, do your best to not overwhelm your new dog. Some dogs may be shy at first, but given some space and time they should quickly adjust. Utilizing a product such as **Comfort Zone**® with DAP® (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) also can help reassure and calm your new pet as well as reduce stress-related behaviors such as excessive barking, urinating in the home and general hyperactivity associated with the dramatic changes in his life.

Your dog will be curious about his new home and will want to investigate. So when you allow him to explore new areas of your home, keep him on a leash to help manage where he goes.

When you can't supervise him, confine him in his crate or dog-safe area. Remember to always generously reward him with a treat and lots of praise when he does go potty in the right place. The first few days in his new home will likely be the most challenging for your dog. Make sure you spend some special time together getting to know each other and establishing some routines.

Sharing your home with a four-legged friend can be one of life's most rewarding experiences. Dogs give us unconditional love, provide us with companionship, and can even help relieve our stress after a long day. If you and your family are looking for a new companion, we encourage you to support the ASPCA's National Adopt-A-Dog month and visit your local animal shelter or rescue group to find your next best friend.

