

What To Ask Before Adopting A New Dog

Remember to consider your family's lifestyle

- Do you have children living at home or children that visit regularly? Have they ever lived with a dog before? Has the dog you are considering have a known history living with children? Young children are at most risk to being injured by dogs. At the OMHS we take safety seriously. If a dog doesn't have a known history with children, we often will be looking for a home with older children or adults.
- Has your family ever owned a dog before? Some shelter dogs often have training requirements that can be a challenge to first time dog owners. Consider choosing a shelter dog that is recommended for first time dog owners or one that doesn't have extensive training requirements.
- How much time is the dog expected to be on his/her own? Puppies cannot hold their bladder for a full 8 hour work day. Some dogs are prone to separation anxiety and will benefit from a family with a flexible schedule.
- How much time will you be able to spend with the dog? What time of day (morning, afternoon, evening)? Will this change in the near future (i.e. school starting up again)? On days where something comes up and you cannot spend time with the dog, how will the dogs' needs be met?
- Who in the family will be responsible for feeding, training and exercising the dog? In cases where children in the home are expected to take on responsibilities, how will parents divide responsibilities when the children lose interest, become too busy with after school activities, move away to college, etc...?
- How active are you and your family realistically? You want to choose a dog that meets your activity level, not the one you wish you were at. Gym memberships are relatively easy to cancel. Rehoming or surrendering a dog due to unrealistic expectations is damaging to the dog and upsetting for the family.
- What type of activities do you enjoy? Hiking, camping, running, etc? Are these activities appropriate for the dog you are looking at? For example, some breeds are not suitable to be off-leash; other dogs are more prone to heat stroke, breathing issues, arthritis and hip dysplasia, etc.
- What grooming will the dog need? Are you prepared to bring the dog to a groomer regularly, or would you rather a dog with a lower maintenance coat?
- Have you spoken to your vet about the breed or age of dog you are looking to adopt? Make sure you learn what illnesses or ailments are common to the breed and what vet care is expected for that age of dog. Some ailments you may not be prepared to deal with. Knowing also gives you the ability to set up a plan with your vet on how to monitor or prevent the illness (i.e. if predisposed to allergies, feed suitable diet, if predisposed to arthritis, take precautions and supplements, etc).
- Will your current pets get along with this new dog? How will you introduce them? Do you have a suitable way to separate them in the beginning until they can be trusted together?

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Remember to plan for training of your new dog

- Do you plan on going to professional training classes? Will you hire a professional private trainer? At the OMHS we recommend that all dogs attend training classes that use positive methods, including lure and reward training and clicker training. Avoiding training schools that use force and intimidation will result in a dog that trusts and respects you and your family as their leader. Training classes are also very important for socialization. Many shelter dogs were not socialized properly as puppies, and being exposed to other dogs and people in a safe, nurturing environment such as a training class can be very beneficial.
- What types of behavioural issues are you prepared to deal with? How would you deal with them should they arise? For example, barking, house soiling issues, separation anxiety, resource guarding, etc. For more information on behaviour issues please speak with Genevieve, our Animal Behaviour Coordinator, or your Adoption Counselor.
- Is your house "Puppy-proofed"? Half the battle of training is to ensure that undesirable behaviours do not occur. The best way to ensure this is to prevent them by managing the dogs' environment. A dog that is crated when alone with interesting, safe toys to chew can't get into the garbage, chew your brand-new couch, dig up your garden, or have an accident on your beautiful oriental rug....
- What will the house rules be? It's a good idea to have the house rules written down. Rules can include whether the dog is allowed on the couch, where he will sleep, where he will eat, where he is expected to stay while the family eats, what games are O.K to play, if he should sit and wait at doors, which rooms are off limits, etc...
- What are your training expectations? For example, do you expect the dog to heel on walks, or are you happy if he/she walks nicely without pulling?
- Where will the dogs' safe place be? A crate? A gated off room? If he's not being supervised, he should be somewhere safe where he can't practice undesirable behaviours.
- Where will the dog be expected to go to the bathroom? For puppies, how often will you take him out? Puppies can (on average) hold their bladder and bowels in hours, the number of months they are plus one. So for a 3 month old puppy, he should be able to hold it for 3-4 hours. Is someone home to take them out as often as they need?
- Dogs need to learn how to chew appropriate toys. Is this dog a big chewer? What type of toys will be required? How many should you get? Variety is the spice of life, and dogs enjoy it too!

Most of all, remember to ASK QUESTIONS if you have them! Do not hesitate to contact Genevieve, the Animal Behaviour Coordinator at the Oakville and Milton Humane Society at 905-845-1551 ext. 30.