



HOW TO BE A GOOD DOG OWNER

This factsheet sets out to help dog owners recognise the needs of their dog and to promote responsible dog ownership.

Dogs Trust believes that by educating the public and promoting responsible dog ownership, we can prevent unnecessary suffering by ensuring that every dog is really wanted and responsibly kept. We strongly encourage people to clean up after their dogs, to provide preventative treatment by way of worming, vaccinations and neutering and to train their pets properly. Such considerations form part of a lifelong commitment and must be thought through carefully before taking on a dog.

Remember you have responsibilities to your dog AND to other people.

Before buying or adopting a dog

Here are some points to consider:

- **NEVER** buy a dog on impulse because 'A dog is for Life'.
- Owning a dog is a long-term commitment. The average lifespan is around 12-14 years.
- Decide which breed or type of dog will best suit you and your lifestyle.
- Think about the size of your home, facilities for exercise and time available.
- Ensure your tenancy or leasehold agreement allows pets.
- Consider the costs and time involved.
- Visit your local Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre or other animal welfare organisation for advice and to discuss the options of adopting a rescue dog or puppy. *Ask us for our leaflet on **Rehoming a dog from Dogs Trust** for more information.*

Where to find a dog

If you have decided to buy a pedigree dog we recommend you follow this code.

- Always buy your dog from a **reputable** breeder. Never buy from pet shops/other retail outlets or through newspaper advertisements where many different breeds are offered – this could indicate that the puppy is from a puppy farm.
- Be prepared to wait for a litter to be born – a well bred puppy is worth waiting for.
- Insist on seeing the mother interacting with the pups as well as seeing the father if this is possible.
- Ensure that all the relevant paperwork is available for inspection when you visit the puppy. This will include the pedigree and registration papers, hereditary screening certificates of the parents (for hip dysplasia or hereditary eye disease if appropriate to the breed).
- If you are keen to adopt a particular breed but not necessarily a puppy, remember there are rescue groups for each specific breed. Contact the Kennel Club (0870 6066750) for details and more information.

The costs involved

Owning a dog is a long-term expense which you should take into account before taking on a dog or a puppy. Costs to consider include the following:

- Weekly food bill
- Bedding, toys, other equipment
- Identification disc, collar and lead
- Vet's bills for vaccination, microchipping, sickness and accidents, neutering and routine health care
- Insurance cover and 'excess' payments for each claim you make for a new illness or injury
- Boarding kennel fees
- Grooming/clipping fees
- Enrolment fees for training classes

Time involved

Dogs demand a lot of time and attention, particularly when they are puppies.

Things to consider:

- Are you going to be away from home for long periods of the day?
- Will you have time to attend training classes?
- Will you be able to take him for at least one good walk a day?
- Will you have time to groom him at least once a week and possibly every day depending on coat type?
- Some breeds of dog (e.g. collie types) will need much more of your time and attention than others for mental stimulation and/or exercise, or they may become destructive.
- Remember a puppy will demand more time than an adult dog.

Your responsibilities to your dog

Your primary responsibility as a dog owner is to provide your dog with everything he needs in a caring and loving home environment.

- Like humans, dogs need company, so do not leave him alone all day. Dogs that become lonely and bored are more likely to bark and become destructive.
- If you have to leave him alone for a period of time, make sure a neighbour, friend or dogwalker— someone he knows, is able to call in to check on him and tend to his needs.

If you really care for your dog you will:

Train him properly

As a responsible dog owner, it is important that your dog is safe and friendly with both people and other animals and is controllable and obedient. There are many good dog training classes that accommodate all ages and abilities or books which can assist you to have a well-mannered dog.

Points to remember:

- Always try to visit training classes before enrolling to ensure that they are suitable for both you and your dog. Seek recommendations from your veterinary surgeon or animal welfare organisations such as Dogs Trust.
- Remember the work that you do in the first few years will be your investment for a happy relationship between you and your dog.
- Early socialisation with people, other animals and situations is essential.
- Training your dog using kind, fair and effective methods is very enjoyable for your dog and will encourage him to use his brain. This mental stimulation can be more tiring for him than running about on the park!

- Play is one of the most essential ingredients in a good relationship between dog and owner.
- Rewarding your dog for good behaviour is far more effective than punishing your dog for undesirable behaviour. Punishment can destroy your relationship with your dog and may lead to confusion.
- If you put the time and effort in to make sure that your dog is well trained and does what you ask, you won't get frustrated with him and a happy partnership will be the result.

Exercise regularly

Regular exercise and mental stimulation are vital for a dog's well-being.

- You must be prepared to give your dog at least one good walk a day and to set aside sufficient time to play.
- The amount of exercise and a space a dog needs will depend on the size and breed. Don't forget this when choosing your pet.

Feed sensibly

Your dog should be fed a balanced diet.

- Commercial dog foods are formulated to supply all the needs of the average, normal healthy dog.
- Specially formulated diets for dogs with special nutritional needs such as rapid growth, geriatrics, pregnancy and lactation, are now easily available through pet shops and your local veterinary surgery.
- Remember your dog's dietary needs will vary throughout his life.
- Always provide plenty of fresh water.
- Avoid feeding bones (**never** give your dog cooked bones) as these can damage the teeth or may cause a bowel obstruction. Instead, feed him whole carrots or rawhide chews (remember too many chews will make your dog fat). Appropriate chew toys are also available.

Provide veterinary care

Essential preventative veterinary care includes vaccination from around eight weeks of age (check with your vet), to protect against Distemper, Hepatitis, Leptospirosis, Parvovirus and Parainfluenza. Regular boosters as advised by your vet are essential for protection to be maintained.

- Many kennels will not board your dog unless he has been vaccinated against kennel cough. This is separate to the annual booster.
- Regular worming and flea treatments are a must. Worm at least three times a year and more often for puppies. Use a comprehensive preparation from your veterinary surgeon. Ask your vet for advice and don't forget to act on it.
- Grooming is an important part of caring for your dog. Not only does it remove dirt but it also aids circulation and helps you build a good relationship with your dog. When grooming, take the opportunity to check your dog's body for any lumps that may develop and report any new ones to your vet.
- Remember to check the teeth, ears and nails on a regular basis for any potential problems.

Neuter your dog

With thousands of stray and abandoned dogs on our streets, neutering is clearly the most responsible thing to do in order to reduce the number of unwanted puppies being born.

Neutering is the **safest** way to prevent unwanted puppies being born. It could save you a lot of time and trouble and also bring recognised health, and in some cases, behavioural benefits to your dog.

Contrary to some misconceptions about neutering:

- It won't cause your dog to be overweight – unless you overfeed (they require less food).
- There is no medical reason why a female dog should have one litter before being spayed.
- Early neutering reduces the risk of some cancers in both male and female dogs.
- Unneutered bitches can suffer from false pregnancies, mammary cancers, ovarian cysts, unwanted pregnancies or potentially fatal uterine infections.
- Any minor discomfort felt by your dog is controllable and will only last a few days.

Responsibilities to other people

You must be conscious of other people's rights. The law requires you to keep your dog under control at all times and to prevent him from being a nuisance to others. It only takes one badly behaved dog to convince people that all dogs are a nuisance.

Prevent fouling

One of the main causes of irritation to everyone – including many dog owners – is fouling.

- Always clear up after your dog if he fouls on footpaths, in parks or public places and dispose of the waste appropriately.

Local authorities have the power to introduce and enforce dog fouling byelaws under which a person in charge of a dog can be heavily fined for allowing dogs to foul in a public place. The **Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005** applies to designated land which may include roads, parks and other public areas within the local authority's boundaries. An offence is committed if a person in charge of a dog fails to clean up his faeces. It is no defence to claim ignorance of the dog's actions, the law, or not to have a device available to remove the faeces. This could result in a prosecution and fine.

Always remember to carry a poop-scoop or plastic bag so that you can clean up after your dog.

Toxocara

Toxocara canis is a roundworm which is carried by unwormed dogs. The worm eggs are deposited in the soil from the faeces. Despite past publicity, the incidence of this is extremely exaggerated. Illness related to toxocara infection is very rare. However, one incident is one too many.

As a dog owner, it is your responsibility to reduce this risk by:

- Clearing up after your dog.
- Worming your dog regularly (especially puppies).
- Teaching children to be careful when playing outdoors.
- Washing your hands before eating or preparing food.

Your legal responsibility as a dog owner

As a responsible dog owner, it is important for you to meet with the requirements of the law. There are a number of Acts and Orders which all dog owners should be aware of.

Identification

- **Control of Dogs Order 1992**

This requires that every dog, while in a public place, wears a collar with the name and address of his owner inscribed on it or on a disc attached to it. If a collar is not worn when out in a public place, the dog may be seized by the police and treated as a stray. Also the owner, and any person

in charge of the dog permitting him to be in a public place without a collar, will each be guilty of an offence and may be prosecuted and fined.

If your dog does stray, you should immediately contact your local dog warden (through the Environmental Health Department at your local council) and the local police station. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 allows for your dog to be seized and sold or **destroyed** if unclaimed after a seven day period.

- **Microchipping**

Sadly, dogs are often destroyed because their owners cannot be found and the dog cannot be found a home. If a dog is microchipped with his own unique identification number registered on a national database, owners can be traced very quickly and the dog can be returned safe and sound.

Control

- **Town Police Clauses Act 1847 (outside London) and Metropolitan Police Act 1839 (London)**

These Acts make it an offence to allow an unmuzzled, ferocious dog to be left at large, or for a person to set on or to urge any dog attack, worry or put in fear any person or animal in the street.

- **Dogs Act 1871**

Under this Act, a court may, upon complaint that a dog is dangerous and not kept under proper control, order the owner to keep him under proper control or to be destroyed.

- **Animals Act 1971**

Under this Act a dog may be shot, without warning, by a farmer for worrying his livestock and the owner could face criminal prosecution for the same offence under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953.

- **Road Traffic Act 1988**

This makes it an offence to have a dog on a designated road without the dog being held on a lead.

- **Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005**

This Act allows local authorities to designate areas of land where dogs must be kept on leads, or where dogs are excluded and also place limits on the number of dogs walked by a single person.

- **Guard Dogs Act 1975**

It is an offence to use or permit the use of a guard dog on any premises unless the handler, who is capable of controlling him, is present on the premises and the dog is under control. The dog must be secured so that he is not at liberty to go about the premises. A warning that a guard dog is present must be clearly exhibited at each entrance to the premises.

- **Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA) 1991**

There are two main sections to this Act. Section 1 applies to four specific breeds of dog including 'the type of dog known as the pit bull terrier'. Owners of these breeds had to comply with certain legal requirements, including having their dog registered, neutered, microchipped and tattooed. One of the main problems with this law is that the pit bull terrier is not a recognised breed in the UK. As a result, many owners of cross breeds which resemble a pit bull terrier 'type' have been charged under the Act.

Section 3 applies to **all dogs**, making it a criminal offence to allow a dog to be dangerously out of control in a public place. This includes instances where there is fear that an injury *might* occur.

Owners found guilty under either section of the Act could have their dog destroyed, face the possibility of six months in prison and/or a fine not exceeding level 5 (at present up to £5,000).

Protection of Animals

There are several Acts on the Statute Book which protect dogs from ill treatment, among them are the following:

- **The Protection of Animals Act 1911**

This makes it an offence to cruelly beat, kick, ill treat, torture, infuriate or terrify any animal. It is also an offence by action or omission to cause unnecessary suffering, or, being the owner, permit any unnecessary suffering to be caused to the animal. This Act was amended to allow an owner to be banned from keeping a dog either for life or for such a period as the court thinks fit.

- **Abandonment of Animals Act 1960**

This Act extends the definition of cruelty to include abandonment of an animal.

You may also be interested in these other factsheets from Dogs Trust: Basic dog training, Every dog owner's duty, Help your hound stay happy and healthy, Microchipping, Neutering questions and answers and What to do if you've lost your dog

For more information about Dogs Trust, to become a member, sponsor a long-term resident or help us in our campaigns please call 020 7837 0006 or write to:

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www.dogstrust.org.uk

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