

Marie's Den

by Kari O'Brien

Five Questions You Must Ask an Animal Rescue Organization Before Adopting

A successful adoption and the integration of a homeless animal into your home can be an extremely heart-warming event for both human and animal. It is an experience that is filled with affection, delight and life-long devotion.

The achievement of a rewarding adoption often hinges upon working with a reputable animal welfare organization. Though well intentioned, some organizations lack the training, support and resources to rescue animals and effectively place them in homes. When an adoption goes wrong, not only does it affect the family and the animal but other potential adopters may be deterred in the future after hearing of another's negative experience.

Marie Joyner, Our Companions Canine Operations Director, suggests that before you adopt any pet, ask the following questions about the rescue organization's practices and pets.



Are dogs evaluated by a trained and experienced Dog Evaluator prior to adoption?

A trained evaluator will assess a dog for many things, including fearfulness, resource guarding, aggression, sociability, prey drive, basic manners and dog/dog skills, and will make recommendations on the type of home best suited for the dog. Without such an evaluation, a dog may be placed in an entirely unsuitable home which could have life-threatening consequences.

Marie recalls one heartbreaking story where a couple adopted a dog who was possibly never evaluated by an experienced evaluator. "If Murphy had been properly evaluated, the evaluator would have quickly discovered that the dog was a resource guarder and should not be placed in home with small children."

"Furthermore, the adoptive family would have known what to do and what not to do with this dog," says Marie. The couple was unaware of Murphy's behavioral issue and one Marie Joyner and her training partner, Jack.

day, while he was quietly chewing on a tennis ball away from everyone, he bit a child after the owner invited a two-year-old child to pet Murphy. After pressure from their neighbors, the couple had to give Murphy back to the rescue organization to be euthanized.

Where is the pet currently living?

Rescue organizations will place pets up for adoption who are either in a shelter, a foster home or in the home of the current owner. Where the pet is currently living determines how much stress the animal is under, what kind of care he/she has received and whether a trainer's evaluation is effective.

In most cases, the best place for the pet to be is in his/her original home where the pet's true behavior can be evaluated.

Pets in a foster home are living in a home environment which is preferable to a shelter. But just because the dog is in a foster home doesn't mean an evaluator can get a true picture of his/her behavior. Marie recalls one situation where a dog was in a foster home with fifteen other dogs. "The dog's behavior in that home was very different than it was in a home where he was the only dog."

Will I get to meet the pet in person before adopting?

If you adopt a pet without meeting him/her in person first, you are relying entirely on another person's opinion of the pet's temperament and health. In some instances, the rescue organization placing the animal for adoption hasn't met or evaluated the dog.

Has the pet received full veterinary care?

No matter where a pet comes from, either a home or shelter, it is crucial that he/she be evaluated by a veterinarian, tested for heartworm and internal parasites, vaccinated for rabies and other common dog ailments, treated for fleas and ticks and spayed or neutered. A dog who is being transported from out-of-state needs to have a health certificate.

Does the organization offer training after the adoption, or will they re-home the pet should it not work out? Do they follow up with you after the adoption?

For many adoptive pet owners, their relationship with the rescue organization ends the day they take the pet home. Most rescues don't have the resources to provide long-term assistance, such as training. Some rescues will not even offer to re-home an animal if needed. The result is animals entering the shelter system more than once or being euthanized for lack of alternatives.

What happens if my dog bites someone?

Dog bites are a significant risk for rescue organizations. If a dog they placed bites someone, their typical response is to either tell the family to keep the dog and do training or euthanize.

Rescue organizations should be lauded for their efforts in placing homeless animals. Just because an organization does not follow the above recommendations doesn't mean you should not adopt from them. But asking these questions before you adopt a pet will help you to make an informed decision.

Our Companions' Adoption Method

Our Companions follows a six-point adoption process for all pets to ensure successful adoptions.

1. All pets available for adoption are either in local shelters, local foster homes or are living with their original family.
2. Every dog is evaluated by an experienced evaluator who determines the most suitable home.
3. Every pet is thoroughly vetted, spayed/neutered and is given Distemper combination and Rabies vaccines. They are also treated for the prevention of internal and external parasites. Dogs also receive a Heartworm and Lyme test.



4. We screen all applicants for adoption through an application, home check and provide a neutral location for the prospective family (and current pets) to meet the new pet.
5. After adoption, dogs can attend a free eight-week training class and adoptive families can call our trainers anytime for assistance after the adoption. Our trainers check in with families during the first week, and then at two-week, one-month, two-month, six-month and one-year intervals to ensure a smooth transition. Furthermore, our trainers are available for in-home visits after the adoption.
6. If an adoptive family can no longer keep a pet, we will re-home. If a dog has bitten someone, we will evaluate the dog and if possible, re-home.