The Happy Dog

Training Academy

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Tel: 07490 719 752

Email: thehappydogtrainingacademy@gmail.com

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**Choosing a Rescue Dog**

Many [shelters and rescue groups](https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/pets/dog-care/how-to-adopt-a-dog-from-an-animal-shelter-or-rescue-group) work hard to match people and dogs. They systematically try to evaluate a dog’s behaviour. As much as possible, they assess the dog’s activity level and personality. Matching a pet with new home is not so easy, there are many factors involved. Sadly, the biggest fact is that people do not tell the truth when handing pets over to shelters but say what they feel the rescue shelter needs to hear. One other problem must be attributed to the shelter/group itself. We can blame rescues shelters and Groups, underfunding and understaffed, but we have to say some are just plain careless. I would just like to give your 3 tips to help you choose the right shelter dog:

**1, Be Prepared Before You Go**

What you are looking for in a dog. A Lazy, feet on the couch kind of dog. A Dog to go jogging with, A companion for long walks. Then it may suggest how young and energetic your dog should be and breed you might consider.

Consider how much time you have spare. [Housetraining](https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/pets/dog-behavior/how-to-housetrain-your-dog) does not take forever, but it is a lot of work. Almost all puppies and young dogs need plenty of exercise. All will need some formal training, time, attention, and consistency. As for grooming, all dog’s long or short haired need grooming, or paying for it, throughout your dog’s life. The choice between high and low maintenance is a lot less trivial than it might seem.

But if you do not have a lot of time and energy to invest, that is fine. Maybe you need an older, quiet, short, coated dog. I can Guarantee you can find these to, and they need homes as well. With a lot less maintenance. Prepare yourself with information and expert help to choose the right dog for you. You can ask Vets/ Dog Trainers or canine psychologist for help. Above all be honest with yourself or any help you receive.

**2, Visit the Shelter**

A friendly dog wiggles when he sees you. He may press himself against the front of the kennel to get as much of himself close to you as he can, their eyes should be almond shaped, and his mouth is probably open in a grin. His tail is wagging, not high and tight over his back, it is held low, and the wags are soft and loose. Should it bark, the bark is excited and happy, not a deep bark that comes from the chest.

A friendly dog will not charge the front of the kennel. He will not stand rigid and facing you head-on, barking deeply. He will not sit or crouch stiffly, watching you out of the corners of his eyes. He will not advance and retreat, barking and growling, nor will he cower at the back of the kennel. Unless maybe he is sound asleep, unlikely in a noisy shelter, he will not ignore you. Shelter dogs are usually lonely, they love human company.

**3, Getting some help**

Behavior evaluations are imperfect, but in a world of limited resources, they beat making life-and-death decisions based on how cute a dog is, or whether an especially a persuasive staff member has gotten attached.  Shelter staff should receive formal training in how to conduct these evaluations. Sadly, that is an advantage most will not have. So, enlist a Dog trainer to help. You should be able to find a dog training school close to where you live, or close to the rescue centre if it is not near you. It is a good place to start your search, many have backgrounds in shelter work, or have had formal training in behaviour evaluation, or both. Ask. You should also interview candidates about their education and experience generally.

It may seem strange to hire a trainer when you do not yet have a dog, but the money you spend now can save you considerable heartache in future. Remember you are to have this pet many years. It’s one thing to take on [a dog with serious behaviour problems](https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/pets/dog-behavior/what-is-life-like-with-a-difficult-dog) when you know that’s what you’re in for, and you have the experience and education to deal with problems. It is quite another if the dog you fell in love with decides, it would like to take a bight out of the child’s hand because he has a bar of chocolate in it.

To the extent possible, your trainer will perform the [kind of evaluation](http://www.centerforshelterdogs.org/Home/DogBehavior/MatchUpII.aspx) the shelter or rescue staff should have done. But they may go a lot further. Considering many other factors.

* the dog’s body language
* how he responds to being touched, in both pleasant and mildly unpleasant ways
* how excitable he is, and how quickly he calms down
* how rough or gentle he is in play
* his reactions to other dogs
* how he reacts if approached or handled when he is in possession of food or an edible chew, or toy
* how he responds to the sudden appearance of a stranger
* how he responds to being startled

You can see why, for safety, it is important to have professional help with such assessments. If you can find a dog trainer you can hugely improve the chances that the dog, you adopt will be one you will enjoy living with for the rest of their lifes.

**I will not pretend it is easy or painless to turn away from the fearful dogs, or the dogs who respond like sweethearts in the behaviour evaluation until they explode when approached while they are eating their dinner. Bear in mind that many of these dogs with behavioural problems need a behaviour expert to adopt them, it can take many months of training by an expert to get them to where they can enjoy the stability and happiness a lifelong home can give.**

**You can help behaviourally damaged dogs without adopting one yourself. Contribute time and money to shelter behaviour modification programs. Spread the word about how**[**appropriate socialization helps prevent behaviour problems**](http://www.avsabonline.org/avsabonline/images/stories/Position_Statements/puppy%20socialization.pdf)**. Help give all dogs and cats a better start in life by campaigning to shut down breeding farms, ban the sale from unlicensed premises and unlicensed breeders. But above all,** [**cherish your own**](https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/pets/dog-care/how-to-bring-a-newly-adopted-dog-home)**happy, healthy, friendly dog.**

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