

### **Open (Conversation-Based) Adoptions: Matching adopters with pets through dialogue & conversation.**

- Creates a welcoming and non-judgmental experience
- Removes barriers to adoption: Lengthy questionnaires, interviews, landlord checks, home visits, vet references, fencing requirements, age restrictions, background checks, income verification, etc.

**Why Open Adoptions?** Frustration, rude treatment, and judgement drive away pet lovers who try to do the right thing by adopting and send them to less humane options

- Connect with more adopters, save more lives!
- Studies show those that adopt through conversation-based adoptions (policy-free) provide similar high-quality care and are just as likely to be highly bonded to their pet as those that adopt through policy-based adoptions
- Support homes long-term instead of investigating them once

**Myth of the “Ideal Pet Owner”:** No one is perfect! Great adopters have different lifestyles and living situations

**Our Role:** Use open-ended questions to facilitate a good match for person and pet.

- What qualities are you looking for in a pet? ‘
- What kind of pets do you have at home?
- Tell me about your past experience with pets.
- What questions can I help answer about my foster pet?

### **Adoption Counseling How-To’s:**

- Welcome adopter contact and have a cheerful approach
- Facilitate bonding with treats and toys
- If there are behavior issues, focus on how the behavior can be managed/improved
  - Do not withhold information – we want to be transparent
- Encourage a meet and greet at the shelter between an adopter’s dog(s) and the dog they are considering adopting – our staff are trained to facilitate these
  - Must sign a waiver if they choose not to do a meet and greet at the shelter
  - We do not offer dog-to-cat or cat-to-cat meet and greets
- Set realistic expectations: explain adjustment periods, the importance of gradual transitions and patience, and slow introductions to other pets and new people
- Adoption fees: Explain that the fee includes vaccines, dewormer/flea treatment, spay/neuter surgery, microchip, the cost of care, transport costs, etc.

### **Conversations, Not Judgement:**

- Develop a friendly, trusting, and open relationship – adopters should feel comfortable and welcomed
  - This will encourage adopters to be truthful and express concerns
- We all have biases. We should strive for objectivity. When we have a bad “gut feeling” we should try to determine if it has an objective basis...if unable to find an objective reason, then it is probably subjective

### **Do’s:**

- Share your valuable insight on the animal in a home environment
- Show cute photos and videos of the animal during its time in foster care
- Highlight the animal’s unique features, charming characteristics, and quirks

**Don'ts:**

- Use blanket statements about certain breeds (ex. All German Shepherds are \_\_\_\_\_.)
- Rule out adopters before a conversation. You may think your foster dog would do best in a home with a yard, but what if someone lives in a condo with a dog park? Or someone who runs every day?

**This is our chance to leave a positive lasting impression!** Adopters become repeat adopters, tell friends about SafeHaven, and becoming supporters

**Remember, returns are not failures!**

- Provide opportunity to learn more about the pet, so a better match can be made in the future
- Adopters trust to admit that a match isn't working and look for support, rather than fearing judgement
- Gives animals time outside of the shelter, similar to foster care

**Resources:**

- [Humane Society of the United States "Adopters Welcome" Manual](#)
- [ASPCA Pro: Conversational Adoption Counseling](#)
- [Report on Adoption Forum II Petsmart Charities](#)
- [Do Policy Based Adoptions Increase the Care a Pet Receives? An Exploration of a Shift to Conversation Based Adoptions at One Shelter](#)

**Important Behavior Points to Cover | Dogs**

<b>Provide a "shutdown" period by limiting new visitors or adventures.</b>	Give them time to get to know their new home, bond with family and adjust to your environment/schedule.
<b>Keep your schedule consistent to help your new pet feel safe.</b>	Scheduled meal times, walks and play time will help your dog feel confident and help with overall health and housetraining. Show your new dog around. Show them where to potty, where their water bowl and bed are, and praise them (with treats!) for everything they do that you like.
<b>Limit access.</b>	<p>A new home can be overwhelming. Baby gates and crates are a great way to ease your dog into a new environment. As dogs adjust, you can increase their space and freedom. Take your dog outside frequently to the designated potty area. Praise and reward them for going potty outside. Assume that your new pet will have a few accidents at first, this is normal. Don't punish them for pottying inside or this will teach them to fear going to the bathroom in your presence.</p> <p>A dog should be slowly acclimated to a crate, and it should always be a positive experience. Provide the dog with something to chew on in the crate such as a stuffed Kong or other safe dog toy. This will help them learn that the crate is a wonderful place to be. Never force the dog into the crate or use it as a punishment.</p>

<p><b>Introduce other pets slowly.</b></p>	<p>Use separate rooms, baby gates, and crates to allow everyone time to adjust. Keep food, toys, and treats separate while pets get to know each other.</p>
<p><b>Reward good behavior with treats, praise, toys, and activities your dog enjoys. The more you reward a behavior, the more you will see that behavior!</b></p>	<p>If your dog knows “sit”, have them “sit” for the many of the things they want (doors opening to go outside, waiting for the leash, before you throw the ball, etc.) If they do not, just wait for a calm moment when they are standing nicely and not jumping up, etc., and reward the calm behavior before continuing with the activity. Try hand feeding as a great way to bond with your new dog.</p>
<p><b>Watch for and respect body language.</b></p>	<p>If your dog shows signs of discomfort such as lip licking, yawning, whale eye (seeing the whites of your dog’s eyes), lifting one paw off the ground, etc. while interacting with a person, give them space, stop petting, etc. Our online training resources or a professional trainer can help you identify other signs of stress and what you can do when you see them.</p>
<p><b>Redirect undesirable behavior to appropriate ones.</b></p>	<p>Forcibly moving, hitting, or pinning an animal down can lead to much larger problems including escalating fear and aggression. SafeHaven endorses positive reinforcement and reward-based training.</p> <p>We believe in teaching and rewarding your pet for desirable behavior (going potty outside) and redirecting undesirable behaviors to appropriate ones (teaching to sit politely when greeting new people instead of excitedly jumping).</p> <p>Catch your dog doing something right (lying on their bed, chewing their own toys, sitting for attention, etc.) and reward with affection, attention, play, or treats.</p>
<p><b>Leave the dog’s leash attached to the collar on the ride home.</b></p>	<p>If you have your current dog with you, keep the dogs separated on the journey home from the shelter. Leave the leash attached to the dog’s collar. Take the dog directly home. Do not stop on the way home for supplies or to visit friends. Before you open the door, get hold of the leash so the dog cannot bolt.</p>
<p><b>A fulfilled dog is a good dog!</b></p>	<p>Engaging your dog’s mind and body with mental and physical enrichment is key. Your dog will not exercise themselves, so leaving them in your yard all day just won’t work. Take your dog for walks with plenty of time for sniffing, hide treats in the backyard to hunt for, play fetch and tug, play with a flirt pole, teach your dog new tricks, etc.</p>
<p><b>If your dog is nervous, fearful, or you have other pets at home, consider keeping the leash on (inside of the house and out) to use as a “drag line” for a few days.</b></p>	<p>This way, you can intervene quickly if necessary to prevent escape or injury.</p>
<p><b>Supervise all interactions with children and animals.</b></p>	<p>Practice Pat-Pet-Pause with young children. (1) Pat-pat your leg to invite a dog to you. (2) Pet-slowly and gently on the sides and shoulder of the dog. (3) Pause-stop petting to see if the dog would like to interact with you further.</p>

	Continue petting only if the dog initiates further interactions.
<b>Just like getting a new roommate, new pets and families take time to adjust. Remember that SafeHaven is here to help! Reach out to us with any concerns.</b>	

### Important Behavior Points to Cover | Cats

<b>Provide a “shutdown” period by limiting new visitors and interactions with other pets.</b>	Give your new cat plenty of time to slowly get to know their new home and adjust to their new environment. Your cat will need time to decompress and transition from shelter to home life.
<b>Prepare a small quiet area, such as a single room in your home, with your new cat’s food, water, uncovered litter box, scratching post, toys, and bed.</b>	<p>A spare bathroom is often a perfect place that is easy to clean. Keep your cat in this confined space for several days to weeks to allow your cat to slowly adapt. Some cats may take longer than others to become comfortable in their room and allowed access to the whole house.</p> <p>Don’t panic if your new cat hides for the first several days (or even longer) in their new home. Give them time to settle in - patience is key.</p>
<b>Provide your cat with multiple hiding places where they can seek privacy if desired.</b>	Large paper bags or a cardboard box with a blanket and holes cut in both sides work great. Offer hiding places on the ground as well as up high. Let the cat come to you at first. Use calming body language like sitting facing the side, blinking, speaking softly, and extending a hand to let the cat sniff you, and allow the cat to approach you. You can also toss a few treats gently nearby.
<b>Introduce other pets slowly.</b>	Use doors, baby gates, and leashes to help pets adjust and maintain a safe distance until you can completely trust them together. Keep food, toys, and treats separate while pets get to know each other.
<b>Always practice petting consent checks to avoid bites and scratches.</b>	<p>(1) Let the cat come to you. (2) Offer an extended finger or the back of your hand to the cat. If they move towards, rub into, or smell your hand, try one stroke. Often the cat will direct your extended finger or hand to where they want to be petted (the sides of the chin are common places). (3) Pause – take a break and watch the cat’s body language. If they move towards you or rub into you, pet for a few seconds and repeat the process throughout the interaction. If they are neutral or move away slightly, stop petting.</p> <p>Consent checks allow your pet to choose to engage or end the interaction at their comfort level, building a trusting relationship with mutual respect. You can also try giving your cat tasty treats with petting sessions to create positive associations.</p>
<b>Watch for and respect body language.</b>	<p>A swishing tail, ears back, or gentle nips are all signs of a cat becoming irritated or over-stimulated and if ignored, can lead to being scratched or bitten. If your cat shows signs of discomfort, give them space, stop petting, etc. Our online training resources can help you identify other signs of stress and what you can do when you see them.</p> <p>Avoid any kind of physical punishment as this will escalate the problem,</p>

	making the cat more likely to bite due to fear and because petting is associated with punishment.
<b>Scratching is an important, complex, and normal behavior that can be directed to appropriate places.</b>	Scratching helps to condition the claws, mark territory, relieve stress, and stretch back and shoulder muscles. Provide your cat with a variety of appropriate scratching options such as a rope scratching post, a log with bark intact, a cardboard scratching pad, etc. A good scratching post will be an appealing texture, tall/long enough to enable a full stretch, stable (to not wobble or topple over), and placed in a good location. Place the scratching post near a favorite sleeping place as cats love to stretch and scratch after a nap. Reinforce with praise and treats when your cat uses appropriate scratching places. Catnip can be used to attract a cat to an appropriate scratching item.
<b>Scoop the litter box 1-2x daily and empty it completely to clean every two weeks-one month.</b>	When cleaning, opt for a mild soap and avoid strong-smelling detergents or ammonia to prevent litter box problems.
<b>A fulfilled cat is a good cat!</b>	Engaging your cat's mind and body with mental and physical enrichment is key. Provide your cat with toys and engage them in play. Toys can be store bought or made from safe items around the house.
<b>Don't expect your cat to have a hearty appetite right away.</b>	Stress and new foods can cause a lack of appetite. At first, leave out small amounts of food and add a small special treat to encourage feeding. If the cat has not eaten or drank anything in 24 hours or seems lethargic or sick within 10 days of adoption, contact SafeHaven's medical department at (541) 928-2789 ext. 117.
<b>Supervise all interactions with children and animals.</b>	Do not allow children to disturb the cat while they are eating or using the litter box.
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