



## **Deciding To Get A Dog**

Deciding to get a dog is NEVER a decision that should be taken lightly or without a great deal of thought and forward planning whether that be a puppy or a rescue dog. The following statement may sound serious and harsh at times but it is vital, for the needs and welfare of every dog, that all aspects are fully considered before you even apply for a home check.

Welcoming a dog into your home is a game changer, owning a dog or dogs is a lifestyle and, if it isn't, you're doing it wrong. Forget Coronavirus, getting a dog presents a new normal for you and your family and a commitment for up to and, sometimes beyond, the next 15 years.

EVERYONE in your family needs to be on board and fully committed to the decision of getting a dog, fully comprehend the possible challenges that may be ahead and be completely dedicated to doing whatever it takes to understand, train and love that dog for the rest of its life.

You can't get a dog that is mainly for you and the kids, for the kids or because one of the kids keeps asking for one and you can't get a dog because you're busy with the kids and your husband wants to go on more walks! Most importantly, you can't get a dog and a week, month or year later decide it's not the dog for you, it's harder than you thought it would be and you don't really have the time or swap it for a different one! This is rescue, these are lives, this is not Argos!

Your dog should be a new member of the family in the same way you may decide to have a child, you commit to them fully no matter what. You wouldn't give up your child because they cry in the night, potty training is a bit of a nightmare or you can't be doing with the terrible twos. You commit to a child, no matter what, before they are born, with dogs, you should commit to them before they arrive, no matter what, if you can't do that PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE don't get a dog.

Like any dog, whether that is a puppy or a rescue, our dogs come with no promises, it's impossible to fully predict exactly how a dog will behave once they have been taken away from the shelter or foster, everything they know and understand, their country of origin, journeyed over thousands of miles and finally arrived at your home.

All dogs are assessed in shelter or foster and again when they arrive at our UK kennels, all information is given freely to the best of our knowledge but this information is a guideline, not a promise. Cat testing, behaviour with other dogs,

children, men, traffic etc are all guidelines based on assessments made in rescue environments NOT in your home with you and your family.

Where we can we also provide as much information about the dog's rescue, history, trauma, illness, veterinary care, rehabilitation, anything that is relevant but sometimes we have very little information as we literally have to save from certain death in a kill shelter, after a road traffic accident or abuse from humans and have no history prior to rescue.

However much information we have provided, from the moment that you take the dog into your care it is up to you what happens next. From that point on the dog is reacting to you, your responses, your decisions, your emotions, your family, your other pets, your home, your behaviour and their new environment. The best thing you can do for your dog at this point is to try and understand everything from their point of view and have no expectations, no time limits and no conditions.

The Aftercare page is set up to provide continuous support and advice throughout your dog's life from myself along with the valuable help and input of the wonderful members of the Second Chance admin team and all our amazing Second Chance adopters who share their experiences, advice and knowledge of rescue dog keepership. However, whether you get advice on the Aftercare page, in a travel group, direct message, email, home visit, a local dog trainer or pay for a one to one with a behaviourist, ultimately, it's up to you and each family member to dedicate the time and understanding to recognise and address unwanted behaviour, train your dog, develop your own personal bond and establish leadership roles with your dog, no one can do that for you. No behaviourist can take your dog, make it perfect and return it to you 'fixed'. They can give you advice, the tools and even show you how to do things but, ultimately, you need to develop the relationship and carry out the work with your dog yourself.

It is widely promoted online with wonderful success stories of desperate rescues being saved by love and adoption, but that love doesn't always just mean cuddles and a cosy bed. Even on our own family page where our wonderful adopters post pictures and videos and always tell us how much their dogs are loved it really doesn't explain the depth and commitment of that love. What you don't always see or understand is that love involves commitment, understanding, dedication, tears and sleepless nights, tackling issues, serious consistent hard work and never, ever giving up but the reason they say they love them so much is because it's that love that makes the others things possible and encompasses all that it takes to really rescue a dog.

Just like puppies, rescue dogs often need to be taught the basics. Amongst other things, they may not understand:

- where they should go to the toilet
- that a bed shouldn't be chewed
- that their teeth hurt you
- that they aren't being left alone if you leave the room
- that all the noises they can hear inside, upstairs, next door, outside or even up the street are not a threat to them
- that your other pets aren't a threat
- that a man isn't a threat
- that your children aren't a threat

- that a collar, lead or harness won't hurt them
- what toys are for
- that night time is for sleeping

All of these things will be needed to be managed, supervised (ESPECIALLY OTHER PETS AND CHILDREN AT ALL TIMES NO EXCEPTIONS) and taught gently, allowing time and with plenty of patience while being clear and consistent in your behaviour. If you're not clear and consistent with your behaviour you cannot expect a dog to understand, they do not understand language they learn commands over time by associating words with consistent consequences.

In addition to these basic expectations, which all dogs need to learn usually as puppies, rescue dogs have very often suffered trauma of some kind in their lives which means they can have additional needs that are displayed through behaviour which need to be addressed correctly. Nearly all of the time these behaviours only become fully apparent once dogs are in a home environment as opposed to a rescue environment. This means that you need to be prepared and know that you have the time to follow training techniques and methods based on desensitising, counter conditioning and positive reward to help the dog to overcome their fears. Full explanations will be given on how to carry out this training along with advice and support at any time.

Behaviours which have been created through trauma are often instilled by fear which links to their natural survival instinct causing them to carry out behaviour in order to preserve their own lives.

If a dog feels threatened or triggered they will attempt to save their lives by reacting, defending or avoiding that thing at all costs. Anyone who has followed even a few of our rescues on the main page will be fully aware of some of the horrendous experiences these poor dogs have had to endure but for those of you who haven't been here long, some of the things that our dogs have suffered before rescue are as follows:

- starvation
- physical abuse and injury from humans
- sickness
- injury
- traffic accidents
- emotional trauma such as loss of puppies, death or abuse of pack members, siblings, mother
- dog fights and confrontations
- neglect
- abandonment
- isolation
- having no shelter, being freezing, wet, filthy
- kill shelter experiences

Trauma such as this can create or exacerbate behaviours such as:

- fear reactivity towards other dogs
- fear reactivity towards men (most commonly) or people in general
- fear reactivity towards children
- fear of or reactivity towards traffic

- fear of cars
- food aggression
- food stealing
- scavenging for food, counter surfing, bin raiding
- separation anxiety
- fear of leads, collars, harnesses
- fear of touch, grooming, brushing
- lead reactivity
- mouthing and nipping
- warning barking, territory guarding and boundary/ fence running
- dominating, fearful, submissive behaviours
- shredding and destruction beds, blankets, toys, sofas, curtains, carpets, doors etc
- resource guarding beds, toys, people, homes, etc
- fear or guarding from visitors

Of course, many of our dogs settle well and show very little in the way of behaviour issues but, before applying for your home check, PLEASE consider this information and ask yourself if you really have the time and commitment to help a rescue dog.

Are you really able to rescue a dog for them or do you want a dog for you? Your honest, well considered answer makes all the difference to our dogs and saves them from the additional trauma of having to return to kennels and/or being rehomed all over again.

For those of you that know you have the time and commitment to rescue a dog and those of you who already have..... THANK YOU SO, SO MUCH, WITHOUT YOU WE CAN'T HELP OUR DOGS AND HELPING DOGS IS WHAT SECOND CHANCE IS ALL ABOUT!!!