



**Sussex North & Brighton Branch**  
Registered Charity No.206630

## **BRINGING HOME A RESCUE DOG**

Adopting a rescue dog is one of the most rewarding things you can do. However it is important that you get the right dog for your family and your lifestyle and manage your expectations of your new furry friend. Dogs end up needing to be rescued and/or rehomed for a variety of reasons, ranging from owner change in circumstances to unresolved behaviour issues. It is a myth that all rescue dogs have behaviour problems, but of course some may have some due to lack of training or mistreatment. For these reasons it is important you do your research, be honest with yourself about what you are willing and able to take on and most importantly, be prepared! This is your guide to choosing, preparing for and integrating your new rescue dog into your home.

## **CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOG FOR YOU**

Before adopting a dog it is important to do your research and be honest about the type of dog that would best suit your needs and lifestyle. For example, if you are out and about a lot, then a young puppy with training needs wouldn't be for you, and if you live in a one bedroom flat then a bigger excitable dog wouldn't be suitable. Breed type will also come into it as most breeds have some breed specific traits.



**Things to consider...**

**Temperament:** Dogs have a wide range of temperaments depending on their breed, age and life experiences. Consider what temperament would most suit you before rehoming a dog. For example, if you would like a foody, cuddle bug, who's happy to go on pottering walks, then an older Golden retriever would suit, or if you want a lively adventure buddy who would thrive on long walks and lots of training, then an adolescent dog, something like a young spaniel, could suit you. Also consider the individual dog's past experiences, as although breed traits and age can give you a good idea of temperament, that won't always be the case.

**Size:** Size is an important thing to consider before rehoming a dog. For example, if you have a small flat with no garden, then a larger, more energetic dog, or even a nervous dog of any size, who may find walks overwhelming at first, would not suit you. Also consider that a larger dog will also usually be stronger as well, so take into account the individual dog's training requirements and also your own physical strength.

**Coat type:** Of course we all have our own preference of what we want our new dog to look like, from coat colour, to coat length and texture. Although of course you should take these preferences into consideration, you could also consider what comes with it. For example, if you are very house proud and would be irritated by dog hair on your furniture, then a longer haired breed would probably not suit you. Also consider the maintenance that comes with different coat types, such as grooming and bathing needs. Another thing to consider is that there is really no such thing as a "hypoallergenic" dog. There is no guarantee that just because you select a certain breed, they will not shed hair or irritate pet allergies.

**Age:** The age of the dog you are adopting is an important thing to think about. Yes the idea of a cute little puppy is very appealing to most people, but with a puppy comes a lot of time and training and you will also need to commit to dog parenthood for a lot longer, 10 – 20 years on average depending on the breed and health of the dog. Age also plays a huge part in the dog's behaviour and temperament. If you don't want to deal with the chewing and mouthing that comes with canine adolescents, then think about choosing a dog over two years old that has reached adulthood.

**Behaviour:** As previously stated, rescue dogs do not always have behaviour issues and some end up needing to be rehomed for reasons that are nothing to do with their behaviour. Of course some will have training and behaviour needs depending on the dog's age and past experiences. Be honest with yourself and the rescue organisation about your level of experience and confidence in dealing with training or behaviour issues. For example, if you rehome a young dog who is friendly and confident with humans and other dogs, it may require house training. This is a simple issue that can be easily trained, either alone or with the help of a qualified dog trainer. Another example could be an adult dog who is fearfully reactive towards other dogs. This issue can be resolved with behaviour modification, consistency and the help of a qualified behaviourist, but not everyone will be able or willing to put the work in that is required.

**Cost:** Having a dog can be expensive, so it is important to make sure you can afford the costs involved with dog ownership. Costs can include vet bills, pet insurance, training, dog

walkers, food, bedding, leads and harnesses, toys etc. The type of dog you rehome can also affect the cost. For example a larger breed of dog will require more food than a smaller dog and so the cost will be more. There are also certain breed types that are more prone to illness and injury, such as brachycephalic breeds like Pugs and French bulldogs that are prone to breathing and eye problems, or German Shepherds who are prone to back and hip problems. This is where research into your preferred breed and type of dog is important to make sure you are prepared mentally, emotionally and financially. The age of the dog will also affect costs, such as young puppies needing their vaccinations and lots of toys to keep them busy, or older dogs who may require more veterinary care or specific diets. Breed, age and existing health problems will also have an impact on the cost of pet insurance, so make sure to get some quotes to check affordability.

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## PREPARING FOR YOUR NEW ARRIVAL

To ensure that bringing your new rescue dog home goes as smoothly as possible, it is vital to be prepared. This includes having your home and garden ready before your new pal sets paw through the door. It is also a good idea to agree to your house rules for your new dog as a family, so everyone can start off on the same page.



### Things to prepare...

**Equipment:** Make sure you have all the essential pieces of equipment for your dog, including a nice comfy bed and bedding, food and water bowls, toys, lead, collar, harness and ID tag. On a dog ID tag you **legally** have to have the owner's name and address. You are not legally required to have a phone number on a dog tag but this is highly recommended. Also highly recommended is **NOT** to include your dog's name, as this will give any potential thieves their name, which they can use to encourage your dog to go with them. The ID tag should be displayed on the dog's collar.

**Food:** If it is known by the rescue or previous owner, find out what food the dog is currently on and if they have any food allergies. Keeping your new friend on the same food will help ease them into their new life, as it will be something that is familiar to them. If you wish to change their food, do so slowly, mixing the two food types for a few days before making the change. This will prevent any upset tummies.

**Your home:** Make sure you have checked your home for any potential hazards such as wires your new dog may chew or bins they may rummage through. Set your dog up for success and keep anything you don't want them to get their mouths on up and out of the way, until you can assess what training they may need in this area. Not only will this protect any prized possessions, but it will keep pup safe as well. It is a good idea to allocate a "safe space" for your dog for the first few days and weeks. This should include their bed, food and water bowls, plus a couple of toys. It is also a good idea to include some puppy

pads/newspaper if you aren't sure about how house trained the dog may be. This way your dog won't have to feel stress trying to find their resources (food, water, bed) in a new environment. This is particularly Important if your dog has been kept in kennels before they come home with you, as they have been used to having all of their resources in a very small space, so having them spread out across an unfamiliar home too quickly, can cause confusion and stress.

**Garden:** Check that your garden fence is high enough so that your chosen new fur friend can't jump over it. Also check there are no gaps or holes that they could squeeze through. You would be surprised how small a hole a big dog can squeeze through, so rather be too cautious than not cautious enough. It is also a good idea to check there are no plants in your garden that are toxic to your dogs. There are species of plants found in gardens that can cause symptoms including an upset stomach, all the way through to death.

**Veterinary:** Make sure you are aware of any pre-existing medical problems that your new dog may have. It is also a good idea to have already contacted the veterinary surgery you wish to use before you bring your dog home. This way you are ready in case any emergencies happen. It is also a good idea to book an appointment to have your dog go in and meet the vet, have a fuss and treat and then leave. This way your dog would have had a positive experience with the vet before any further visits that will require formal handling and / or treatment and it will also let you know how your dog copes when in the vet so you can be prepared. Shop around for pet insurance, there are many providers so see what's out there and what best suits your needs.

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## FAMILY AND OTHER PET INTRODUCTIONS

There are ways we can help to make sure your new rescue dog has indeed found their forever home. One way of doing this is with proper introductions. If it is possible to do so, it is advisable that you introduce the dog you are considering rehoming, to all existing members of the family, that they will be sharing their home with, both human and canine, before you make the decision to rehome. This way you can make sure everyone is happy and the dog gets along well with everyone. However, this is not always something that can be done. Regardless if introductions are before or after adoption, there are some guidelines to follow to make them go as smoothly as possible.



### Meeting pup for the first time...

**Adult humans:** When meeting your rescue dog for the first time, it is important to be aware of the dog's emotional state. It can be tempting to go straight in for a cuddle whilst squealing with delight (because it's exciting right?!) but try to hold back and assess before you do. If you are meeting the dog in a rescue centre or Kennels, be aware that it can be a very stressful environment and they may not be feeling their happiest. It is a good idea to let the dog initiate the first physical contact. Once they have come up to you to say hi and brushed or leaned against you, you are probably good to let the petting commence! Just make sure to look out for signs of stress in the dog, if you see any of the following signs, back off and give the dog a bit of space...

- Lip and nose licking
- Yawning
- Ears back
- Lowering body
- Tension throughout body and face

Also be aware that if a dog rolls over and shows you their belly when you first meet them, do NOT go in for a belly rub. This is a form of appeasement behaviour by the dog showing



you the most vulnerable part of their body to show they aren't a threat and asking you to back off. Ignoring this can lead to the dog having to escalate their behaviour in order to get you to back off. Only belly rub once you really know the dog and there is no tension through the body. See example pictures below.



NO BELLY RUB PLEASE



YES BELLY RUB PLEASE

**Human children:** As with adult introductions, make sure when children meet the dog for the first time they are calm and not too noisy. Again, make sure the pup initiates the first physical contact and that the pup has plenty of space to move away if feeling uncomfortable. Never force a dog into an interaction, look out for signs of stress and don't overcrowd them. Rather be over cautious and listen to the dog's body language, than not cautious enough.

**Existing dog/dogs:** Make sure when you are introducing your existing dog to your new dog that it is done on neutral ground in a field or park and not in your home straight away. Also make sure that there is plenty of space for either dog to move away if they are feeling uncomfortable. Never force dogs to meet when on the lead and listen to their body language. Dogs have three options when they are scared of something. Option one is to move away and this option is taken away if they are on lead. Option two is appeasement, such as lip and nose licking, lowering their body and rolling over to show their belly. If options one and two are taken away or not listened to, option three is aggression, which includes a subtle lip curl, barking, growling, snarling, warning bite, then bite. Always listen when a dog growls and never tell them off for it. Telling off a dog for growling is like taking the batteries out of a smoke detector. It is a warning, heed it. First introduce dogs whilst on lead, to make sure you have them if the meeting were to go wrong, but keep the lead nice and slack to simulate the feeling of being off lead and make sure the leads don't get tangled together. Resist the urge to keep the lead tight or pull back on the lead if you are feeling worried, as this will travel down the lead and let the dog know that there may be something to worry about. Start off by having one of the dogs walking in front and the other following behind, but at a slight distance away. After a while, swap who is in front. This is so both dogs can get each other's scent, without any potentially worrying face to face greetings. Once both dogs seem comfortable with this, we can look at letting them meet. It is a good idea to apply the 3 second rule when introducing dogs. Dogs usually make up their mind if they are going to like another dog in 3 seconds. Let the dogs meet and after 3 seconds recall them away or lure them away with some food. Never drag them away and if they choose to

go back for a second meeting then you are most likely ok, but if they move away from each other let them and don't force them back together again. They may just need more time and space to assess how they are feeling. Continue this with short meetings followed by walking again, whilst keeping an eye on both dogs' body language for signs of stress.

**Other pets:** When introducing your new dog to other pets in the house, such as cats, it is a good idea to scent swap first. Keep them separate for the first couple of days and swap their blankets over each day so they can get used to each other's smell. If they don't use a particular blanket for sleeping you can simply rub a blanket over each of them to get the scent then swap them over. Once this is done, you can let them smell each other under a closed door. If this goes well you can try letting them see each other through a glass door or baby gate etc. If at any point it doesn't go well, go back to the stage before for a couple more days. It is important not to rush introductions to allow for an eventual harmonious home life and also for the safety of the smaller pets.

## **IMPORTANT**

Make sure you always put your existing pet first. It is their home and their feelings should take priority over any new or potential new pet that isn't yet a member of the household.

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## SETTLING IN YOUR RESCUE DOG

When you are settling in your new dog it is important to manage your expectations. Some dogs will relax immediately and it will be like they have always been there and others will take a bit longer to relax and trust you. This will depend mostly on the dog's past experiences. Most dogs take on average 3 months to start to settle in and show you their true personalities, but some can take as little as 3 days. There are some things you can do in order to help your dog feel more settled.



### Things that can help...

**Space:** Space is your friend when you are trying to help your new rescue dog settle into your home. Make sure they have a "safe space" allocated to just them where they can take themselves away if they are feeling overwhelmed. As previously mentioned their safe space should include their bed, food and water bowls and some toys.

**Time:** Give your new friend time to settle in. This may mean just letting them get used to their new home and garden for a day or two, before any walks happen and before any visitors arrive. There is a good chance that they have come from a stressful kennel environment, so take things at their pace.

**Separate resources:** Make sure if there are any other pets in the home that they all have their own separate water bowls, food bowls, beds and toys. They should also ideally be in separate places in the home. This way you avoid any stress or conflict over precious resources, which could lead to the damage of any bonds that are or may be forming.

**Calming agents:** There are various calming agents available on the market that can help reduce stress in dogs. One example is Pet remedy. Pet remedy contains valerian, a natural calming agent for dogs. Another example is Adaptil, a product that contains pheromones produced by mother dogs to calm their puppies. In more extreme anxiety cases, medications can be prescribed by a vet.



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### TRAINING AND BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

Rescue dogs can have a range of behaviour and training needs and sometimes can have none at all. Like with any dog it will depend on what training they have received in the past and also past experiences, both positive and negative. Training is the act of training a new and wanted behaviour in our dogs, such as training them to come back when called or walk nicely on the lead. Behaviour modification is the process of undoing unwanted behaviours such as fearful reactivity towards other dogs. Training using reward based methods can be a fun way for dogs and owners to bond. Behaviour modification takes a lot longer as it usually deals with issues that have been caused by fear, so it can be a delicate web to



unravel.

#### Training...

Dogs are not born knowing what we require of them, so it is up to us to teach them. If we don't want our dog jumping up at us, then it is up to us to teach them what we would like them to do instead. If we want our dog to come back when called, then it is up to us to train that behaviour. There are two ways of training or undoing a behaviour, reward based methods, or punishment based methods.

**Reward** based methods work by training the new behaviour and then rewarding it to increase it.

**Punishment** based methods work by punishing the dog if they get it wrong, and so increase the likelihood they will get it right.

## **DO NOT BE TEMPTED BY PUNISHMENT METHODS**

Sadly, punishment based methods are everywhere out there and even some TV dog trainers are still using these outdated methods. Some punishment methods do work, but they work by treating the symptom and not the cause of the behaviour and by doing this, what you are actually doing is teaching a dog to suppress their natural behaviour, not changing how they actually feel about the trigger. These methods will usually only work for a short while and the behaviour can return further down the line, but even worse. It is also the fastest way to break a bond between owner and dog. The fall out is a dog that doesn't trust you, is fearful of you and a fearful dog is a very worrying thing indeed and fearfulness can lead to aggression very quickly. Punishment can be anything that the individual dog finds worrying or scary, or anything that causes pain, discomfort, shock or alarm. For example, a prong collar that constricts and digs in when a dog is pulling, is a punishment based piece of equipment. Another example of a less obvious punishment based technique, is a water spray bottle. No it does not cause physical pain, but does cause shock, alarm and discomfort and so fear. This teamed with the fact that problem behaviours quite often stem from fear and anxiety, means that by using these methods you are simply layering more fear on top of fear. Everything you can teach a dog using punishment you can teach using reward based methods and that way both dog and owner enjoy the training, there is no fall out later down the line and you strengthen the bond between dog and owner.

### **What to use for reward based training?**

A reward can be anything that your dog enjoys! This can be individual to your dog. Just be aware that what is rewarding and what is punishing can differ dramatically from dog to dog. For example, one dog may love water, so going swimming is a huge reward, whereas another dog may dislike water, so this indeed would be a punishment. The easiest way to train a new behaviour is by using treats, as a new behaviour is learnt using repetition and the fastest way to get repetitions is with food. It is a good idea to have two types of treats when training, something lower value like a standard dog treat when you are training in low distraction areas and something higher value like chicken when training in higher distraction areas. Each treat only needs to be very small, no bigger than the size of a pea. This way the dog gets the taste and the reward, but without over feeding. Once a new behaviour is learnt you can move the reward away from food and onto other things your dog will find rewarding, such as praise, being petted, or a game of tuggy!

**If you are struggling with training, seek the help of a qualified and experienced dog trainer.**



## **Behaviour modification...**

Behaviour modification works by undoing unwanted behaviours by changing the dog's association with whatever is causing the behaviour. For example, a dog becomes aggressive with other dogs because they are fearful of them and want them to go away. This could be down to being attacked in the past, or poor or no socialisation with other dogs. Any behaviour that is due to a negative emotional state will require careful handling in order to undo it. Attempting behaviour modification if you are inexperienced, unqualified and unsure of what you are doing can make the behaviour worse. Always seek the help of a qualified and experienced behaviourist. Behaviour modification, if done correctly, can be very successful at undoing unwanted behaviours, however it is important to manage your expectations and understand that it will take a lot longer than training a wanted behaviour and sometimes with certain behaviours, you will improve them, but may never manage to fully erase them.

**ALWAYS SEEK THE HELP OF A QUALIFIED BEHAVIOURIST IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT ANY UNWANTED BEHAVIOURS IN YOUR DOG.**

**These behaviours could include, but are not limited to...**

- Human aggression
- Dog aggression
- Over grooming
- Separation anxiety
- Excessive barking
- Resource guarding
- Fear of vets
- Fear of handling and being groomed, bathed etc

## **Extra help**

If you are struggling, please get in touch with a qualified behaviourist. These can be found by copying and pasting the following link into your web browser:

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/general/findabehaviourist>

