

What do you think is the best approach to adoptions?

Are there certain requirements organizations should never budge on?

What are the most important things to do when interviewing potential adopters?

Those are the questions we asked for this issue's Coffee Break. You responded by telling us about the policies, screening skills, and animal evaluation methods you've developed to try and ensure that animals adopted from your shelter find the best possible matches.



The Danbury Animal Welfare Society's adoptions are about making the right match between people and pets. Volunteer adoption counselors interview prospective adopters to guide them toward animals that fit their lifestyle. A few things we don't budge on: everyone living in the home must meet with us and the animal before the adoption is approved; at least two personal and one veterinary reference; and facilitated animal introductions by our training director to spot red flags with a prospective adopter's current companion animal(s). We also give adopters a sense of the financial responsibilities of caring for an animal, since most people factor in food and grooming but may not have considered veterinary expenses beyond routine care. We also realize that circumstances may change, so our adoptions don't end when the animal goes to its new home. We follow up and make sure our adopters know we are there to help—and happy to do it!

—Melissa Sader, volunteer
Danbury Animal Welfare Society
Danbury, Connecticut

Our adoption philosophy has shifted in the eight years I have been here. We used to be very strict, [but] that did not seem to make much sense when so many animals were being put down. We now concentrate on education rather than exclusion. We still turn some people away. We do not want to place an animal in an unsafe situation, but we no longer demand perfection.

—Peggy Brown, community outreach
Humane Society of North Texas
Fort Worth, Texas

We evaluate our dogs so we know a bit about their personalities, energy level, and preferences. When an adopter comes in, we feel it's important to ask, in a nonjudgmental way, how they plan on caring for the dog and what sort of lifestyle they live. They may think they want a high-energy dog because it's cute, but if we discover they work all day or are inactive at home, we explain to them about the dog's needs and lean them toward animals that are more appropriate to their personal lifestyle. We explain that a bad match leads to an unhappy dog, and that an unhappy dog will develop behavior problems that will make the owner unhappy. By catering to the owner's desire to have a well-behaved dog, we're usually able to convince them to find a better match.

—Alyssa Walker, front office manager
Cache Humane Society
Logan, Utah

We are a guinea pig rescue, and our adoption process requires an application, a phone interview, and a half-hour, in-person training session, because education furthers the human/pet bond and offers a better chance at permanent placement. We also have minimum-square-foot housing requirements for the guinea pigs and other small exotics.

—Amanda Peterson, president
Arizona's Piggie Poo Rescue Inc.
Phoenix, Arizona

We adopt out one dog at a time. Each dog is an individual, and each home is different. Our dogs come from varied backgrounds and generally require a fair amount of rehabilitation before they are ready for adoptions. With that said, we are open to all homes. Our dogs are placed with plenty of assistance, if needed, after the placement, so no rule is written in stone. We screen adopters for cases of animal cruelty and ask about any dogs that may have passed away from negligence. These are probably the only two things we are firm on with each adoption. It is my belief that many shelters are too strict with adopters, to the detriment of the dogs. No home is perfect, but I can find the perfect home one dog at a time.

—Laura Azevedo, founder
Canines in Transit
Wallingford, Connecticut

I think the most important thing about adoptions is dialogue. Talk to the potential adopter and find out what their expectations are in the new adoptee. Looks may be what drew them to the dog they're applying for, but the temperament, activity level, and social skills of the animal are what's going to keep them in the home. They've likely chosen to adopt a pit because of some positive experience or trait of the dog. We make sure that we know what that is, so that we can meet their expectations. If their previous dog was super chill and just hung out on the couch, the last thing we want to do it put a seriously athletic dog in their home. The dog and the adopters may both be awesome, but we're failing them if we place them together.

—Kim Smith, president, board of directors
Pit Bull Rescue San Diego
San Diego, California

At the Calgary Humane Society, we understand that people make the difference. Without people, we would not be in a position to help as many animals as we can, almost 8,000 animals every year. We knew that in order to save more lives, increase donations, and reduce the need to euthanize healthy, adoptable animals, we

needed to look at how we were presenting ourselves to our public. We save more lives by working together to create a compassionate, nonjudgmental environment where everyone is welcome. We follow an "open adoption" policy where we get to know our adopters, and work with them to find the best animal to welcome into their home. We listen to our adopters and get to know them. Everyone knows that companion animals are easily obtained in the community, with little to no questions asked, so it is imperative that we inform people about the benefits of adopting from us!

—Christine Landry, department head
of adoption/weekend shelter manager
Calgary Humane Society
Calgary, Alberta

We find the best approach is to ask open-ended questions like, "Tell me about your pets." Questions that get people talking about their past or current pets reveal more than anything about the type of pet owner they are and will be.

—Nancy Rubino, rescue coordinator
Partners for Animal Welfare Society
(P.A.W.S.)
Greenfield, Indiana

The most important thing we do is let adopters talk! Usually people (or their children) will hang themselves if they are not great adopters. We have a couple of rules we will never break. We never let an animal leave unaltered, and we make sure that the adopters' current animals are altered, too. Most people just need education and aren't planning on breeding their animal. With other adoption rules, you can be a little more flexible. It depends on the dog and the household it may be entering. Mostly we just make sure the dog or cat finds its purr-fect match.

—Allison Gillespie, adoptions counselor
Saint Frances Animal Center
Georgetown, South Carolina

Congratulations to Alyssa Walker, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, Cache Humane Society in Utah, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appétit!

Check out the latest Coffee Break question and submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering/HSUS*, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an email or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.