

10 questions to ask yourself before you adopt

It takes research and careful planning to bring the right pet into your home, and to make sure your lifestyle is the right one for your pet. Answering the following questions will get you started.

- 1. Why do you want to adopt a pet?** Are you looking for the loyal and steady companionship that an animal can offer? Are you hoping to fill the empty place left after a pet has passed? Maybe you want a companion for your child. Knowing why you're preparing to bring a pet home will help you to determine the species and breed that will fit your lifestyle.
- 2. Are you ready to make a long-term commitment?** When adopting, you are *making a commitment to care for an animal for the rest of its life*—that could up to 15 years for dogs and up to 20 years for cats. As you go through lifestyle changes such as moves, the birth of children, and new jobs, your animal will remain a permanent part of your life. If circumstances change, will you still be able to care for your pet?
- 3. Do you know what kind of pet is right for you?** Your personality and lifestyle, along with challenges such as space restrictions and amount of time spent at home, should be explored to determine what pet is right for your household. Research different breeds and ask adoption staff what animals they recommend—they're experts at making perfect matches!
- 4. Can you afford to care for your pet's health and safety?** Owning a dog or cat costs more than the initial adoption fee. *Food, veterinary care, spaying or neutering and proper identification* (that means a collar with tags and a more permanent form of ID such as microchipping) can add up.
- 5. Will you be able to spend quality time together?** Dogs thrive on several hours of exercise and companionship every day, and pooches who are constantly left alone can develop behavioral problems. Cats are healthiest and happiest indoors and love to be treated to energetic play sessions with their human families. If your work demands that you travel often, or if you're out of the house most days and evenings, this may not be the right time to adopt.
- 6. Are you prepared to deal with an animal's health challenges?** Fleas, allergies and sudden medical issues are just a few of the health-related problems that potential pet owners may face. *Can you care for your pet when he/she gets sick?*
- 7. Are you willing to train your animal companion?** Lack of training is one of the most common reasons that adopters return pets to shelters—*are you willing to solve behavior problems?* Basic training helps dogs and their owners communicate better, strengthening the relationship overall. And taking the time to understand why your cat does what he/she does, especially when it involves litter box and scratching issues, will help you avoid potential problems.
- 8. Are you prepared to pet-proof your home?** Whether it's tightly sealing your garbage cans or paying attention to dangerous decorations during the holidays, you'll need to make your home safe before adopting. That includes keeping toxic foods, pet-unfriendly plants and dangerous household items out of paw's reach.
- 9. Is your living space adequate for an animal companion?** Be sure to choose an animal who will thrive in your home. If you're attracted to energetic large-breed dogs, but live in a small apartment, will your pooch have enough room? If you live on a noisy street, will it disturb your cat? Also consider that many landlords don't allow pets or place restrictions on having them. Be sure to check out your "house rules" before adopting.
- 10. Is your family ready for a pet?** If your kids are still toddlers, you might consider waiting a few years before adopting, as *pet ownership is a team effort*. Children who are mature enough can happily share pet-care duties. You may also have another pet at home who's not yet—or may never be—ready to share his/her kingdom with another animal.