



## **Forever Home Manual**

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## **Introduction**

Our Companions Animal Rescue is offering you this guide to help you find a forever home for your pet. You are doing the right thing by taking personal responsibility for your pets' fate. You are also helping other pets by not shifting the burden on a shelter. Shelters are usually at capacity and by taking responsibility for your pet, it allows shelters to spend their resources on other needy animals.

Much of the content of the Forever Home manual was reproduced from Best Friends Animal Society. Thank you Best Friends, for helping us help people and pets in Connecticut!

## **Finding a New home**

Something has happened in your life and you can no longer take care of your pet. Or perhaps you have found a stray cat or dog and need to find him/her a home. Maybe a friend or a relative has died leaving one or more pets to be placed in new homes. You want to be able to do something to help find this animal a new and loving permanent home, rather than turn him/her over to a shelter where they may be euthanized.

The suggestions in this booklet will help you achieve your goal. We will show you how to create an effective flyer with some tips on taking a good photograph of your pet, and how to write imaginative text that will capture the attention of a prospective adopter for a flyer or a classified ad in the paper.

We discuss the preparation of the pet; making sure that the animals' vaccinations are up to date, and that he/she is healthy and groomed.

And we will show you how to take advantage of the networks already established to advertise your animal.

Most importantly, we walk you through the screening process. We assume you don't want to just give the pet away without checking up that he/she is going to a good responsible home. We suggest what questions you may want to ask to find out if this will be a suitable new home.

## **THE GROUNDWORK— Preparing great flyers**

- Describe the appearance, size, and age of the animal.
- Describe his/her nature and appealing qualities.
- Include the pet's name
- State that the pet is spayed or neutered.
- Define any limitations, e.g. not good with cats/small children/ other dogs/other cats.
- Use a good photograph. Color is best. Copy places like Kinko's can help with these.
- Be sure to put in your phone number, email and time you can be reached.
- Depending on the situation in your area, you might want to add "No Bunchers" to your ad. Bunchers are people who pose as prospective adopters, pretending to be loving and concerned. The pets they obtain are then sold to licensed B dealers who in turn sell the pets to research laboratories. See further information on this subject in the telephone screening section.

## Tips on taking good animal photographs

When you take photographs, use a background that is in contrast to the animal in order to highlight his/her best features. Keep it simple and clear with few background distractions. Use a person, a hand or some other means to show the scale of the pet. Take the time to get a calm relaxed photo that does not present the pet as aggressive or scared.

The flyer is an advertisement. Make it clear, fun and appealing. Include a person to show the height and size of the dog, a clear picture of the animal and a contrasting background.

## Prepare your pet

It is imperative to spay or neuter your pet or the stray you are trying to place. Without this procedure, no reputable humane rescue group will help you. Pet overpopulation is an overwhelming problem and we all need to do what we can to prevent more unwanted animals from being born. Call us for information on low cost clinics throughout the area.

## Update the vaccinations.

Call us for low cost vaccination information. Prepare a complete medical record of all your pets previous vet visits.

## Prepare a history of your pet.

Include as much information as possible about his/her likes and dislikes; current food preferences, relationship to other animals; whether he/she likes to play with certain types of toys. All this information will help make the transition easier on the animal. We have a personality profile form that you may want to complete to succinctly describe you pet to prospective adopters.

**Groom and bathe** your pet so that he/she looks their best. If it is relevant, talk to a trainer about your pet's disposition. Often the help of an experienced and caring professional can help you solve quirky or destructive behavior, making it easier to place the pet in a new home.

## Network

Take flyers everywhere!

- To your veterinarian.
- To your work.
- To pet supply stores such **as Petsmart, Petco, Pet Supplies Plus.**
- To community bulletin boards.
- Show your family and friends.

## Spread the Word

Contact as many rescue agencies as possible.

**[Visit Petfinder.org](http://Petfinder.org), [Pets911.com](http://Pets911.com), or [Adopt A Pet.com](http://Adopt A Pet.com).**

Most agencies will be at pet handling capacity, but might allow you to show your pet on one of their adoption days. They might have some other suggestions, or be able to put you in contact with someone who is looking for the kind of pet you are trying to place. Our Companions maintains a database of people who are seeking pets as well.

## Breed rescue groups

There are many people who are prepared to help place a specific breed of a cat or dog. If you have a Pug or a Persian cat, for example, there could be a rescue group or club that has a list of people looking to adopt that particular breed. Some breed rescue groups might even be willing to place a mix, as long as it is close to the purebred. **Call us for Breed rescue groups for your breed.**

## Advertise

Place an advertisement in your local paper, mention in the ad that an adoption fee is required. The bunchers we mentioned earlier gravitate towards ads that offer pets "Free to a good home". Asking for a fee will discourage these people from following up on your advertisement. If you would like Our Companions to guide you through this process, we request that the adoption fee be donated to our organization.

Run the ad several times with a picture if you are looking to reach a wide audience.

## CLASSIFIEDS Ads

Here are some samples of classified ads

**Little Sue is ready for love!** Sue is a three-year-old spayed female Lhaso apso with a great personality. She adores cats and dogs, isn't as keen on children! She has all her shots. Sue is very vocal when she wants something. Call Marie after 6 PM at 123-4567 Adoption fee & Contract to apply.

**Mr. Rosie is waiting for you!** He is ready to walk right into your heart! Mr. Rosie is a two-year-old neutered Staffordshire terrier mix. He loves to give kisses and play. He is a complete love. Call Mary at 555-3576 after 7PM weekdays or all day Sunday. Adoption fee required.

## Telephone Screening

When someone responds to your flyer or advertisement, you have an opportunity to interview him or her over the phone before introducing them to the animal. By doing so, you can eliminate unsuitable potential adopters early on. The following are some guidelines for helping you find the best possible new home for your pet or rescued animal. The following is a list of questions we suggest you ask the prospective adopter. Ask them in a conversational style, rather than as a questionnaire. For example: "This dog/cat is very special to me, and I am looking for just the right home for him/her, would you mind if I ask you a few questions about yourself and your home?"

As you speak with people, gather all their contact information (name, address, phone, email, etc). Make thorough notes on your conversation and their responses to your question.

## Questions

1) Is the pet for you or someone else?

If the dog or cat is for someone else, then tell them that you need to speak directly to the prospective owner. A gift of a live animal for another person can be a terrible mistake. If the pet is for a child, then tell the person that the dog or cat needs to be seen as a family pet, not exclusively the child's. Parents need to realize that they must be willing to take on the responsibility for the day-to-day care of the animal for the rest of its life. Children can be involved in the animal's care, but often their attention span is sporadic. We have seen many pets turned in to shelters because the children have lost interest.

2) Do you live in a house/mobile home/apartment?

3) Does the situation have a yard (for dogs)?

4) Is the yard completely fenced?

5) Does it have a gate?

6) Will the dog or cat be an indoor or outdoor pet?

From the answers to these questions, you can start to build a profile of the person and where they live. The address alone can tell you a lot about the area in which they live. If they do not have a fenced yard, then there is a possibility that the dog might wander off or end up being chained up outside. We consider this a cruel fate for any dog, and we are sure you will not want yours to end up this way. Will they be willing to walk the dog on a leash regularly? This point also applies to apartment dwellers. Many dogs and all cats do very well in apartments. The proximity encourages close companionship and bonding, whereas a yard can be used to ignore a dog. There are many services that will walk dogs during the day and there is even doggie day care.

7) Have you had pets before? If so, what has happened to them?

Responses to these questions can be very revealing about the person's level of responsibility. We have found that letting people talk quite a bit in this area elicits the information. You might start by saying "Do you have other pets at home? What do you have?" From these answers, you can determine whether the pet you are placing will fit into this household. If you are trying to place a dog who hates cats, and they have cats, this is obviously not a good choice. If they do not have pets now, ask if they have ever had them and where they are now. You might start to see a pattern. If they say, "Oh, my last three dogs were run over/poisoned/stolen etc." You are not looking at a responsible home. One negative incident in the past would not immediately rule that person out. Accidents can happen to even the most caring people. On the other hand, they might tell you of the pets they have had until they died of a ripe old age. This will tell you that these people are willing to make the commitment to an animal for its whole life.

8) Do you have children? If so, what are their ages?

Children can be either a blessing or a curse to a pet! Small children often do not know how to differentiate between a live animal and a stuffed one. And even the most vigilant parent can't be watching the child all the time. This will be your own judgment call with the pet you are placing.

An adult cat or dog, which is used to being around small children, makes a wonderful family pet. The animal will be too big for the child to hurt, and an adult animal is usually more tolerant of toddlers inquiring hands pulling at his/her tail or ears. If the animal you are placing has had any kind of biting or nipping incident around children, it would be irresponsible to place that animal in

a home with any children. The prospective owner needs to be aware of the history of the animal, as even an adult only home may receive visits from grandchildren or neighbor kids.

The child /animal bond is very special and can be of tremendous value in producing a compassionate, caring person, who will bring those qualities into his/ her whole life. So this decision to take on a family pet needs to be made with great care. We see a lot of kids learning that animals are disposable items to be gotten rid of when they become inconvenient, or when the family moves. We would rather they learned that the pet is as valued a member of the family as they are.

We recommend a book called "Child-Proofing your Dog" by trainer, Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson. Published by Warner Books. It is full of good information about children and dogs.

**9) How many hours would the animal be alone during the day?**

The number of hours that an animal will be alone during the day needs to be taken into account. Young dogs and cats can get very lonely and destructive! Dogs are pack animals and need a lot of companionship from either the family or another pet. Many adoptions do not work out for this reason. A lonely bored dog or puppy can chew through the couch, rip up the carpet, and destroy the table legs, just for something to do! You get the idea. Prospective adopters need to be aware of this and be encouraged to make provisions for a young dog or cat while the family is away at work and school. We mentioned dog-walking services earlier. Perhaps a neighbor or a local retired person could spend some time with the animal during the day. Locking a dog outside all day can present an ideal target for thieves, particularly in a big city.

An ideal situation is to have a companion animal as a buddy, a doggie door into a dog-proofed area with lots of toys to chew on. Cats do not appear to need the pack in the same way as a dog, but anyone who has owned more than one cat knows what a difference companionship of their own kind makes to a cat.

**10) Do you own your own home or are you renting? Does your lease allow pets? May we have your landlord's number?**

If a person is renting, you will need to ensure that they have permission in writing to have a pet. Also, you will need to determine if there are any size requirements, i.e. under 20 lbs for dogs. Again, it is not fair to the pet you are placing to put him/her in a situation where he/she is at risk. We have known people try to sneak a pet by the landlord, only to be found out. And guess who has to go! So you are back where you started, or the animal ends up at the pound.

**11) Are you willing to have me come to your home to see where the animal will be living?**

**If they are unwilling then immediately rule them out for adoption.** If they are willing, we require that you do make the visit. If you are placing a dog who is an escape artist and the person's fence has large holes in it, you know this will not be adequate to keep your guy in. Some discussion about repairs could solve the problem, but make sure they are done before the animal goes to live there. Promises are just that - promises - until the job is done. Seeing the other pets in the household will tell you a lot about the level of care your pet will receive.

**12) Would you consider declawing a cat?**

Our Companions regards declawing a cat cruel and unnecessary. Most people just need to be informed about correct height of a scratching post (as tall as the cat when fully extended), about clipping the claws regularly and providing lots of toys for play and stimulation. Most people are unaware of the pain & suffering involved with the declawing procedure. If you would like more material about this, we will be glad to inform you.

### 13) Inside or outside cat?

Cats that go outside live for about two to three years on average. They are vulnerable to traffic accidents, attacks by dogs, accidental or deliberate poisonings. A cat that stays indoors can live up to twenty years. Cats do very well as indoor pets, but some people like to build a cattery attached to the house, or screen in a porch so that their cats can enjoy the open air, and yet remain protected.

### 14) Ask for references

Personal references and veterinary references are great sources of information. If they have other pets, ask permission from the adopter to contact their vet to get a reference on them as a pet owner. When you call, ask the hospital if the animal is up to date on his/her care. Also, ask if any suspicious injuries have ever occurred. If they do not have other pets, ask for personal references. Remember, people who are proud, responsible pet owners will be happy to give references.

## What happens next?

After you have asked your questions and received the answers, you will have a good idea about the prospective owner and whether you feel he/she will make a good home for the pet you are placing. Of course, it is always possible that the answers you received are not truthful. Some people may answer in the way they think you want to hear rather than how it actually is. You will need to use your instincts. And this is why it is important to meet the people in person and see their home

## Meeting the Prospective Owner

By the time you reach this stage, you will have found out quite a bit about the prospective owner and his/ her suitability as a new home for the pet you are placing. You have some choices about where to introduce the animal to the new person.

Our Companions Animal Rescue recommends meeting your prospective adopter in a neutral territory such as a Dog Park. A list of dog parks can be found on [http://www.downstay.com/dogfiles/dog\\_friendly\\_parks.htm](http://www.downstay.com/dogfiles/dog_friendly_parks.htm)

It is always better to err on the side of caution when first meeting someone. If the person does not turn out to be suitable for some reason, it is best they do not know where you live.

If the prospective owner has another dog and you are placing a dog, a park setting could be a good place to arrange a meeting. If you feel uncomfortable assessing a proper dog-to-dog introduction, we can help you arrange the meeting with one of our trainers.

Hopefully you will be as impressed with the prospective owner in person as you were on the phone. However, if there are some doubts in your mind you could mention that there are other people interested in seeing the pet and that you will get back to them. This can give you the opportunity to make a graceful exit without confrontation.

You will want to observe how they relate to the pet, and how the pet relates to them. This will give you a lot of information. It is fine to be concerned about your pets well-being and any reasonable person understands this. It is better to be safe than sorry. And we advise you do not give up the pet until you have checked the home and living situation.

If you decide to go ahead with the adoption, you may want to use a contract like the one included with this booklet. This can be a safety net for both you and the new owner. Make out

two copies of the contract and both of you can sign them. Leave one with them and take one with you. Also, hand over any medical and vaccination records, and any special food, bowls or bedding.

## **Final Thoughts**

Placing an animal using these procedures takes time, but your dog or cat has been a good and faithful companion to you. He/she deserves the best new home you can find. You will sleep better knowing that your pet is happy, healthy and safe in their new home.

Don't give up after just one or two interviews. If you persevere, you are sure to find a new owner eventually. If you are working on a time limit and that time expires with no home in sight, then consider boarding the animal to buy some more time. Some kennels run about \$10 per day.

Once you have made a match, stay in touch. Call regularly to see how things are going, particularly at the outset. Be careful not to bug the new owners, though. There is a time to let go and allow the owners to form their own bond with the animal. If there are any problems with the transition, remember that Our Companions can also help with advice, training and solutions if necessary.

Whatever you do, do not abandon your pet. A domestic animal cannot fend for itself. Some of the saddest sights we see are dogs who dash out to each car that comes along in the hope of its owner's return. These dogs are very hard to catch as they wait for the person who abandoned them. Abandoned pets also become subject to injury, disease, starvation and death.

We wish you the best. Our Companions, other animal groups, and many concerned individuals have used these procedures to re-home thousands of dogs and cats in this area alone. It can be done. It is done every single day. So take heart. With some effort, creativity and perseverance you can do it too.

## **STRAY ANIMALS– What to do when you find one**

### **Check for a tag.**

If you have found a stray check for a tag! If the tag has the owner's name on it make sure they can verify the pet is theirs, either describing the pet or having a picture and vet records. If the tag gives the name of a veterinarian's clinic, call during business hours and get the name and phone number of the owner using the code number on the tag and then follow up to return the dog or cat.

Stray dogs are required to go to the municipal shelter in the town where the dog was found. Cats are not required to be impounded. You can contact the animal control officer by calling the police department.

If you must take the animal to the pound, be sure to claim first and last rights should you wish to continue to relate to the animal. First rights give you an adoption privilege if the owner does not claim the animal. Last rights again gives you adoption privileges if the animal is not claimed within a given time period and is due to be euthanized. It is a good idea to call the pound daily to let them know that you are interested in the animals' welfare.



## MAKE EVERY ATTEMPT TO FIND THE OWNER

Check lost/found ads in the local newspapers and **on the internet. Petfinder.org has a lost/found section.**

- Place lost/found ads in local papers
- Have the dog scanned for a microchip- many rescues and owners have a small microchip implanted under their skin for identification purposes. Veterinary clinics can scan pets for you.
- Place posters and flyers in the vicinity where the animal was found.

A typical ad describes the type of animal, where he/she was found, coloring and other distinct characteristics. You may want to leave out some characteristics about the animal, so that when a person calls claiming to be the owner, you can verify that the animal is really theirs. For example, you could leave out information about the gender of the animal, or that he/she has white feet, or a really short or bushy tail. Don't forget your phone number and times you can be reached.

## Beware of dishonest callers

When someone answers your ad, make sure they give you a detailed description of the animal. To ensure you have found the animal's real owner here are a few tips.

- Ask the caller to bring a photo of the animal to the meeting place-**again always meet in a neutral territory for your own safety.**
- Ask for their veterinarians' phone number, and make a follow up call.
- See how the animal reacts to the caller in person. If you are not satisfied, ask for more proof of ownership.
- Remember to get the owners phone number and address. We referred to bunchers earlier, who sell animals to B dealers who turn around and sell them to laboratories for use in research. Claiming a stray as their own can be another way these people can put money in their pockets with a resale. It makes sense to be vigilant.

We hope that the advice in this booklet helps you to place your pet or an animal you have rescued. We understand that this may be a difficult and stressful time for you, so we hope you will be patient and give the suggestions in this booklet time to work. Often a pet can be placed in a new home immediately, and sometimes it will take time. There are many wonderful people out there looking to add a pet to their family. Finding just the right home is very rewarding and worth your efforts.

Also, don't hesitate to ask for help from an Our Companions volunteer. They can walk you through the steps and give you support during that whole placement process. Dogs and cats find new homes every single day. It can happen for you too.

Example of an Adoption Contract the prospective adopter would complete:

## ADOPTION CONTRACT

Name of Adoptee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Pet Name \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ S/N \_\_\_\_\_

Color and description \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Adopter \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

AS THE ADOPTING PARTY I AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING PROVISIONS:

- 1) If the pet is not already altered I agree to have the pet altered.
- 2) I agree to keep an identification tag attached to a properly fitted collar which will remain on the adopted animal at all times, whether inside or outside of the house, and to obtain all of the necessary city licenses required by local authorities.
- 3) I agree to provide the adopted pet with necessary inoculations at the intervals advised by my veterinarian.
- 4) I agree to have the adopted pet under my control when it is not on the confines of my property. A secured fenced area will be provided for dogs, including shelter from the elements. If the adopted pet is a cat, I agree to keep the cat as an indoor only pet. The adopted pet will not be tied or chained.
- 5) If for any reason I cannot keep the adopted pet, I agree to notify the Adoptee (name and address above), of the availability of the pet and to return the adopted pet upon request.
- 6) I agree not to abuse or neglect the adopted pet and I authorize the Adoptee, at his/her sole discretion, to determine whether or not the pet has been abused or neglected.
- 7) I understand that any failure to perform the foregoing agreement will constitute a breach of contract. In the event of any such breach of contract, I authorize the Adoptee to reclaim both possession and ownership of the Adopted pet.
- 8) I understand that the pet covered by these adoption papers, is as far as can be determined by the Adoptee, in good health and that the Adoptee is not responsible for any medical fees incurred after the adoption date. However, if a health problem develops during the first 10 days, I should notify the Adoptee to discuss the matter.
- 9) I agree to give the Adoptee visitation rights to ensure that the terms of this adoption agreement are being observed.

ADOPTEE \_\_\_\_\_

ADOPTER \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## **Need More Help?**

Our Companions offers a re-homing program where we can work with you on advertising, screening potential adopters and making a match between your pet and an adopter. We can do all of the work a shelter would do, with the pet staying in the comfort of his own home until he is adopted. It is a much smoother transition for the pet and the new owner!

If you are located in Connecticut, contact us to discuss how our programs can help you:

[Helpline@ourcompanions.org](mailto:Helpline@ourcompanions.org) or 860-242-9999

### **Our Companions Animal Rescue**

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