Dog

Information Pack

Owning a dog can be a hugely rewarding experience. Dogs can live on average **12 years** and owners should be willing to commit to the responsibility of providing for their dog's welfare needs for the life of the pet.

Are you ready to welcome a dog into your home?

These guidelines should help you make an informed decision:

- Carefully select a dog(s) suited to your home, lifestyle and family members
- Avoid making an impulsive decision
- Ask yourself these questions to see if you are ready for a dog
- Consider adopting where possible. Please look at Dogs Trust, Scottish SPCA or another local rescue centre
- If you are considering buying a puppy, please read this advice

Under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, pet owners are legally obliged to care for their pets by meeting their **five basic welfare needs:**

- suitable environment
- suitable diet
- ability to behave normally
- appropriate companionship
- be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

This pack provides information on how to provide the best care for your dog, and where to go for support if needed.

1. Environment - creating the ideal home for your dog

Inside the home, dogs need:

- A dedicated and comfortable space to rest, such as a bed or blankets
- Toys
- Food and water bowls
- Enough space to move freely and easily

Outside of the home, dogs need:

- A collar and tag (this is a legal requirement)
- Lead



A harness may also be used by some dog owners.

If you are welcoming a new dog, you will need to settle them into your home. You can do this by:

- Creating a den for them in a quiet area of the house, using a crate or blankets. This is a safe place they can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed. Make sure no one disturbs your dog while they are here
- Begin toilet training for dogs that aren't already trained. Be patient with this and clean up any accidents straight away. Ensure you use a pet safe cleaning product. Find more information here
- Avoid visitors to begin with so your dog can settle into their new home
- Start to create and maintain a routine, e.g. make sure food, walks and bedtime happen at roughly the same time every day
- Ensure that any interaction with children is supervised by an adult and encourage children to respect your dog's personal space. Find more information on keeping dogs and children safe together here.

You may wish to crate train your new dog, as a quiet crate can be a safe space for them. Find more information here.

2. Diet - providing a suitable diet for your dog

Food



When buying dog food, look for packets stating the food is **'complete'**. This type of food should provide all the essential nutrients to your dog. It's difficult to ensure that home-prepared diets are nutritionally balanced – so it is best to buy commercial dog food rather than making your own. If you decide to give your dog a home-prepared diet, always seek veterinary advice first.

Most foods are now available to suit the different life stages: puppy, adult and senior. These have been formulated carefully to match the needs of dogs at different ages, so make sure you buy the right one for your dog. Whenever changing your dog's diet, transition to the new food gradually to avoid stomach problems. Additionally, different diets may be recommended if your dog has certain medical conditions, and these can be discussed with your vet.

Check food packets for a guide to work out the right amount of food for your dog. But be aware that these are only guidelines, and you may need to adjust according to your dog's individual needs. Be careful not to overfeed your dog. Obesity increases your dog's risk of arthritis, diabetes and heart disease. If you think your dog may be overweight, your vet will be able to help you with a feeding and exercise plan. Find more information here.

Water



Your dog should always have fresh and clean water available. Speak to your vet if you're concerned about your pooch's water intake.

3. Behaviour - ensuring your dog can show normal behaviours

If you're concerned about your dog's behaviour, the first thing to do is speak to your vet to rule out any medical problems that may be influencing their behaviour, and to seek a qualified behaviourist. Underlying pain, disease or medical disorder can significantly affect dog behaviour. You can also call our free Behaviour Support Line on 0303 003 0666. If required, you can be referred to a qualified behaviourist.

Being able to recognise when your dog might be feeling worried or frightened will help you respond appropriately, and keep you, your dog, and others safe. You can find more information on dog body language here.

It is important to provide your dog with **appropriate exercise** and **mental enrichment** to prevent unwanted behaviours such as damage to your home. You can find ideas for enrichment here.

Dogs Trust champion **positive reinforcement training**. This means training with rewards, such as a treat, praise or a toy. You give your dog something they want when they're behaving in a way that you like. Then, they'll be more likely to behave in that way in the future.

Excessive Barking

If your dog is barking excessively, it is important to understand why this is happening. When you learn what your dog hopes to gain from barking, you can show them they can get it by behaving in a calmer, quieter way.

Follow these steps:

- Don't tell your dog off for barking
- Avoid things they find scary, e.g. covering windows if needed
- Make sure your dog is staying active, to prevent barking due to boredom
- Don't reward your dog for barking, e.g. by giving them food. Reward them when they are quiet

Reactivity

If your dog shows signs of worry or frustration towards people and other dogs, they could be considered reactive. The most common behaviour to look out for is lunging or barking at other dogs or people. Top tips to try are:

- Recognise your dog's body language
- Keep them on a lead when needed
- Choose quiet times and places for walks
- Move away calmly from any triggers
- Reward calm behaviour

If you would like more information on training, please visit our website or speak to your Housing Officer. As above, you can contact our free Behaviour Support Line for advice on any behaviour issues.

4. Companionship - making sure your dog has appropriate company

Spending time alone

It is important to teach your dog how to spend time on their own so that they can feel relaxed if they are home alone. There are some steps to take before leaving them home alone:

- Make sure they have a comfy bed or den to relax in
- Teach your dog to settle when you are busy around the house
- Slowly increase the time you leave them alone while you are in the house
- Start to introduce small periods of time alone while you leave the house
- Make sure they have had sufficient and appropriate exercise before leaving them alone

If you believe your dog may be feeling worried or frustrated about being home alone and may be showing separation related behaviours, contact our free Behaviour Support Line for advice on this. You can also speak to your vet about a referral to a qualified behaviourist.

Spending time with children

Keep your dog's introduction with children short, positive and as calm as possible. If the dog approaches, you can let your child give them a gentle stroke. If the dog moves away, let them leave and don't follow them.

At all times within the home, follow these steps:

- Stay close and supervise any interactions between your dog and child(ren)
- Step in if your dog looks uncomfortable. You can find more information on dog body language here. Ask your child to stop the behaviour and create some space between them and the dog
- Separate if the situation starts to feel unsafe. Take your dog or child to a different place. You may wish to use treats or toys to tempt your dog to come with you

Spending time with other animals

You may wish to consult a qualified behaviourist or trainer before introducing a new pet into the home, to ensure they will be a good fit. If you decide to get a new pet or introduce your dog to other animals:

- Ensure all animals are up to date with vaccinations, flea and worming
- Start by 'scent swapping', taking an item with the scent of each animal and placing it in the other animal's environment
- Ensure dogs meet for the first time outside of the home, if possible
- Consider using leads indoors initially
- Supervise all interactions until the animals are comfortable with each other

Find more advice on introducing new dogs here and cats here.

5. Health - making sure your dog is protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease



Dogs are important members of the family, and we all want them to stay healthy and happy.

It is important to **register your dog with a vet**. Here are some signs that your dog might need to see the vet. Vet bills can be significant and may be difficult to deal with if they're unexpected, so you may wish to take out insurance to cover them. Find further advice on pet insurance here.

You may want to consider **neutering** your dog and speak with a vet about this. Neutering can stop unwanted pregnancies and may prevent some behavioural issues and certain illnesses. See this page for more information and to learn about the benefits of neutering.

It's a legal requirement for your dog to be **microchipped**. Should your dog ever go missing or be stolen, the microchip can be scanned and traced back to you, to reunite you with your dog. You must keep the microchip details up to date should your circumstances change. See this page for further information on microchipping.

Your dog will need **booster vaccinations** every year after their initial puppy course. Your vet can tell you what's needed.

It's important to use medicine regularly to prevent **fleas** from being able to live on your dog or within your home. It is much easier to prevent an infestation than to deal with one once it has become established in your home.

Make sure your dog is up to date on **worming** treatment. If you struggle to give your dog tablets, read some tips here.

This guidance is provided for information purposes only and it should not be relied on as formal advice for your specific circumstances. Dogs Trust accepts no liability for any loss or damage caused as a result of your reliance on it.

A dog is for life ®
Dogs Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales (1167663), and in Scotland (SC053144), and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (09365971).

Support for dog owners

Help with vet bills

- **PDSA** can help with the costs of vet care to those in receipt of benefits. Visit their website or call 0300 373 7223 to find out if you are eligible.
- **Dog Aid Scotland** can help with the costs of vet care in some circumstances. Visit their website or call 0300 365 2500 to find out more.
- If you aren't eligible for financial help, please visit our website for more information on dog vet care on a budget.
- Your vet practice may offer monthly or yearly care plans to spread the cost of essential pet care such as flea and worming treatments and vaccinations.

Help with microchipping

- **PDSA** offer microchipping at their hospitals. Visit their website or call 0300 373 7223 to find out if you are eligible for this service.

Cost of living support

If you are struggling with the cost of dog food, a pet food bank may be able to help.

- **Scottish SPCA** run Pet Aid to support people and their pets. They offer cost of living advice and run food banks. Find your closest one here.
- **Blue Cross** have pet food available at food banks across Scotland. Use this map to find your closest one and contact them directly to check they have pet food.

- **Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home** run a network of pet food banks across East and Central Scotland. Please use this map to find your closest one or phone 0131 669 5331.

Domestic abuse

- **Dogs Trust Freedom service** provides specialist, free and confidential temporary care for dogs, enabling their owners to access a refuge without the fear of what may happen to their dog if left behind. If you or someone you know needs support, please contact freedom@dogstrust.org.uk or phone 0808 169 4315.

Dog behaviour support

- **Dogs Trust's free Behaviour Support Line** can offer advice to deal with tricky behaviours, and refer for further support if needed. Call 0303 003 6666 or click the hyper link for more information.

Other support

- It is wise to have a plan should you ever become unable to care for your dog, a family/friend might be able to help. Pet Fostering Service Scotland is a service available if you are unable to look after your pet through illness, homelessness or domestic abuse and cannot arrange any alternative care. Please phone 0344 811 9909 to access the service or email fosterenquiry@pfss.org.uk to arrange a call back.

- **Blue Cross** run a Pet Loss Support service so that no one has to face the pain of losing a pet alone. The service is free, confidential and can be accessed via emailing plsmail@bluecross.org.uk or calling 0800 096 6606. You can find more information here.