

## Be a Responsible Dog Owner

Among companion animals, dogs are unmatched in their devotion, loyalty and friendship to humankind. Anyone who has ever loved a dog can attest to its hundred-fold return. The excitement your dog shows when you come home, the wagging tail at the sound of the leash being taken from its hook, the delight in the tossing of a tennis ball, and the head nestled in your lap-those are only some of the rewards of being a dog owner.

Owning a dog is not just a privilege-it's a responsibility. These animals depend on us for, at minimum, food and shelter, and deserve much more. If you are considering taking a dog into your life, you need to think seriously about the commitment that dog ownership entails. If you already have a dog, you need to consider if you are fulfilling all your obligations as its owner.

The AKC is committed to helping dog owners raise happy, healthy dogs. The list below is certainly not exhaustive, but it contains some of the essential ways you can be the best dog owner you can be.

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### 1. Recognize the Commitment

Dog ownership is not something to be entered into lightly. Owning a dog is a long-term emotional and financial commitment. Before deciding that a certain dog is right for you, you must make an honest assessment as to whether your home is right for any dog.

### 2. Evaluate Your Lifestyle

If you get a dog, he (or she) will become a part of your life. You need to make sure that he's suited for your lifestyle. For example, if you are athletic, you will probably not be happy with a dog that has a low energy level. If you are extremely neat, you will probably want a dog that doesn't shed

much. All aspects of your family's life - hobbies, activities, personalities, schedules - should be evaluated before you get a dog.

### 3. Make a List

Based on your evaluation, determine what qualities you want in a dog. Consider size, energy level, grooming needs, trainability and temperament. Do you want a guard dog or a lap dog? Is it important that your dog get along with children? If you rent your home, are there restrictions on height, weight or breed? Answer these questions now - once you bring a dog home, it can be heartbreaking to realize that you made the wrong choice.

### 4. Choose a Breed

Once you have made your list of ideal characteristics, do some research to find which breeds fit that profile. Go to your local library, attend a dog show, and visit the AKC website. Narrow your choices to the breed that seems right for you.

### 5. Get a Referral

You have a much better chance of being satisfied if you get your dog from a responsible, ethical breeder whose primary concern is to produce dogs of high quality, good health and stable temperament. The AKC has a Breeder Referral contact for each recognized breed. These individuals can put you in contact with breeders or rescue organizations in your area.

### 6. Make Contact

Get in touch with the breed contacts in your area. Let them know that you are interested in their breed. Be able to demonstrate that you have put thought into your choice. Don't be discouraged if the first breeder you talk to does not have puppies available right away. That person may know another breeder in the region.

### 7. Ask Questions

Ask the breeder any questions you can think of about the breed. When you find a breeder you're comfortable with, ask to visit the kennel and view the dogs on the breeder's premises. Inquire about health problems of the breed, and what can be done to prevent or control them. Find out what kinds of activities, including competition, the breeder's dogs participate in and enjoy. The breeder's dogs are a preview of what your dog will be.

### 8. Consider an Older Dog

Puppies aren't for everyone. If an older dog better fits your lifestyle, check the AKC website for breed rescue groups. These organizations rescue purebred dogs that have been lost, abandoned or surrendered due to the death or illness of their owners. Most rescue dogs have been spayed or

neutered and are screened for health and temperament problems. Rescue is not only a great source for purebred dogs, it's also a way to save the life of a dog in need.

#### 9. Expect Questions

A responsible breeder or rescue contact will ask you extensive questions about the type of home you can offer a dog. These people are as committed as you are to making the right match between you and a dog. Give honest answers to their questions. Remember that, due to their experience in the breed, they know what issues are important in placing one of their dogs.

#### 10. Prepare to Wait

Availability varies. Be aware that a puppy or dog of the breed you've decided on may not be easy to find. Responsible breeders do not breed often, and many times the puppies of a planned breeding are already spoken for. Just remember that a good dog is worth waiting for.

#### 11. Skip the Holidays

Many people try to buy puppies as Christmas gifts for children or other family members. Most breeders do not recommend this. You should be prepared to give a new puppy your undivided attention, and that is rarely possible during the busy holiday season. A better idea is to give dog-related gifts - toys, leashes, grooming tools - and then bring your puppy home when all the excitement has died down.

#### Make the Commitment

#### 12. Pick Your Pet

When the time has come to select your pet, consider your options carefully. Respect your breeder's input about which puppy is right for you. If you are rescuing an older dog, ask your contact person for information on its health, temperament, behavior and history.

#### 13. Get It in Writing

Information about the sale or adoption should be in writing. The contract should include, for example, details regarding any fees, spay-neuter agreements, health guarantees, terms of co-ownership, restrictions on breeding, and living arrangements. It should also include instructions on what to do if the dog, despite your best efforts, simply doesn't work out for you or your family. Most responsible breeders will insist that the dog be returned to them.

#### 14. Get Your Papers

Get your AKC registration application from the breeder when you purchase the puppy. Make sure the breeder completes the appropriate sections of the form and signs it. The breeder can also help you fill out your section correctly.

### 15. Register Your Dog

Send the completed, signed registration application to the AKC. Your dog will then become part of the nation's largest registry of purebred dogs and as well as being eligible for a variety of competitive events can also receive 60 days of introductory, no-cost healthcare insurance through the AKC Pet Healthcare Plan. If you rescue a dog, consider applying for a Purebred Alternative Listing/Indefinite Listing Privilege (PAL/ILP) number. This number will allow your dog to participate in some performance events.

Get Ready

### 16. Prepare Yourself

Get ready for your new friend before you bring him home, to make sure the transition will be as smooth as possible. Buy food, treats, a collar and leash, toys, grooming tools and other necessities in advance so your dog or puppy will have everything he needs.

### 17. Make a Schedule

You and your family members should decide who will be responsible for food, water, walking, exercise, clean-up and grooming. Post a schedule of tasks in a visible area of the house to remind everyone of their responsibilities.

### 18. Dog-Proof Your Home

Prepare your home before your new dog arrives. Move breakables or "chewables" to higher ground. Make electrical cords inaccessible to curious paws and noses. Block off any area of the house that you want off-limits to the dog. Put the lid down on your toilet and your shoes up in your closet. Block access to any house or garden plants that may be toxic to dogs.

### 19. Set a Containment Policy

It is essential that you have a secure method of keeping your dog on your property. Check your fence for spots vulnerable to chewing or digging. If your yard is not fenced, consider a large dog run or invisible fencing. If your property is not fenced in some way, stress to family members that the dog must be leashed at all times when taken outdoors.

### 20. Get a Collar

Your dog should wear a flat leather or nylon collar with a buckle at all times, except when in a crate. (The buckle can catch on the crate and cause injury.) The collar should be tight enough that it will not slide over the dog's ears, but loose enough that you can fit two fingers between the collar and the dog's neck. Check the fit of the collar often, especially if you have a fast-growing puppy.

### 21. Make a Bed

Every dog needs a quiet place to call his own. Create a comfortable area, whether a crate, a mat or a pile of blankets, for your dog to go to when he needs rest or privacy.

#### 22. Buy Some Toys

Provide your dog with a variety of toys to prevent him from playing with your socks and shoes, your morning paper, or your child's favorite doll. Get some toys that you and your dog can play with together, such as balls and plush toys, and some things to keep him busy when he's alone, such as chewies or rope bones. Never leave your dog unattended with any toy that has small, detachable parts.

#### 23. Find a Veterinarian

You should choose a veterinarian for your dog as soon as possible. Have your dog examined by the vet within a few days of his arrival. Give your vet copies of the dog's health records, and set up a vaccination and check-up schedule. The AKC Pet Healthcare Plan can help with the cost of providing quality healthcare throughout your dog's life.

#### Bring Your Dog Home

#### 24. Welcome Your New Pet

At last! You've made all the preparations, and it's finally time to bring your new friend home. Give him the best welcome possible. With love, patience and mutual respect, he will feel like part of the family in no time.

#### 25. Let Your Dog Adjust

Give the dog time to adjust to his new home. The dog is bound to feel insecure and frightened by a change in environment, and a pup may be homesick for his mother or littermates. Show him to his crate or bed, and where to find food and water. Then leave him alone to explore the new surroundings.

#### 26. Name Your Dog

Your dog will need a good name. Your breeder may have suggestions or even requirements for his AKC-registered name, but his call or informal name is up to you. Older adopted dogs can adjust quickly to a new name.

#### 27. Make Introductions

Introduce your dog to your household slowly. Many pairs of hands petting him at once will only frighten him. Later, introduce him to neighbors, regular visitors and other family members. Give your dog a sense of who your - and your dog's - friends are.

### 28. Introduce Other Pets

Other companion animals in your home should also be properly introduced to your new dog or puppy. Don't expect them to get along right away, and don't try to force them to play together. Give them time to adjust to one another.

### 29. Houstrain

Whichever method of houstraining you have chosen - crate training, paper training or litter box - make sure that all members of the family enforce it consistently. Accidents happen, so have a procedure for clean-up.

### 30. Set House Rules

Teach your dog from the beginning what is and is not appropriate behavior. If something is "OK" today, your puppy will think it's OK forever. Make sure that every member of the family enforces the house rules. Consistency is the key to having a well-behaved pet.

### Keep Your Dog Healthy

### 31. Go to the Veterinarian

Set up a schedule for regular check-ups with your veterinarian. Ask the vet questions about your dog's diet, behavior, activity level or other concerns. Contact the veterinarian at once if your dog seems ill or in pain. The AKC Pet Healthcare Plan can help with the cost of providing quality healthcare throughout your dog's life.

### 32. Feed a Good Diet

Work with your veterinarian or breeder to find the food that is best for your dog's age, size and activity level. Keep the diet consistent. Always provide plenty of fresh, clean water.

### 33. Exercise

Dogs need regular exercise to ensure continuing good health. Take your dog for walks, run around in the yard, throw a ball around - anything to get him up and moving. This will benefit his health and could prevent behavior problems.

### 34. Vaccinate

Dogs should follow a strict schedule of vaccinations to prevent diseases. Keep your dog current on his vaccinations, following the schedule recommended by your veterinarian. Keep a copy of your dog's vaccination records handy.

### 35. Prevent Disease

You can take steps to prevent other diseases not covered by the regular series of vaccinations.

Depending on the area of the country you live in, your dog could be at risk for diseases such as heartworm and Lyme disease. Ask your veterinarian for advice on prevention. The AKC Pet Healthcare Plan can help with the cost of providing quality healthcare throughout your dog's life.

#### 35. Repel Fleas and Ticks

Aside from discomfort, parasites such as fleas and ticks can cause serious diseases. Keep your dog, his bedding, and your home free from parasites by using the method recommended by your veterinarian.

#### 36. Know Your Dog's Patterns

You should become familiar with your dog's patterns in terms of eating, drinking, sleeping and relieving himself. Any major variations in these patterns could indicate illness and should be reported to your veterinarian.

#### 37. Provide Chew Toys

Dogs never outgrow the need to chew. Protect your possessions by providing a variety of chew toys to satisfy your dog's urges.

#### 38. Bathe Your Dog

A clean dog is a healthy dog. Bathe your dog on a regular basis appropriate to his breed and environment. Overbathing can be harmful to a dog's skin. Use a good shampoo and be sure to rinse well. If bathing your dog is more than you can handle, take him to a groomer or veterinarian for help.

#### 39. Groom Your Dog

All dogs should be groomed regularly for health and best appearance. Some short-coated breeds need just a quick brushing every week, while some longer-coated breeds need daily brushing to prevent matting and to reduce shedding. If your dog requires clipping or sculpting, you may want to consult a professional groomer.

#### 40. Clip Those Nails

Keeping your dog's nails short will keep him comfortable, prevent injury to his feet, and may save the surface of your floors. If you can hear your dog's nails click on a hard surface, they need to be trimmed. Ask your veterinarian for advice on clipping your dog's nails yourself.

#### 41. Clean Those Teeth

42. To prevent tooth decay and gum disease, clean your dog's teeth regularly. Most dogs will accept

a "toothbrush" if introduced to it slowly and gently. You can also give your dog products such as hard biscuits, rope bones and nylon chews to keep his teeth clean.

#### 43. Prevent Obesity

Keep your dog healthy by maintaining him at an appropriate weight. Feed him a well-balanced diet and give him plenty of exercise. Don't give in to begging - "people food" is generally bad for dogs.

#### 44. Know Your Breed's Health Risks

You should be aware of common health problems in your breed, how to prevent them, and how to recognize their onset. For example, some giant breeds are prone to bloat, while some short-faced breeds are prone to respiratory problems. Ask your breeder or veterinarian for information about any signs or symptoms you should watch for in your pet.

#### 45. Protect From Poisons

Make sure that your home and yard are free from poisonous substances, such as antifreeze, which tastes good but can cause serious illness or even death. Keep your veterinarian's number handy in case of accidental ingestion.

#### 46. Be Alert to Changing Needs

As your dog ages, his needs will change. He may require a different diet, need more sleep, and be less active. Do what you can to keep him comfortable. Your dog may not be as "fun" as he once was, but he is the same dog you loved as a puppy. You should do everything you can to pamper him in his final years.

#### 47. End Suffering

If, due to illness or old age, your dog reaches a point where his quality of life is severely compromised, arrange to end his life humanely. Letting go is sometimes the kindest thing you can do. Don't prolong the suffering because you fear the pain of losing your dog.

#### Keep Your Dog Safe

#### 48. I.D. Your Dog

Your dog should wear an identification tag with your name, address and phone number at all times. This will increase the chances of your dog being returned to you if he is lost or runs away.

#### 49. Consider Microchips or Tattoos

Microchips and tattoos are methods of permanently identifying your dog, and can be invaluable in recovering your dog should he become lost. You may wish to enroll your dog in AKC's affiliate, the Companion Animal Recovery service, which is the nation's largest database of microchipped pets.



#### 50. Provide Shelter

Your dog needs a sheltered area for the time he spends outside. The shelter should provide shade in summer and warmth in winter.

#### 51. Watch the Heat

Dogs can succumb to heat stress in a matter of minutes. Do not leave your dog in the car when the temperature is high. When your dog is outside, he should have a shady place to lay down and plenty of fresh, cool water.

#### 52. Travel Safely

Keep your dog safe in the car by using a crate, or by attaching the dog to a seat belt with a harness. Never let your dog ride free in the back of a pickup truck, or allow him to hang his head out of the car window.

#### 53. Find a Pet-Sitter or Boarding Kennel

Make arrangements for your dog's care when you go away. Have a friend or reliable pet-sitter come over to tend to the dog, or find a good kennel for boarding. If you opt for boarding, try to inspect the facilities before you drop your dog off.

#### 54. Prepare for Disaster

Be prepared to care for your dog in the event of a disaster such as fire, flood, hurricane or earthquake. Make an emergency kit with clean water, food, and first aid equipment. Find out in advance if the evacuation shelters in your area allow animals. If not, develop alternatives.

#### 55. Establish an Emergency Contact

Enlist a family member or friend to take care of your dog in the event of a sudden illness, hospitalization or other emergency. This person should ideally be someone your dog has spent some time with and is comfortable with. Leave a list of general care instructions in a safe place.

#### 56. Make a Will

You should make arrangements for the safety and care of your pet in the event of your death. Don't assume that a family member will step in to take care of the dog.

#### 57. Take Pictures

Of course, you will want a picture of your dog to grace your desk or to send as a Christmas card.

More importantly, a current photo will be invaluable in the event that your dog is lost.

Be a Friend

#### 58. Play!

Dogs, of course, love to play. Set aside time each day for play sessions. Apart from the obvious benefit of having fun together, play also provides an outlet for your dog's energy.

#### 59. Go On Walks

Take your dog on frequent walks. He will enjoy exploring the neighborhood and will benefit from the exercise. Make sure that you have a good strong leash and that you maintain control of the dog at all times.

#### 60. Talk to Your Dog

Your dog won't understand your words, but he will enjoy the sound of your voice. Talking to your dog will make him feel involved. You can also use different voice levels to praise or correct your dog's behavior.

#### 61. Give Treats

Your dog will always appreciate a treat, and treats can be used as a supplement to his regular diet, as well as an excellent training aid.

#### 62. Love Your Dog

Your dog will love you no matter what. Return the favor.

#### 63. Switch Out Toys

Keep your dog entertained by rotating his toys. Put "old" toys out of sight for a month or two and then bring them out again - your dog will enjoy them just as much as when they were new.

#### 64. Give Your Time

You are the center of your dog's world. You may be tired after a long day at work, but your dog has spent the day anxiously awaiting your return. Reward that loyalty with your time. Pet him, talk to him, play with him, laugh with him. Let your dog know you value his company.

#### 65. Find the "Spot"

Scratch your dog's belly often. If you find the "spot," so much the better.

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