

Adopting A Dog - Are You Ready?

When considering the birth rates among animals, it's not hard to understand why animal shelters are always filled with animals waiting to be adopted. Shockingly, it has been calculated that over a seven year period, one female cat and her offspring will produce approximately 420,000 kittens. Likewise, one female dog and her offspring will produce 67,000 puppies during a six year period. Since there are more animals looking for homes than there are people who want to adopt them, some 6.5 million animals are euthanized each year.

Given the statistics cited above, adopting an animal can be a kind and loving thing to do. However, before making the final decision to adopt, there are a number of things to consider.

Many of the animals awaiting adoption in shelters have had very rough beginnings. Some were abused, some abandoned and some were "turned in" because the owners didn't have time for them. Many were left alone for long periods and some were never properly potty trained. In short, when adopting an animal you must be prepared to work with them. They may come to you cowed or with feelings of trepidation and may be overly sensitive to your tone of voice or to any commands you might give them. You will need to be patient and by all means, loving. When they finally realize that they can trust you they will reward you with more affection and loyalty than you can imagine.

Adopting a dog as a means of entertaining a small child is not recommended. A dog is not a toy and should not be treated as one. Small children should be trained to understand "animal etiquette". In other words, animals are not to be hit, dragged, ridden or teased. They should understand that being overly aggressive with a new dog, especially one recently adopted, could cause the dog to react by biting or running away. If feeding and exercising the dog is to be the responsibility of a child, an adult should follow up to be sure these things are getting done. It isn't the dog's fault if a child fails to meet his or her obligations and the dog shouldn't have to suffer for the child's failure.

Many adopted dogs will come to the new surroundings filled with fears based upon earlier mistreatment or the harsh rules of their previous owners. Some dogs will be reluctant to go from one room to another, will shy away when corrected and hide upon hearing a loud noise. New owners must be patient with them and speak to them softly and affectionately. Dogs are not stupid and they will gradually come to understand their new environment and show their appreciation for your loving care.

When contemplating adoption, prospective new owners should be prepared to deal with the fact that their new adoptee may not be completely housebroken. Previous owners may have been irresponsible in their approach to this training; furthermore, when the dog was placed in the shelter it continued to do its "business" right in its pen. Housebreaking is not a complex chore and should not deter someone from adopting a pet. Some owners will use a cage to assist in this training, while others will just take the dog out for a walk several times a day. Fenced yards and doggie doors are minimal expenses that pay extra dividends on cold or rainy days.

Adopted dogs are subject to all of the behavioral problems commonly associated to dogs in general. These would include digging, jumping up on people, jumping fences, barking and nipping. There are proven solutions to all of these "offenses." If your dog is prone to digging, and always digs in one area, there are a number of effective repellent sprays that work well. If he digs under your fence, a little buried chicken wire works wonders in breaking that habit. Spray bottles filled with water should be kept at hand to break a dog from jumping up and to combat incessant barking. A quick spritz in the face immediately following, or during, the offensive behavior will usually bring about a quick behavior modification.

Visiting an animal shelter can be an emotional experience for an animal lover. It's difficult to see all the animals in their pens and not want to take them all home. Such feelings are understandable and commendable; however, just be sure that prior to adoption you consider all of the ramifications. And remember, your best friend is waiting for you at your local animal shelter.

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