



## Being a Responsible Owner



### Being a responsible owner

Now that you've made the decision to welcome a dog or cat into your family, there are many areas to consider to ensure that you become and remain a responsible pet owner.



### Find a Veterinarian

Don't wait until your pet becomes ill before registering with a vet. Your pet will need annual vaccinations which are also a good opportunity for a complete health check. Responsible ownership means ensuring that your pet receives the following:

- **Vaccinations** – Pets should follow a strict schedule of vaccinations to prevent disease. Keep your pet up to date with these in accordance with your veterinarian's recommendations.
- **Worming / Flea Control** – Aside from discomfort, parasites such as fleas and ticks can also cause serious diseases. Ensure your pet, their bedding, and your home are all free from parasites.
- **Micro chipping** – Microchips are methods of permanently identifying your pet and can be invaluable in recovering your dog / cat if they should become lost.
- **Neutering** – Neutering is the most responsible way of preventing unwanted puppies or kittens being born. For detailed information about neutering and the benefits to you and your pet, please see our Neutering fact sheet.
- **Pet insurance** – This is an important consideration. A regular payment will guard against unexpected veterinary fees and allow you to provide the best healthcare for your pet.

## Your Home

Before you bring your new friend home, please take all steps to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible

- **Pet Proof Your Home** – Prepare your home before your new pet arrives. Move breakables or “chewables” to higher ground and make electrical cords inaccessible to curious paws and noses. Ensure that any area of the house that you want to be off limit to your pet is blocked off securely.
- **Protect From Poisons** – Make sure that your home and yard are free from poisonous substances which can cause serious illness or even death. It is always a good idea to keep your veterinarian’s number handy in case of accidental ingestion. They will also be able to provide detailed advice about which substances should be kept away from your pet.
- **Set a Containment Policy** – It is essential, if you have a dog, that you have a secure method of keeping your pet on your property. Check your fence for spots vulnerable to chewing or digging. If your property is not fenced in some way, please stress to family members that your dog must be leashed at all times when taken outdoors.



## Taking care of your pet

You and your family members will need to decide who is responsible for feeding, walking, play time, clean-up and grooming. If necessary, post a schedule of tasks in a visible area of the house to remind everyone of their responsibilities.

- **Feed a Good Diet** – Work with your veterinarian to find the food that is best for your pet’s age, size and activity level. Keep the diet consistent, and always provide plenty of fresh, clean water. Human food is not recommended. Human chocolate, for example, is poisonous to dogs and can be fatal in large quantities.



- **Exercise** – Pets need regular exercise to ensure continuing good health and to prevent behaviour problems. Exercise requirements will vary between pets. For example, dogs need to be exercised regularly, usually twice a day, in all weathers. Cats require less exercise, but should still be provided with ample space, preferably with access to a safe, outdoor location. Small, enclosed flats and apartments rarely make suitable homes for healthy young pets, though they may be more suitable for older, house-bound animals.
- **Make a Bed** – Every animal needs a quiet place to call their own. Create a comfortable area for your pet to go to when they need rest or privacy.
- **Buy Some Toys** – Provide your pet with a variety of toys to add variety and interest to their life. Ideally, get some toys that you and your pet can play with together and some to keep them entertained when they are alone. Never leave your pet unattended with any toy that has small, detachable parts.
- **Groom Your Pet** – All pets should be groomed regularly. Some short-coated breeds only need a quick brush every week, while some longer-coated breeds need daily brushing to prevent matting and reduce shedding. If your pet requires clipping, you may want to consult a professional groomer.

## Your responsibility to others

- **Training** – If you have a dog, you also have a responsibility to ensure that they can interact safely with people and other animals. If you get a puppy we would strongly advise researching training classes in your local area, unless you feel comfortable to adopt your own training programme. If you get an adult dog from a rescue centre, they may already have been trained to behave safely in all situations but the staff who have been looking after your pet will be able to advise you of any training they feel your dog may need.
- **Control** – Your need to ensure that you have control of your dog at all times in public places. You could face prosecution if your dog is found to be threatening the public in anyway and your pet could also be put to sleep.
- **Fouling** – It is an offence to let your dog foul in a public place and not clear it up and so always carry a poor-scoop or plastic bag when you take them out for a walk.
- **Identification** – All dogs should wear a collar and tag with the owners name and address on it so as they can be easily identified. If your dog became lost and was mistaken as a stray there is a risk that they could be picked up by a warden and taken to local kennels.

## Finally – Love them!

You aren't a responsible pet owner just at the weekends, or when you have spare time. When you bring a pet into your family, that animal is yours for life. Once you've made that commitment don't break it. Your pet's life depends on you.

- **Play** – Pets 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 friend's energy.
- **Talk to Your Pet** – Your pet won't understand your words, but they will enjoy the sound of your voice and will make them feel involved.
- **Give Treats** – Your pet will always appreciate a treat and in moderation these can be used as a supplement to their regular diet, as well as being an excellent training aid.
- **Give Your Time** – Make sure your new pet isn't left alone all day. You and your family are the centre of their world. You may be tired after a long day at work but your pet has spent the day anxiously awaiting your return. Reward that loyalty with your time and let them know that you love them.



For further advice on any area of this factsheet, please contact our veterinary panel at [enquiries@iapwa.org](mailto:enquiries@iapwa.org) who will be happy to advise you.