

Re-homing Your Pet

Finding a new home for a beloved pet can be very stressful. You want to be sure your pet will have a loving and caring forever home, where he or she can be safe, healthy and happy. There are many reasons why you may need to re-home your pet, but before doing so, be sure you have exhausted all possible options to keep him or her. This may mean speaking with a veterinarian or animal behaviorist about your pet's physical or behavioral needs, talking with your landlord about pet ownership or speaking with your own doctor if the reason for re-homing involves allergies. There are often ways to work around what may look like an impossible situation. If it turns out that re-homing is the only option for your pet, there are some ways to assure that your pet gets the best possible new home.

Starting your search for a new home

When looking for a new home for your pet, start the process as early as possible to give yourself time to find a good match. Have a written story that tells about your pet's history and personality, and describes what you love most about your pet. And be sure to include some great photos!

It may be that a trusted friend or relative can provide the best care for your pet. Entrusting your pet to someone you know means you will be able to hear about your pet's progress and possibly even see your pet from time to time. It also means that you may be able to bring your pet back home if your situation changes.

Even if you are giving your pet to someone you know, be sure the living conditions will meet your pet's needs. While Uncle Joe may be a great guy and is willing to take in your kitty, will kitty get along with Uncle Joe's three cats? If you can't be sure, you may wish to consider other options, or have a back-up plan in case things don't work out. Your pet's needs are the top priority!

How to know what to look for

If you have exhausted all options with friends and family and have still not found a suitable home, it is time to broaden your search. There are many online sites, like Petfinder.com, that can aid you in your search for a new home. Be wary of posting an ad for a free pet in the newspaper or on Craig's List. Some people may be attracted to the "free" listing, without thoroughly thinking about the implication or the cost of owning a pet, and these types of homes often don't work out. Instead, use these venues along with workplace connections, veterinary offices, pet supply stores and social media outlets to post information about your pet and to describe your application process.

Create an application

If you have ever applied to adopt a cat or dog through a shelter, you know that the adoption counselor asks a lot of questions! Shelters want to learn everything they can about their adoptive homes, in an effort to insure their animals' health, happiness and safety. You, too, want the best for your pet and you should ask similar questions of potential new owners. A thorough check of a potential new owner's "pet history" will give you peace of mind once your pet is adopted.

Whether you want responses on paper, over the phone or in person, prepare your questions ahead of time and do not hesitate to ask about anything you want to know. Start with the basics – name, address, phone number, occupation, etc. Verify the applicant's name and address with a driver's license or through an on-line search. Knowing where someone lives or what they do for a living may provide you with information about their ability to provide adequate care, and may tell you about the time they have available to commit to a pet.

Ask for information about current and past pet ownership. Any question is appropriate, if it helps you to find the best fit for your pet. Some examples might be: Do the new owners plan to keep the kitty inside or let her out? How many hours a day will the dog be outside? What are the plans for the pet's care if the owner is away from home for an extended period? Where will the new pet sleep at night? Where will she be allowed to go during the day? Will they feed both wet and dry food? What will they do if the new kitty scratches the furniture or the new dog barks at night?

Reasons why people re-home their pets – and what you can do differently

Elimination Issues – Inappropriate elimination is the number one reason why people want to give up their pets. Before giving your pet away, try to find the cause of the problem. With cats, some reasons for inappropriate elimination may be a medical problem (see your vet), a litter box that isn't clean (some cats like their box scooped a few times a day), multiple cats (add more boxes or if a cat is scared to get to the box, put one in a location where he is more comfortable), or changes to the cats environment. Keep litter boxes in a quiet location away from noise, children, food and other activity. A new pet or person in the home can create stress, causing a pet to act out. Try to help the pet feel at ease by making changes gradually and calmly whenever possible. Pets (and especially cats) do not like change!

Moving – Look first for a place that allows pets. Some apartments may have restrictions on the number or size of pets, or in the case of cats require they be kept indoors or be declawed. Some require an annual per-pet fee. Talk with your potential new landlord about your pet, providing vet records, graduation certificates from obedience classes and references from past landlords. Some landlords may give in if you show that your pet can behave responsibly. Most of all, try to find new living arrangements that will allow you to keep your pet.

New Baby – Babies and pets are a great combination! You do not need to get rid of your pet because you are pregnant or have a young child. Most pets can live comfortably with children, and having a pet teaches a child a lot about respect for other living creatures. Also, studies have shown that children who grow up around pets are less likely to acquire allergies later.



Allergies – Many allergies attributed to pets are not from pets at all but are from other allergens like dust or pollen. Be sure an allergy is pet-related before re-homing your pet! This may mean having an allergy test done and having the cat live in temporary housing for a few weeks while you see if allergy symptoms persist. Some pets are more hypo-allergenic than others and some people may be allergic to one cat, while showing no allergy symptoms at all with another. Consider trying allergy medication or room air filtration systems before re-homing your pet. There are often ways to work around allergies.

Pet aggression – If your pet is aggressive with you or another pet, there are things you can try before re-homing. Separating the pets and using medication (such as Prozac) can calm an aggressive animal. While some dogs like to play hard, cats benefit by a gentler touch and less aggressive form of play. If your cat intentionally bites or scratches during play, this is an indication that you may need a calmer form of activity. Gradually modifying your behavior with you pet will help him to change. Pet aggression may also mean that the pet is not feeling well. If your otherwise calm pet suddenly becomes aggressive, a visit to the vet may indicate if there are any underlying health issues.

While these questions seem very personal, anyone interested in providing your pet with a good home will answer your questions without hesitation. Be sure to listen to the answers without indicating how you feel. You want straightforward, honest responses that aren't influenced by your opinion. A savvy adopter will quickly learn how to tell you what you want to hear, once they know what that is!

Be sure to ask about the type, age and temperament of other pets in the home and the ages of all household members, from children to seniors. Ask why the applicant is interested in your pet. Some folks may want to give a home to a pet in need. Others may be looking for something specific – a lap cat as a companion for an elderly relative, a dog for the children or a friend for another animal in the home. Be sure your pet has the personality to fit their needs. If your dog is shy and backs away when approached, she would not do well in a home with three active, young children. Some breeds of dogs, especially those that chase prey, may not be good with cats. It is important to learn about the personality of any other animals in the home before introducing a new pet.

Also, be sure you have informed the applicant about all aspects of your pet's health and personality. If there are issues that are causing you to give up your pet, be candid about those, as not doing so may result in your pet being unwanted in his or her new home.

References

Ask the applicant for one or two personal references who can speak to the applicant's current and/or previous pet ownership. Be aware that most personal references will naturally be very supportive of the applicant, as people typically choose friends and relatives to speak on their behalf. Nonetheless, you may learn things about the applicant's pet ownership that did not come out in the application process.

If you feel the applicant may potentially provide a good home, ask him or her to contact their vet to give you permission to do a vet reference check. Once again, any applicant who is serious about pet ownership will not mind being asked. When you speak with the vet, inquire about current and past pets and whether they are spayed/neutered, up to date with vaccines and given routine and emergency vet care as needed.

If the potential new owners are renters, speak with their landlord to be sure that this new pet will be allowed and ask if there are any restrictions (some landlords may require a cat to be indoors or declawed or a dog to be below a certain size). Do not simply take the word of the tenant that pet ownership is allowed. Speak directly with the landlord yourself.

Meeting the applicant

When you think you have found a potential home, it is time for a home visit so the applicant can meet their potential new pet. Some people may prefer to do this earlier in the process, which is fine. If you are re-homing a cat, this meeting works best in the cat's own home, as cats are most comfortable in familiar surroundings. For a dog, you should determine whether they are most comfortable at home or would be okay making a visit to the new house. Either way, you may certainly ask to visit the potential new home yourself, before turning over your pet to a new owner. A face-to-face meeting also gives you the opportunity to chat with the new owner more informally, and to get a gut feeling about whether you think this would be a good fit. If you don't have a sense that this is an appropriate home for your pet, inform the applicant that you have decided to go in a different direction. Don't feel pressured into making a decision that you don't feel right about. However, be mindful of the fact that no one will do things exactly as you do. Remember, you are looking for a home where your pet can be safe, happy and healthy. No home will be exactly the same as yours.

Adoption Fee

Never give pets away for free – especially kittens or puppies! There is no such thing as a "free" pet but some people can't pass up that cute little face, oblivious to the fact that it costs a lot of money to own a pet. Many unwanted and homeless adult cats and dogs were originally brought home as free kittens or puppies!

While it may seem strange to ask for money when you are trying to find a home for your pet, asking for a small donation (\$25 to \$100) will help to tell you if the applicant is truly serious about pet ownership and will discourage those who have malicious intentions. If you wish, you may certainly donate the money to a shelter, or use it to purchase food and supplies for your pet before he heads to his new home.

Before your pet goes to a new home

Be sure your pet is spayed or neutered and up to date on vaccinations before going to his new home. This means a wellness check up and rabies, distemper and parvo vaccines for dogs; rabies, and distemper for cats, as well as a feline leukemia vaccine for a cat that goes outdoors. There are low-cost spay/neuter options in many areas, and some vets may be able to provide payment plans or financial assistance to elderly or low-income families. If your cat goes outdoors and has never been tested for FeLV (feline leukemia virus) it is a good idea to have this done before introducing him to other pets in a home. If you are unable to afford vet care before re-homing your pet, you may be able to work with the new owner on providing such care. Be sure to turn over any vet records that you do have to the new owner, so that they have a complete medical history of your pet.

Once your pet is settled in a new home.

Finally, be sure the new owner knows that if any issues arise that make it impossible for them to keep your pet that you will either take him back or will assist them in the re-homing process. Giving up a beloved pet is never an easy thing to do. However, if you have taken the proper steps to be sure he or she is going to a good home, you will feel more at ease when you turn over the carrier or leash to the new owner. Ask the new owner to provide you with updates on your pet, and feel free to call in the first few days to see how things are going. Then rest assured that you have done everything you can to give your pet a happy new life!