

Adopting a rescue dog



There are a variety of reasons why a dog may end up in a rescue centre, which may include: a change of owners' circumstances e.g. change in job or home, a partnership splitting up, starting a family, a death or an illness. Other reasons may be the dog was a stray or is an ex-racing Greyhound who has been retired. Sometimes puppies may be brought in by a family whose dog has had a litter or sometimes a pregnant female arrives and the puppies are born at the centre.

Dogs from a rescue centre will have a variety of backgrounds, and so this handout is designed to guide you through the process of finding a suitable rescue dog, how to assess whether they are suitable, and the process of introducing them to your home.

Finding a rescue centre

There are several large, well-known organisations throughout the UK including the Dogs Trust, Battersea Dogs Home, the RSPCA and the Scottish SPCA, National Animal Welfare Trust, Wood Green Animal Shelters, and The PDSA—they all have a website to visit for more information.

There are also many smaller organisations that may not have dedicated kennels and use foster carers — there may be details of these in your local area. There are also specific breed rescues e.g. Lab rescue (see Kennel Club, Find a Rescue Dog for more details).

We do not recommend Family Dog families take on a dog from private adverts. With private adverts, you have no guarantee that the dog will turn out to be how it is described, either in health or their behaviour. It is recommended to only work with registered organisations, or Kennel Club assured breeders if looking to rehome an adult dog of a certain breed.

Visiting a rescue centre

When first visiting a centre, have an idea of what type of dog will best suit your family (general size, energy levels etc.) but you will still need to be flexible on the size, age, sex, and breed. You are unlikely to find a suitable dog on your first visit, so it is advised that you build up a relationship with the rescue centre through regular phone calls and visits so that you have the best chance of finding the right dog. This may take up to a year of investing your time but this is how parents have been successful with finding the right dog.



You may want to explain that you have taken part in the **Family Dog Service** workshops and have an understanding of what taking on a dog entails.

When visiting a centre, speak to a rehomer who will be able to sit down with you to explain the adoption process and see if there are any dogs who would be suitable.

Next Steps

Step 1: Questionnaire

On your first visit to a rescue centre you may be asked to fill in a questionnaire so they can find out a bit more about you, your family, and what type of dog you are looking for. Questions may include:

What size of dog are you looking for, what age, male or female, do you have an enclosed garden with high fencing, who lives at home, will the dog be left alone, do you own other animals, how much daily exercise can you give the dog, and what is your past experience with dogs?



Step 2: View the dogs and talk to staff

Dogs up for rehoming will have information about them on the front of their kennels and/or online. Try to read between the lines as these are only a guide. By the time a dog has settled into kennels and gone through their assessment, staff will have a good idea of the behaviour and trainability of the dog, so speak to the rehomer about any dogs that may be suitable. If there are no dogs up for rehoming who are suitable, the rehomer may know of dogs not yet up for rehoming who may be a possibility.

Staff are unlikely to be able to contact you about available dogs individually, so as mentioned, it is advised that you have regular contact with the centre through visits and phone calls.

Step 3: Shortlist

Make a shortlist of dogs who may be suitable.

The rehomer will then sit down with you and go through all the dog's history and details to make sure that you and the rehomer are happy with the dog on paper before you meet the dog. Find out as much information as you can, dogs are likely to have undergone an assessment when entering the centre. This may include temperament testing, checking whether the dog is happy to be handled, behaviour around other dogs, their reaction to cats, and what they are like when they are left alone.

If they have come from a previous home, hopefully detailed information on the dog should be available. Such as how long they had the dog and where they obtained the dog, health of the dog, if it has any ongoing health concerns and the dog's behaviour such as has the dog ever bitten or has any fears or phobias. They should also know if the dog has had contact with children, visitors, cats and other dogs. They may also know what kind of household the dog is from e.g. busy or quiet, and what routine the dog is used to, such as whether they are used to being left alone, used to being handled and groomed, ok with travelling, and what training they have had. Ideally suitable dogs are those that have come from a home with children, or had regular contact with visiting children, and who have been comfortable and happy in this environment. When a dog's background isn't known the staff will advise you as best they can.

Adoption Process

Step 4: Meet the selected dog (s)

Meet the dog you think you may be interested in. We have put together a **checklist** at the end of this handout to keep in mind when meeting potential dogs.

If you think the dog is suitable then you can reserve the dog. This gives you time to think about it away from the rescue centre. At Dogs Trust that dog will be held for you for around 10 days in which time you will need to complete the rehoming checklist.

In this time get to know the dog. It is advised that you visit the dog several times and see them both on lead outside and in a room off lead to see how they interact with all the family. If possible, take the dog for a walk.

Step 5: Home visit

The rescue centre may want to conduct a home visit—prepare the home environment by making sure the garden is secure and the house is set up for a dog. You may only have 48 hours to rectify any problems.

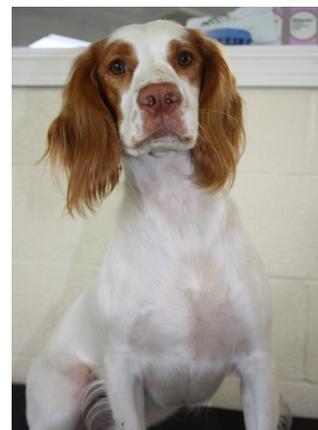
The centre may also ask for a reference.

Step 6: Vet check

All dogs from Dogs Trust are vaccinated, neutered, microchipped, and checked by the vet before being allowed home. Puppies that are too young to be neutered will be sent home with a voucher so it can be done later.

Step 7: Pre-adoption talk

They may discuss how to make your new dog comfortable in your home, or you will need to attend a pre-adoption talk which lasts around 45 minutes.



Step 8: Going Home

When both parties are happy that the correct match has been made and all paperwork has been completed, you can then formally adopt the dog.

There is likely to be an adoption fee—this will vary but Dogs Trust charge £80.

Depending on the organisation they may offer short term free pet insurance.

Arrange to collect the dog from the centre in the morning so they have the maximum amount of time to settle in before bedtime. Go to the centre with one other adult, who can drive the car while you look after the dog. An adult dog will need to be confined safely in the car. Go equipped with towels etc. in case the dog is sick and take a bottle of water and a bowl if it is a hot day. Try not to stop on the way home; if it is a long journey make sure the dog has their collar securely fastened and a lead is attached before allowing them out of the car.

Step 8: Going Home

Remember that the kennel environment is very stressful for a dog, they may be uncertain of you, your family and your home so must be given time to adjust. A new dog won't necessarily initially enjoy a lot of fuss and attention, this will take time. Make sure the children are prepared for this.

Although you may be keen to start on training it is important to allow time for the dog to find its feet in their new home. Try to make things as easy to understand for the dog as possible, already decide where the dog will sleep, what rooms the dog will initially have access to and set up the dog's bolt hole. Have clear house rules that everyone sticks to and keep visitors to a minimum. Try to also introduce the normal routine of the house, so possibly avoid taking 2 weeks off work only to unsettle the dog again in 2 weeks time when you return. Try to avoid school holidays also, as this won't be the normal routine and the household will be busier than usual.

Concentrate on building a bond and only on the training the dog needs to become settled in the home. Through using kind, rewarding techniques encourage calm behaviours such as waiting patiently and greeting people in a calm manner and reinforce house training. You can also start to teach the dog their name and the foundations of coming when called around the house.

Try to notice the good behaviours the dog is showing such as lying down or sitting quietly, coming in from the garden when called and friendly responses to family members.

Please see your other factsheets on 'Settling in your dog into a therapeutic dog role' for more information, the process is summarised on the back of this handout.

Step 9: Advice & Support

You should be able to contact the rehoming centre for advice about your dog. They have animal behaviourists on hand that you can arrange one to one sessions with if there are any problems.

Also please do not hesitate to make full use of the **PAWS** aftercare service and Facebook group. Let us know if you have adopted a dog so we can provide any help or advice you may need.



Checklist for assessing a rescue dog

Assessment	Behaviour	Y/N	Assessment	Behaviour	Y/N
How does the dog behave in the kennel	Hides		How does the dog interact with the children	Ignores	
	Seems withdrawn			Friendly	
	Over excited			Wants to interact	
	Seems settled			Avoids	
	Seems stressed			Fearful	
When being handled by a known person, are they	Shows repetitive behaviours such as spinning, constant barking, over grooming		Behaviour with food / chew	No interest	
	Friendly on lead			Snatches	
	Friendly off lead			Becomes over excited	
	Happy to be touched			Guards it	
	Interacting with them			Carries it but does not eat it	
	Interested in you			Attempts to bury / hide it	
	Interested in the environment / seeks attention			Chews / eats it calmly	
	Trying to find a way out			Ignores	
	Very over excited			Sniffs	
	Relaxed			Carries	
How does the dog behave out of the kennel in an enclosed space with you	Under confident		Behaviour with toys	Plays	
	Stressed			Guards	
	Jumpy at noises			Lives in kennel with another dog	
	Vocal			Can be lead walked with other dogs	
	Chews / destructive			Can run free with other dogs	
	Toilets			Cannot be mixed with other dogs	
	No known problems			Cats	
	Low			Small animals	
	Medium			Livestock	
	High				
What are they like being left alone			Interactions with other dogs		
Exercise / Stimulation level they need				Do the staff know if they are ok with	
Comments			Comments		

Settling in your dog see 'Settling in your dog to the PAWS dog role' for more detailed guidance.

1st Month	1- 3 Months	3 - 6 Months	6 - 9 Months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess dog's temperament around food. Supervise children and dogs at all times. Limit as much as possible children having direct contact with the dog and encourage 'non contact' interactions. Establish the dog's bolt hole. Give the dog plenty of things to chew. Establish team leader role. Establish a routine with the dog. Find out what your dogs favourite things are. Start to introduce your dog to handling. Introduce very short rides in the car. Try not to concentrate on training, allow the dog to settle in. Manage behaviours rather than try to resolve them until the dog is settled. Communicate the house rules by rewarding correct behaviours. Start to think of ways to strengthen dog - child relationship ready for the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to ensure the team leader role is cemented. Start to list in priority what you will need to work on with the dog over the coming months. 'Life skills for puppies' book may be helpful for this. Teach your dog one or two tricks that children might like to do with the dog. Teaching sit is useful for dogs that may be mouthing or jumping up. Identify any problematic behaviours in the home and work with us to resolve them. Find an appropriate positive trainer or training class to attend should this be helpful e.g. Puppy School, APDT or APBC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start to introduce one or two new walks but be careful not to overwhelm them. If you notice any anxiety to new things add them to your gradual introductions tick list. You should notice the dog is now more settled in the home. Start to slowly work through your gradual introductions tick list. Check what the dog's behaviour is like around other dogs from a distance. The rescue organisation should be able to provide information on how your dog is likely to react. The dog should now be looking to the team leader for support and guidance. Once this is happening the team leader can start to involve other family members in the daily care of the dog. Start allowing children to have more contact with the dog under close supervision. Start to introduce basic training like lead work and general obedience. Start to use your dog as a role model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get the vet to give them a very thorough check. Dogs should now be confident with the majority of everything that happens inside and outside the home. Make sure you have gradually introduced anything you are likely to want them to inter-vene with. Start advanced training. Look into structured activities available to take part in with your dog e.g. agility