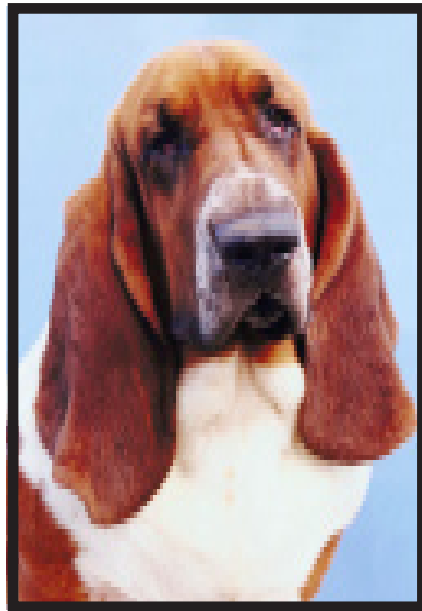


BEFORE You Adopt a



PLEASE READ

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**"Don't Breed or Buy
While Homeless Pets Die!"**



Thank You...

...for considering adopting a dog through the Winnebago County Animal Shelter. By obtaining a dog through our shelter, you are saving a life. Animal shelters can be a tough place to go. It's often noisy and you may have to wait for individual attention. You'll see many pets and wonder how they can all be saved. Shelter employees may ask a number of questions about you, your pet experience and what you expect from a pet, questions you may not have expected. They also have a great deal of information and experience to offer about selecting the right pet for you and your family.

If you are ready to make a commitment to the right pet, not only will you save a life, you'll enhance your own. People with pets live longer and recover from illness faster than people who have none. Kids with pets learn empathy earlier than other kids. Research suggests that kids with pets handle family tragedy, such as divorce, better, too.

Each hour, every day, over 3,000 dogs and cats are born in the U.S. Most of these are unwanted and many end up in shelters. Five million are killed every year because there aren't enough homes for them. Although you can't save them all, you can be proud that you did at least save one (or more)!

Because adopting a dog is a long term commitment and responsibility, we want to help you choose just the right dog for you, your family and your lifestyle. The more you know **BEFORE** you start the adoption process, the better your experience will be. Here we are providing you with important information to help you make an informed decision and the right choice of your new companion. The commitment does not end when you get busy on your job or when you have to move, or when you get married, or when you have a baby. The animal will be totally dependent on you and the other members of your family for good food, clean water, a safe place to live, regular medical care, exercise, and lots of love and attention.

The shelter staff and volunteers will help you find the perfect match. Remember – if the day you come in you don't find what you're looking for, the next day or next week we will have many new dogs to choose from. Take your time and choose wisely!



Common Myths About Shelter Pets

There are many misconceptions about the quality of animals found in rescue shelters. The stigma that shelter pets have been stuck with for many years is that they are “damaged goods.”

MYTH: Shelter pets are obviously not good pets, or else their original owners wouldn't have gotten rid of them.

If the main reason why a pet gets brought to rescue shelters was because they were a *bad* pet, there would be thousands of empty shelters across the country. Animals are brought to shelters for a large variety of reasons, some of which are...

- Their owners have passed away
- An irresponsible owner didn't get their pets spayed or neutered so they found themselves with a litter of babies that they could not keep or did not want
- The animal's owners were abusive or neglectful to the animal, so the authorities have removed the pet from the harmful environment
- An animal was obtained by someone who did not take into consideration all of the responsibility that caring for that pet would entail. A good example of this would be someone who adopts a pet in an apartment complex that does not allow animals and then is subsequently forced to get rid of the pet.

MYTH: Animals from abusive homes will never be good pets because they have been mistreated for so long

Most animals coming from abusive homes will typically make a full emotional recovery - with proper care and attention. In fact, many of them are so grateful to be rescued from their previous situation, they end up being more devoted and loyal than animals coming from non-abusive homes.

MYTH: You never know what you're getting with shelter pets

Although its true that the medical history and temperament of an animal adopted from a rescue shelter are not always able to be tracked down, it's really no different than an animal you might get from a pet store.

MYTH: All animals in rescue shelters are sickly or unhealthy

Once again, it certainly is possible that a pet adopted from a shelter may have medical problems, however the majority of the animals that are adopted from shelters are perfectly healthy, and just need a good home. If anything, you're more likely to get an honest answer about an animal's medical problems from a shelter volunteer - who is clearly there because they care deeply about the animals - as opposed to a pet store owner or breeder that is only in for the money. Additionally, animals in shelters are typically treated much better than animals in pet stores, which have often spent their short lives in cramped environments with little socializing and often, unsanitary conditions.

MYTH: Animals from shelters have trouble bonding to a new family.

Of course animals miss their families and their old routines. However, shelter animals often bond more strongly to a new family because of their experience of losing their previous one. They may have trouble being left alone at first so adopt when you can spend a few days at home. Schedule short excursions so your new pet will feel secure knowing that you will always come back. Dogs reunited with owners they have not seen in years can be overjoyed to see their old friends but still prefer to stay with the new family they have come to love.

MYTH: Older animals have trouble bonding to new people.

Age does not affect a pet's ability to bond with a new family. Social animals, such as dogs, cats, horses and birds form new relationships throughout their lives with other animals including people. A very elderly animal may take longer to adjust to physical aspects of a new home (such as stairs or a dog door) than a younger dog, however emotional attachment will not be hampered by a pet's age.

MYTH: Stray animals do not make good pets.

There is a difference between stray animals and "feral" animals. Most strays had a family but got lost or were put outside to fend for themselves. Many strays are found wearing collars but no ID tag. Strays that survive long enough to be rescued are usually more intelligent than the average pet. Most are so grateful for food and shelter they are happy to comply with house rules.

MYTH: Adopting a second-hand pet is taking on someone else's problem.

People give up pets for reasons as simple as "sheds hair" or "needs exercise." Since all dogs and cats shed and require exercise, these are not problem pets. People make mistakes when acquiring pets. Some people adopt a pet on impulse or are given a pet they do not want. They may become responsible for a loved one's pet after a family tragedy. When people give up a pet, guilt may cause them to hide the pet's worst behavior or exaggerate normal behavior to blame the pet for their unwillingness to meet the responsibility of caring for an animal. It is very difficult to evaluate a pet based on information from people who no longer want the pet.

MYTH: Animals from the shelter have frequently been abused or have behavior problems that indicate abuse.

Don't be fooled by an animal's shy or frightened behavior. Many animals cower and flinch when approached by strangers, especially tall or assertive people or excited children. This behavior is not an indication that the animal was abused. In fact, many animals that actually have been mistreated are outgoing and forgiving. Ask any animal control officer! Many young animals in shelters did not receive



Advantages to Adopting an Adult or Senior Dog

Puppies, although cute and moldable, are a handful and labor intensive! Soiled carpeting and rugs, late nights and early mornings, runny stools, teething and other things such as chewing, digging, barking, nipping, scratching and jumping are just some of the behavior challenges owners will have to confront again. Following are the unique advantages to adopting an older dog.

What you see is what you get

With an older dog you know what you're getting in terms of size, physical appearance, health and temperament. They have already developed their personalities, temperaments, and physical characteristics. There is no way to know whether the tiny puppy you adopt today will be 90 pounds of hard-to-manage dog a year from now, or if she will shed constantly or fall victim to a genetic disease.

Low physical demands

Fortunately these animals are not as demanding as some of their younger counterparts. Although they still need quality time in the form of attention and walks, they may be more content to sleep and curl up at your feet and nap. The nice thing about older animals is that they will prefer quiet walks to running or active play and will usually not pull you around on the leash or jump on you.

Convenience

Training a puppy means starting at ground zero; an older dog will most likely be housebroken and may have had previous training. At the very least, an older dog will not have to be fed or taken outside as often as a younger one, and can be left alone for longer periods of time. The older the dog, the more independent they can be.

Great for older people

Older dogs often make great companions for older people, who don't have the stamina to keep up with a young, energetic dog.

Longer attention spans

Contrary to the old myth which says "You can't train an old dog to do new tricks," training can actually be quicker because they probably may already know some of the "basics" (come, sit, stay, etc.). You can use this to your advantage to teach more advanced commands or tricks. In fact, older dogs have a longer attention span, and often give more recognition to their trainers than puppies and young dogs do. Because they have "mellowed" they can often be easier to train making them great candidates for new tricks and further training.

Won't chew inappropriate items

Older dogs are not teething puppies, and won't chew your shoes and furniture while growing up. An older dog has already gone through the destructive phases of adolescence and puppyhood, and will most likely be more focused and self-disciplined.

Settles in much quicker

Older dogs settle in easily, because they've learned what it takes to get along with others and become part of a pack.

Know what "no" means

Older dogs have learned what "no" means. If they hadn't learned it, they wouldn't have gotten to be "older" dogs.

A good night's sleep

Older dogs let you get a good night's sleep because they're accustomed to human schedules and don't generally need nighttime feedings, comforting, or bathroom breaks.

Give you more time for yourself

Older dogs leave you time for yourself, because they don't make the kinds of demands on your time and attention that puppies and young dogs do.

Fast learner

By adopting an older dog, you bring into your home a more mature thinker, and in many cases a very intelligent dog (intelligent dogs can be hard to handle – which is why so many end up in rescue). While they may have emotional issues to overcome, they more than make up for that in the fact that they learn FAST. Adopting an older dog is like a "pass" to skip the chewing phase and fast-forward through housebreaking. Many older dogs up for adoption are already housebroken, but if they aren't, housebreaking can be accomplished over the course of a few days instead of weeks or months.

With all the superb qualities possessed by older dogs, it is unfortunate that they are often overlooked. Before heading to the nearest puppy kennels in search of your next companion, take a moment to ponder the possibilities of an older dog. You may be surprised what (and who) you find.

If your time is limited, consider an adult dog. A puppy that is left alone all day can't learn how you want it to act. It could take months, or even years, before you reach the same comfortable relationship with a puppy that you could have with an older dog in a matter of days.



Questions to Ask Yourself BEFORE Adopting a Dog

So you're thinking about adopting a dog? Dogs can be a wonderful addition to your life. To be sure you are ready for a dog, take a few minutes to think about and answer the following questions.

- Are you ready to make a commitment to a dog for his/her entire life (which could be 15+ years)?
- Have you checked your local laws as to maximum number of dogs you can have and also local leash laws, etc?
- Are you willing to have the dog indoors and treat him/her as part of the family?
- Do you know and understand the characteristics of the breed you want?
- If you live in an apartment, are dogs allowed and what restrictions might there be on dogs? Can you afford the required Pet Deposit?
- Is your yard large enough to accommodate the size dog you wish to have?
- Will other pets in your home get along with a new one?
- Are you financially prepared for the cost of a veterinarian, quality dog food and dog supplies (leash, collar, toys, food, snacks), etc.? (See "Expenses" later in this booklet)
- Do you have the time and money to take your dog to obedience training? Do you have the time to have daily practice sessions?
- Do you have the time it takes to groom a dog? Some dogs hardly need it, yet others need brushing everyday. Can you afford a professional groomer, if needed? Does shedding bother you?
- If you go on vacation, who will take care of your dog?
- If you get a puppy, can you put up with chewing, crying or whining during the teething stage?
- If you adopt a puppy, do you have the time to house-train it?
- Do you have the patience, time and discipline to retrain your dog if it has bad habits?
- After a long day at work, do you have the energy it takes to exercise a housebound dog?
- Do you or any family members have any known allergies to dogs?
- What's your lifestyle? Active or sedentary? Be sure to choose a dog with a similar energy level.
- If you move, are you willing to make sure you obtain a place that allows dogs?
- Should your dog have behavioral problems, are you willing to deal with them and work them out?
- Are ALL family members in agreement about adopting a dog? Who will be the primary caretaker?
- Are you always travelling (business/pleasure)? Is someone at home for a good part of the day, or is everyone always on the go? If your pet must spend most of its time alone, then you likely won't be able to provide it with a suitable home at this time.

Choosing the Right Dog

Adopting a dog is a lifelong commitment., yet an extremely rewarding experience. Once you've decided to adopt a dog it is a good idea to put some thought into what kind of dog you want. All dogs are not the same! Some qualities to think about are; activity level, how much grooming care is needed, size, and temperament. There are many books and articles, printed as well as online, that will give you information about different breeds and their characteristics. Take some time to find out about different types of dogs. Consider these things before choosing to adopt a pet:

Your family's activity level. If your family is the type that goes hiking often you will probably want a pet that you can take with you. If your family tends to stay at home to relax, a cat or a low-activity dog may be better for you.

Pet size. Is your home, yard, and car big enough to accommodate a large-breed dog? Are you able to physically handle a large dog? Do you have any physical conditions that may prevent you from exercising or caring for your dog?

Your schedule. Remember: dogs require more time and effort than cats. Cats are wonderful for people who like the companionship but don't have time to walk a dog everyday or let it out every few hours to do "business." Consider exercise needs, daily walks, feeding, training, and attention.

Coat type. Generally speaking, long-haired dogs will require regular grooming either by you or a professional groomer. This can be very time-consuming (not to mention expensive!). Also consider shedding – long or thick haired dogs tend to shed a lot.

Your budget. Owning a dog can be very expensive and this should be taken into account before bringing him/her home. Costs to consider are the weekly food bill, bedding, toys and other equipment, veterinary care, boarding kennel fees, enrollment fees for training classes, grooming/clipping fees. Keep in mind that large dogs also require large amounts of food and grooming and vet bills can be more expensive.

Your family. Do you have kids or family members with special needs? Some breeds of dogs have known tendencies to bite. Others are known to be extremely high energy dogs who require a great deal of attention and exercise, such as border collies. Young children, in particular, should place restrictions on the type of dog you can get. You will also need to be able to properly supervise your children and dog at all times.

- ▲ Has everybody in the family happily agreed to getting the pet? It is heartbreaking when pets are turned into shelters or abandoned because someone in the family did not want it.
- ▲ Does anyone have allergies? Spend time with different types of pets if you can. Regardless of claims that a dog is "hypoallergenic," find out for yourself before you adopt. Dogs can produce dander, which people can be allergic to.

Please do not adopt a pet as a surprise gift. Many pets are turned into animal shelters every year because the recipient of the pet did not want it. Pets have thoughts and feelings just like we do and it is frightening and confusing to be dumped at a shelter. If you want to give a pet as a gift, please bring the recipient of the pet with you to choose one for themselves. Or ask if you can purchase a "pet gift certificate" that would allow the person to select a pet when they are ready.

Preparing Your Home for Your New Dog

Before you bring your new friend home, it's best to be prepared to prevent unnecessary confusion and stress. Establish the rules. Decide who's responsible for what: grooming, feeding, exercising, cleaning, playtime, and so on. Also establish whether or not there will be areas that are "off-limits" for your new dog. Have all the necessary supplies ready. Dog-proof your home. Some things to consider are:

- Lock away household and garage chemicals, such as cleansers, insecticide, antifreeze, engine lubricants, and others. Animals are especially attracted to antifreeze; be sure to clean up spills immediately and keep the rest out of reach as even a small amount can be fatal.
- Place houseplants out of reach. Many houseplants are poisonous to dogs - know which ones are.
- Have separate areas for your new dog and any existing pets. Pets need to be introduced to one another slowly and preferably on neutral territory. Be sure you have an extra room or a kennel so that your pets can be separated until they have grown accustomed to each other.
- Tie electrical cords out of the way, if you can. Dogs can chew on electrical cords - or even catch them while walking (or running!) around, causing lamps, TVs, radios, etc. to fall.
- Keep doors closed - this includes the doors to your washer and dryer, your closets, and the cupboards. Inquisitive puppies can sneak in just about anywhere when you are not looking!
- Keep household trinkets out of your dog's reach. Stuff like garbage, medicine, pins, elastics, thread, needles, and so on should be placed out of the way.
- If you own a pool or hot tub, make sure the cover (or fence) are in good condition.
- If you have an outdoor kennel, place it in an area that provides sun and shelter in the pen; and be sure the kennel is large enough to comfortably fit your dog's full adult size. Double check that your dog cannot dig its way out.
- Set rodent traps out of a dog's reach.
- Shut the bathroom door when you run water in a bathtub. Close toilet lids, and make sure the fireplace is tightly screened.

Make sure everyone knows how to **PROPERLY** handle your dog, especially if it is a small puppy. Everyone should know how to safely pick up your pet. Also emphasize certain rules such as your dog should never be disturbed while eating.

Have these items on hand **BEFORE** adopting your new dog

When you bring your new dog home, you will want to spend as much quality time with it as possible in order to acclimate it to your home, your family members and what you expect of it. You won't have time to run to a store and get all the initial supplies. In fact, if you work outside of the home, it is best to obtain your new dog on a weekend when you have several days to spend with it. This is important bonding time.

- Leash and collar & possibly a harness
- Bedding
- Food and water bowls
- Quality dog food
- Toys and treats
- Indoor gates if needed
- Enzyme cleaner (for potential accidents)
- Temporary or permanent ID tag. This is vitally important when you bring home a new dog as he/she will be unfamiliar with its new territory and may try to get away. Even if it is microchipped, a visible collar with ID may get your pet returned **MUCH** sooner!
- Crate or confined area to keep your dog until it is gradually introduced to all family members and other pets and also to help with housebreaking if needed.

Expenses Involved in Having a Dog

Adopting a dog, caring for it and keeping it healthy is an emotional and financial investment. Remember, you're going to be responsible for this dog for its lifetime, and it's your responsibility to make sure you can handle the costs of dog ownership. But the overwhelming majority of owners would agree that the rewards of unqualified love and companionship, make the union between dog and owner a very fulfilling, desirable and worthwhile experience! Below are some costs to think about and consider.

You'll have *one time costs* such as your adoption fee and items you need to have on hand **BEFORE** you get your dog (see list in this booklet). However you also need to consider the *on-going costs* such as yearly vet bills, licenses, vaccinations, food, etc.

One Time Expense

Adoption fee: \$110 for a dog which includes: spay/neuter services, microchip, one year rabies vaccination, parvo/distemper vaccinations, one year registration, heartworm test, and initial veterinarian visit. Adoption fee for a person 62+ years of age adopting a dog 5+ years of age is \$50.

Yearly dog license fee: Altered dog: \$25 • Unaltered dog: \$40

Puppy shots. Puppies will require several sets of shots to protect them until their immune system is fully developed. Once they are adults, they only require an annual booster. The required vet exam will run about \$24 and up. Puppy vaccinations are about \$12 and up and are usually done at 8, 12 and 16 weeks.

On-Going Expenses

Veterinary Expenses and Maintenance -- You will need to see your vet at least once a year to get a checkup and necessary shots. Costs each year can be \$50.00 and up. As your dog approaches old age, it's especially important that s/he gets a checkup to monitor and help prevent future problems. Also consider miscellaneous costs due to cut paws, bit by the cat, ate a shoelace, worms, etc. This can run anywhere from \$0-\$1000 a year.

Annual Shots: Approximately \$24 & up for the vet visit and \$13+ for rabies and \$19+ for distemper.

Dog Food -- There are many kinds of dog foods. Cost for one month: \$10.00 - \$40.00 or more depending on size of dog. For a premium dry food, this can run about \$25 a month for a large dog. Approximate yearly costs: Small Dog: \$100-\$300, Med. Dog: \$200-\$400, Large Dog: \$300-\$500/year. Please note that costs vary based on brand quality and location.

Food and Water Bowls -- Choose from stainless steel or ceramic bowls. \$3.50 and up. Remember to wash them daily as you do your own, otherwise bacteria will build up (especially in plastic bowls) and can be problematic for your dog.

Flea or tick medication. Monthly preventative treatments can cost around \$13/month and up. If you have to flea treat your home, that can add quite a bit more expense.

Crate -- even if you don't crate-train, you will need a crate for transporting your dog. The crate should be large enough so that your dog is able to stand up and turn around comfortably in the crate. Unfortunately, with larger dogs, the size crate needed for a full-grown dog is far too large for a puppy. If you crate train, you need to make sure that the crate is not too large so that the pup will not mess in one end and sleep in the other. Usually, the recommendation is to buy a smaller crate for the puppy, and then a larger one for the adult dog. You could, however, block off the back half of the crate with a piece of plywood until they got bigger. Crates can run from \$15 for a small to \$170 or more for a giant size crate.

Dog Bed -- High-quality beds can last a long time; even if the cushion wears out, those are easily replaced. You may need to line the inside of the crate with something, and if you don't want to sacrifice a blanket, a removable-cover dog bed is \$30. Dog beds can cost \$20 or more.

Grooming -- Your dog will need regular grooming. You can do it yourself if you have an easy-care kind of dog. If you have a breed that needs special grooming and depending on the size of the dog, it can cost \$30.00 and up.

Grooming Tools -- basically, a brush and comb, nail clippers, shampoo. \$25 and up.

Collar, Leash, etc. -- you can spend as little as \$10 on this, or as much as \$100, depending on what you want. Be sure you can always fit at least two fingers between the collar and the dog's skin. If you can't, the collar is too tight and you will need to buy a bigger one.

Toys -- in order to save your house and keep your dog entertained, you will need to give a dog toys. Figure on \$50 or more per year for chewies, squeaky toys, bones, ropes, Kongs, etc. They're not cheap, and chewing puppies tend to go through them at a surprising rate!

Treats. This can include dog cookies, jerky treats, rawhide chews, and so on. Figure about \$35 a year

Enzyme cleaner -- because your new dog may have accidents as s/he is learning to be housetrained, this type of cleaner will remove the stain AND the odor. Figure about \$8. Don't buy any old stain or carpet cleaner. It MUST contain neutralizing enzymes to completely remove the odor so that your dog or your other pets are not drawn to "mark" the same area.

Heartworm medication -- Medication to prevent heartworm can run approx. \$19 and up, depending on the size of the dog. Before medicating, a heartworm test must be done and it can cost around \$27.

Flea treatments -- There are a number of ways to combat the little beasties, so plan on approximately \$5-13 a month.

Obedience Training -- To be a responsible dog owner, you should train your dog. If you need help doing this, you might call an obedience club in your area or look in the phone book for private classes. The cost can be anywhere from \$50.00 -- \$200 for group classes or private training sessions.

Books -- NEVER stop learning about how to train and understand your dog. This can prevent many, many future behavioral problems and will help make for a better bond between you and your dog. Figure about \$40 for miscellaneous books and items.

Fencing or containment areas -- Since you shouldn't leave your dog chained up, if you don't have a fenced yard, you might want to consider the cost of getting a fence or at least fence off an area for the

dog. If you already have one, check it over thoroughly to make sure it can properly confine your new dog. Make sure there are no places where the dog can dig its way out or jump the fence. Some dogs can even climb fences, so make sure it is 100% secure. Chain-link kennels are another option and can cost several hundred dollars.

Boarding care – Do you go on vacation or take weekend trips? Call a few local kennels to get an idea of what they charge per day. Costs may run \$6 to \$15/day and up. Be cautious of kennel cough and consider vaccinating your dog against it.

Indoor gates – It might be handy to have a “baby gate” to fence off areas of your house to confine your new pet until s/he gets used to your house. Although these can cost around \$35, you can find them for much less at garage sales.

A **doghouse** is necessary as well, if you intend your dog be outdoors at times in inclement weather. You can build one yourself, or buy one. In any case, it will probably cost \$100-\$200.

“Destroyed-by-the-puppy” expenses – If you have a puppy, it is practically inevitable that it will destroy something. This can range from shoes or sofa cushions, to carpets and walls!

Unforeseen medical expenses – If you are worried about these types of costs, you may want to look into purchasing pet insurance for peace of mind.

Dental care – Like people, dogs need yearly dental cleanings and treatments too. Yearly preventative care can run around \$100 or more. You can help prevent future problems by regularly brushing your dog’s teeth with special doggie toothbrush and toothpaste.

Daily dog walking services – Great to have if you work extended hours. Figure around \$10 to \$15 for 20 minute walks but this can vary greatly!

Car Seat Belt – Just as you would seat belt your children, you should also secure your dog (if not in a carrier). You never know when you’ll have to stop fast and a pet loose in the car is not only a danger to himself, but also to you and your passengers. These can be purchased at any pet store. Don’t forget, if your pet is in a carrier, you also should make sure the carrier is secured in its spot. Figure about \$15 &



Plan Ahead How to Introduce Your New Dog to Your Pets

Even with careful introductions, there may be an adjustment period after bringing a new pet home. Existing and new pets may hit it off from day one but they are just as likely to initially exhibit fear, depression or “jealousy”, or they may even be mildly aggressive towards each other (all normal reactions). If you are not ready to cope with an almost inevitable (but generally temporary) adjustment period, please postpone adopting until you know you are ready and have the time.

New puppy or dog to established dog or dogs:

Puppies are more fragile than adult dogs and less able to defend themselves, so it is important that introductions be closely supervised. Some adult dogs might ignore the new puppy and give you a “WHAT IS THAT?” look. Others may lick and nurture the little one right away. Although unlikely, it is possible that an adult dog will attempt to hurt the puppy. When introducing a puppy into your household, remember that some lack respect and are too playful for more mature dogs. By using a crate, the established dog can get used to the puppy while it is crated without it jumping on them.

If you have multiple dogs, introduce the puppy to each separately so the puppy is not overwhelmed. The safest place to introduce a new dog is on neutral territory; i.e. a park, neighbor’s yard or the place where you are getting the new dog. Once again, remember if you have multiple established dogs, introduce them to the new dog separately at first so the new dog is not overwhelmed.

All introductions are done while observing both dogs carefully, preferably while they are on a loose leash held by two individuals. If there is a problem, you can easily separate them which is not always easy when you are by yourself. Allow the dogs to sniff each other. Watch body language carefully; raised hackles, stiffened-legs, tail or an overall stiff demeanor besides the obvious growling/snapping could signal trouble. Play bowing (lowering the front half of the body with the forelegs splayed out) is generally considered a positive when introducing two dogs. This gesture is an invitation to play.

If all goes well after the initial meeting, put the dogs in a fenced area, with leashes dragging, and allow them to get to know each other. The dragging leashes ensure that you have something to safely grab to separate the dogs if there is a problem, which is safer than trying to grab them by the collar. Some of the most common problems between dogs in a household are usually food or toy related. It is a good idea to feed them separately (perhaps feeding the new dog in its crate for a while) and to pick up all toys until you know that they can play together with no serious territorial problems.

After a week or so, when you are confident they are getting along, you can then supervise their eating in the same room. You can move the bowls closer together over time if things continue to go well. Re-introduce toys gradually and watch carefully to ensure that everyone learns to share. Close supervision and being tuned in to body language, eye contact, etc. for potential problems are key to ensuring that disagreements are avoided during the “honeymoon period” (generally the first month or so that a new dog is in the home).

If the new dog is crated when you are gone and the established dog is loose, put the crate where the loose dog cannot tease the crated one. A closed door is a great solution and leaving a radio on provides soothing background noise when you are not at home. After initial introductions, give the pets a few weeks to get acquainted with you supervising before leaving them together unsupervised. A month is an average “probation period” although this can vary considerably. Start off by leaving the house for short periods of time rather than a several hour trial period. In many instances the pack will settle down within a few days after the new dog is introduced.

New puppy or dog to established cat or cats:

Keep in mind that not all dogs hate cats or vice versa, but they are generally, at the very least, suspicious and distrusting of each other initially. It is important to be very careful when introducing them, since each can do serious damage to the other. Approach introductions with patience (it can sometimes take several months for dogs and cats to live in harmony).

The way they are introduced initially is very important and can greatly affect the length of time until they are at ease with one another. Just putting them together at the onset and hoping for the best is a mistake and can cause major setbacks. Confine the cat to a room where it feels comfortable with food, water and litter box. Start with the door closed so the animals can sniff each other under the door. The cat will know the dog is in the house and vice versa. Do this for several days, up to a week.

Next, allow the cat and dog to see each other under your close supervision. This can be done with a heavy-duty baby gate wedged in the doorway. Keep the dog on a leash and if the dog barks or tries to go after the cat, correct the dog by sternly saying “NO!” and then distracting it (a toy works well). Use the same method if the cat tries to go after the dog - a stern “NO!” and then a distraction. Do this for at least a week. The pet’s reactions to each other should decrease over time. Then allow the cat out to be loose in the room while the dog is crated. Don’t react if the dog barks and is excited when it sees the cat in closer proximity. Give the dog a distraction in its crate (like a Kong with peanut butter or a favorite toy). Do this step for several days, but only while you are home with the interaction supervised and the dog crated. When the pet’s reactions have diminished to what you feel is a safe level of interest in each other, you can allow the dog and cat out together under your supervision.

Again, any threatening actions by the dog and/or cat should immediately result in a stern NO! to the offender(s) and then a distraction. Keep a leash on the dog so you can grab it if it seriously threatens the cat. Do this exercise for several days. There will probably be some skirmishes, you can never totally prevent them, but let the dog and cat know that you are in charge of the interaction and don’t let it get out of hand. Always safely confine the cat in its room and/or place the dog in its crate away from the cat whenever you cannot supervise them. When you feel comfortable, you can remove the dog’s leash when they interact.

Understand that while many dogs and cats safely live together, some may never be able to be left together unsupervised. To insure that neither gets hurt, trust your instincts, increase their interaction with each other gradually, and always err on the side of caution. **REMEMBER: Gradually** introducing a new pet to existing pet(s) is the key. Going too slowly is much better than proceeding too quickly (which could negatively impact your chances of success). Patience usually pays off!