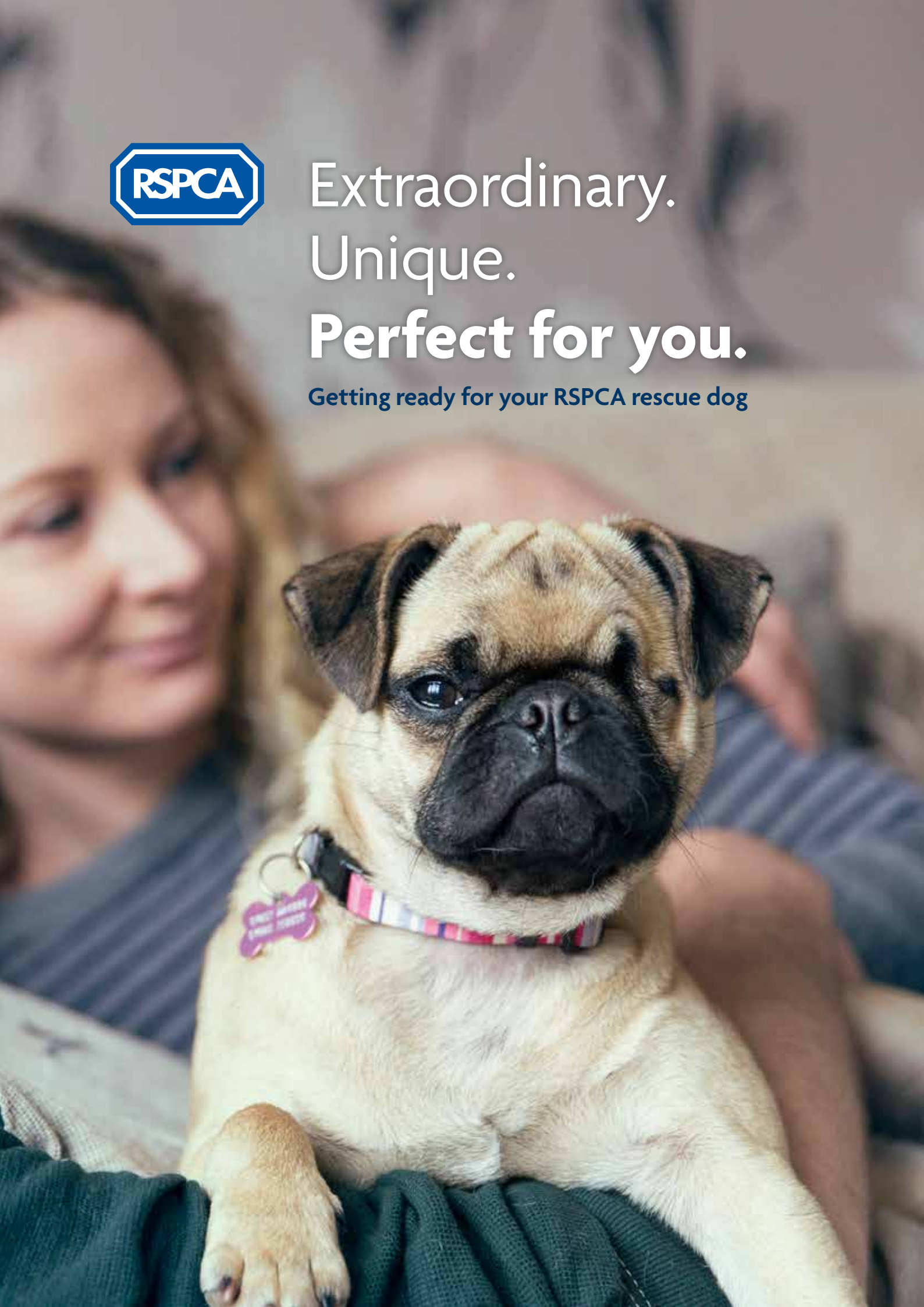




Extraordinary.  
Unique.

**Perfect for you.**

Getting ready for your RSPCA rescue dog



## Your dog's details

Name:

Age:

Description:

A little bit about him/her:

What food is he/she being fed:

Your notes:

Your RSPCA contact details:

RSPCA branch/animal centre:

Telephone number:

### Don't forget to:

- Register with a local vet.
- Make sure your house is free from hazards – see page 8.
- Arrange pet insurance.
- Find a good dog trainer. See page 24 for how to find a good trainer.

## Contents

Preparing for your RSPCA rescue dog	6
● What to buy	6
● Creating a hazard-free home	8
● Preparing other pets	8
Bringing your rescue dog home	11
● The journey home	11
● Creating a safe haven for your dog	11
● Getting a good night's sleep	12
Helping your rescue dog settle in to their new home	15
● Help to keep things familiar	15
● Establishing a good routine	15
● Take your time	15
● Getting used to being left alone	16
● Toilet training your dog	17
Learning to live together	20
● Getting out and about	20
● Introducing new experiences	20
● Meeting new people	22
● Meeting children	22
● Meeting unfamiliar dogs	22
● Understanding your dog's body language	24
● Training your dog	24
Understanding your dog's behaviour	25
● Preventing and managing behaviour problems	26
● What to do if you're having problems	27
Keeping your dog fit and healthy	29
● Finding a vet	29
● Worms, fleas and ticks	29
● Teeth	29
● Grooming	29
● How much to feed	30
● When to call a vet	30
● The body condition system	31
How kids should not and should interact with dogs	32
Useful contacts	34

# Thank you

**for choosing to adopt a dog who has been rescued by the RSPCA.**

**The next stage of the process is to help you get ready to welcome your new dog into your family. We will arrange for one of our Adoption Support Volunteers to visit you and your family at your home.**

They will discuss with you any specific needs that your dog has, and suggest any adjustments to your house, garden or lifestyle that may be needed to help you and your rescue dog settle into a safe, secure and happy life together.

Introducing a new dog to your home will be exciting, rewarding and, at times, challenging. It may take quite a while for your new dog to settle into life with you, but, don't worry, everyone encounters some tricky bits with their new dog and remember you are not alone – we are here to support you.

**Each of the dogs in our care comes with a story.**

They may have been a victim of cruelty or unwanted and abandoned, while some may never have experienced life in a loving, family home, until now. Your dog may not be perfect, but they will be perfect for you.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the RSPCA centre you've been dealing with.

## RSPCA Rehoming Team

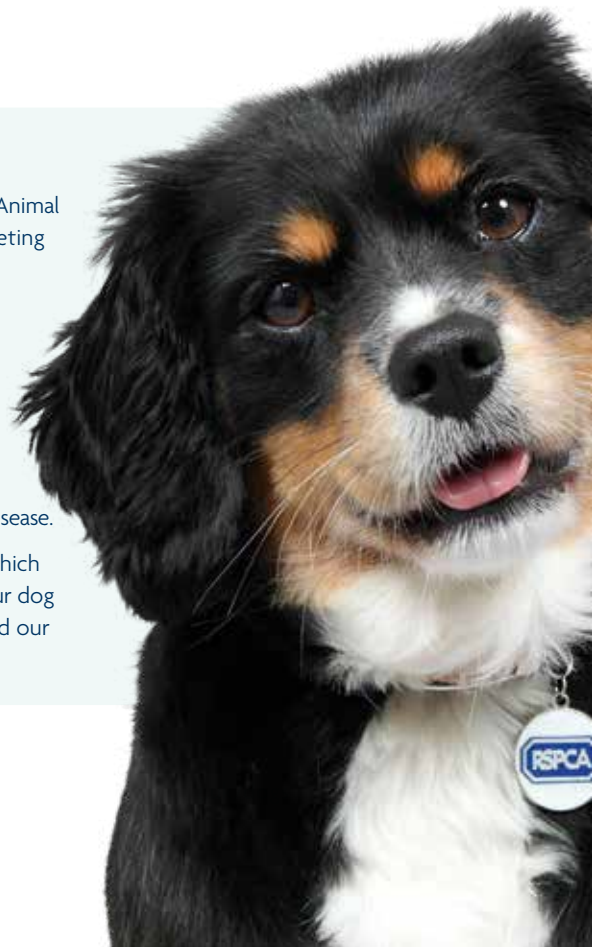
### THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006

All animal owners are required by law, under the Animal Welfare Act, to care for animals properly by meeting their five welfare needs.

**These are:**

1. a suitable place to live;
2. a healthy diet, including clean, fresh water;
3. the ability to behave normally;
4. appropriate company and
5. protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

There are other laws relating to dog ownership which are important to know about to protect you, your dog and others. Visit: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs) to read our guide 'Dogs and the law'.



# Preparing for your RSPCA rescue dog

## What to buy

If you're a first time dog owner, here's a guide on what to buy, and what you'll need to think about before your RSPCA rescue dog comes home. We can advise what's best to suit the needs of your dog.

### ● Collar and tag

A correctly fitted collar should allow two fingers to be placed comfortably side by side between the collar and the dog's neck.

**It is a legal requirement for your dog to wear a collar with an identity tag when in public – make sure your contact details on the tag are kept up to date.**

### ● Lead

Your dog's lead needs to be strong enough for their size and strength and have a strong (non-plastic) clip which can be attached to their collar. It should also feel comfortable in your hand. Flexi or retractable leads can be useful when it's unsafe to let your dog off the lead, but should only be used when there is no risk to you or your dog, for example when away from busy roads.

### ● Food

You should continue with the diet that your dog has been fed at the RSPCA because sudden changes in diet can lead to stomach upsets. If you choose to change to another food, this will need to be done gradually, over three to five days, mixing a little of the new food with the old to gradually wean your dog onto the new diet. Your dog will need separate bowls for food and water, and have access to fresh, clean drinking water at all times.

### ● Bed

Your dog will need somewhere warm, dry and quiet to sleep, away from drafts. Dogs like a nice soft bed that is large enough to stretch out or curl up in and allows them to go through the usual dog routine of turning before going to sleep. Your dog should always be able to get to their bed and be left undisturbed. Make sure you get one that is washable and easy to dry – muddy paws and belly mean frequent washing!

### TOP TIP

We recommend you take an item made of material, such as a blanket or towel, from your home to the kennels a few days before you collect your new dog so they are introduced to the smell of your home before they arrive. If you have other pets take an extra towel and stroke your dog with it. Bringing this home will help your existing pets get used to the new pet's smell before they come home.

### ● Feeding toys

We recommend the use of feeding toys, such as Kongs, treat balls and puzzle feeders to help keep your dog mentally stimulated. They're also good for keeping your dog occupied when you go out.

You may be able to buy these products directly from us – either from the RSPCA centre you've been dealing with or at our website: [shop.rspca.org.uk](https://shop.rspca.org.uk)

Claim a 10% discount by quoting **rehome10** at the checkout.

“Jack loves to play and has been stealing slippers, so we've been to buy him some toys which he loves to play with.”

*Jack's adopters*



**It is a legal requirement for your dog to wear a collar with:**

- your name  
and
- your address

on the tag and we also recommend adding your phone number.

**Make sure your details are up to date.**

### ● Toys

Dogs love playing, so toys are very important. There are many types of toys available such as balls, ropes, Frisbees and squeaky toys. It's a good idea to have a variety of toys and to keep things interesting and fun, but of course your dog will probably have their favourite toy!

### ● Poo bags

Poo bags are a must to take out on dog walks. You can buy poo bags or nappy sacks, which do the job just as well. Don't get caught out without a poo bag or you could face a fine of up to £1,000.

### ● Travel equipment

To keep you and your dog safe while travelling in a car, and to comply with the UK Highway Code, there is a range of safety harnesses, crates and dog guards available.

## Creating a hazard-free home

Dogs are inquisitive and like to investigate their surroundings, which can sometimes lead them into danger. Make sure your home and garden is safe for your dog. Check that the garden and all fencing is escape-proof, and that the following items, which are poisonous to dogs, are locked safely away:

- **Anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen.**
- **Paracetamol.**
- **Slug and snail pellets.**
- **Weed killers.**
- **Rodent poisons.**
- **Toxic cleaners.**

## Preparing other pets

You can start introducing your RSPCA rescue dog to other family pets before they actually meet. Swap the bedding of your current cat or dog with that of the rescue dog while they are still at the RSPCA. Alternatively, take two cloths and stroke your current cat or dog with both, then stroke your rescue dog with both, leaving one with your rescue dog and taking the other one home – this is the same as us seeing photographs of someone before we meet them.

### First meetings

To make sure the first meeting is as positive an experience as possible for all involved, plan the first meeting well in advance. Read our step-by-step guide at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company) Remember, the better prepared you are, the greater the likelihood of your pets living in harmony.

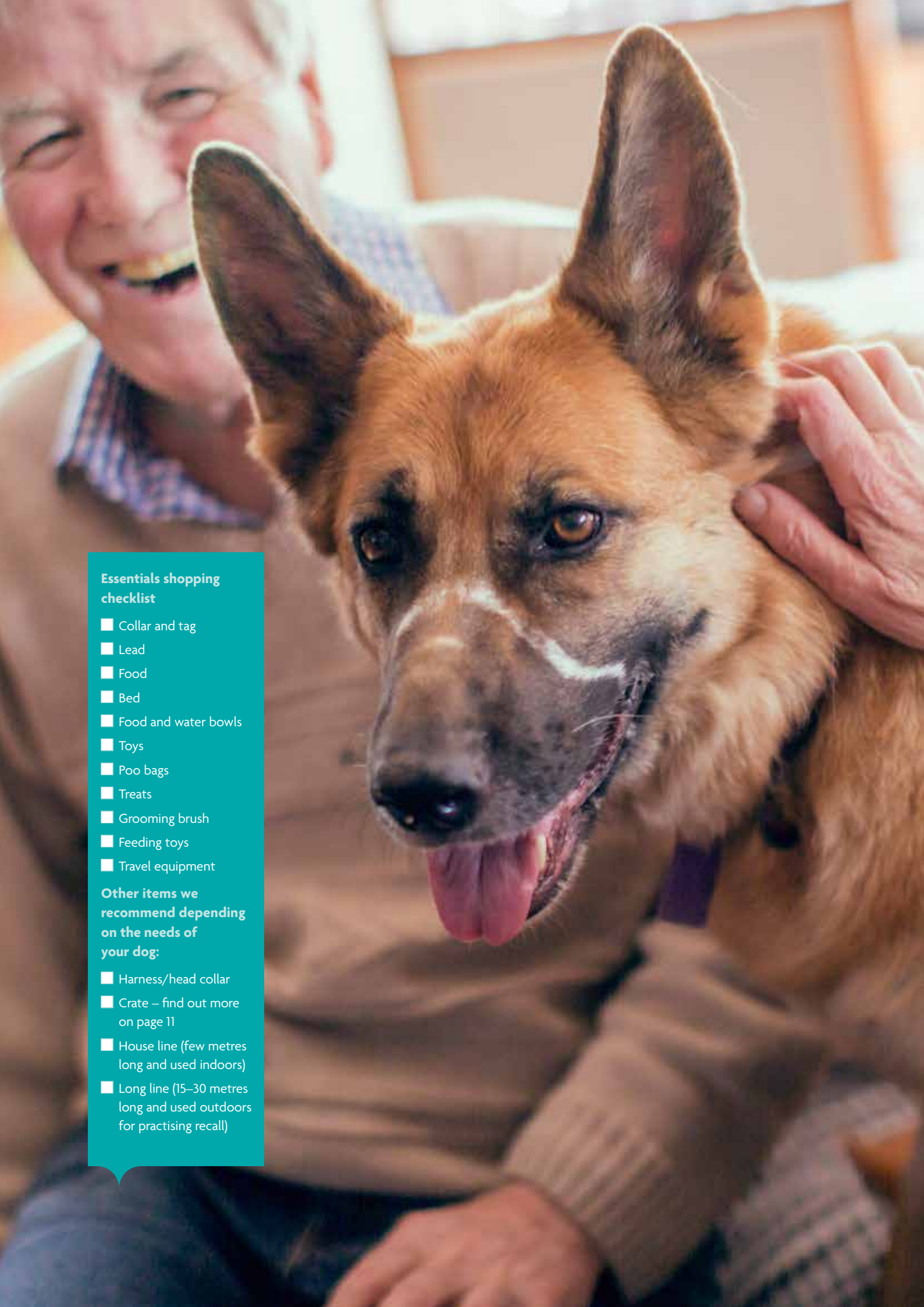
#### TOP TIP

If you already have a dog, make sure that you provide enough toys, beds and resting places for all of them, as well as enough space for them to get away from each other. Let them get to know each other at their own pace rather than forcing them to interact.

You can find our step-by-step guide to introducing cats and dogs at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company)

“Our cat is not happy about Gabanna so we are keeping them separate while the cat gets used to a dog being in the house. Gabanna is ignoring the cat, which is good, and we have a trainer coming to help us.”

*Gabanna's adopter*



### Essentials shopping checklist

- Collar and tag
- Lead
- Food
- Bed
- Food and water bowls
- Toys
- Poo bags
- Treats
- Grooming brush
- Feeding toys
- Travel equipment

### Other items we recommend depending on the needs of your dog:

- Harness/head collar
- Crate – find out more on page 11
- House line (few metres long and used indoors)
- Long line (15–30 metres long and used outdoors for practising recall)





**ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES FOR YOUR NEW PET!**

### RSPCA Pet Products

Animals in our centres have responded brilliantly to our new range of foods, care products and accessories.

Visit your local centre shop and ask about the RSPCA range of pet products.

All are carefully tested and selected to meet the welfare needs of your pet.

If you're not able to buy from your local centre visit:  
[shop.rspca.org.uk/rehomer](http://shop.rspca.org.uk/rehomer)

# RSPCA products for RSPCA pets



HEALTHY FORMULATIONS

ETHICAL SOURCING

AS USED IN RSPCA ANIMAL CENTRES

SUPER PREMIUM PRODUCTS AT VALUE PRICES

ALL PROFITS GO TO SUPPORTING THE RSPCA



## Bringing your rescue dog home

You can find more advice on travelling in the car with dogs at:

[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment)

*“He jumped straight into the car and settled. He was a bit whiney and car sick towards the end of the journey.”*

*Milo's adopter*

No doubt you will be feeling excited – and maybe a bit anxious – about bringing your rescue dog home and this is likely to be how your new dog feels too as they begin a new life with you. Here are a few tips to help keep those early days as stress-free as possible.

### The journey home

A familiar smelling item, such as a blanket from their kennel, may help your dog to feel more comfortable on their journey home. Make sure that both you and your dog are safe when you are driving – we recommend using travelling crates or harnesses.

Your dog may whine or bark during the journey and some dogs will poo or vomit, quite often just before you arrive home because they are nervous or not used to travelling. Please remember to be patient and don't tell them off, instead calmly remove them from the car and clean up later.

#### TOP TIP

When you get home, let your dog go to the toilet before entering the house, and give them lots of praise when they go. It can be very common for even the most house-trained dog to have accidents in their new home. To avoid this happening take them outside regularly throughout the first few days. Don't shout or smack if they have an accident – this will make them anxious and the problem worse.

### Creating a safe haven for your dog

Help your dog to settle in by creating a 'safe haven'. The idea of a safe haven is to give your dog a place they can go to whenever they choose, a place they always feel safe and a place they know they can rest undisturbed. Just like us, dogs can get stressed, worried and scared sometimes and a safe haven gives them an important retreat.

Their safe haven should be in addition to any other beds your dog has.

#### Creating a safe haven

Your dog's safe haven should be somewhere out of the way such as in a corner or under a desk that isn't frequently used and away from areas with direct sunlight or draughts. The safe haven can either be a really comfortable bed or a crate, which some dogs like because it's fully enclosed. Next you need to make it a great place to be.

- If you're using a crate, add some comfortable soft bedding for your dog to lie on.
- If possible, feed your dog a few of their meals in the safe haven area.
- Place some interesting, safe, chew toys inside.
- Hide tasty treats in the bedding for them to find.
- With crates, placing a cover over part of it can help nervous dogs feel more secure.

If you're using a crate, your dog will need to be able to sit and stand at full height, turn around, stretch out and lie down comfortably.

You can find more advice on using dog crates at:  
[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment)

### Help your rescue dog to feel secure in their safe haven by:

- Never sending them to their safe haven as a form of punishment.
- Always allowing your dog to decide when they want to go to their safe haven.
- Leaving them undisturbed.
- Not physically removing them from their safe haven – if you need to get them out then call them over or better still, lure them out with a treat.

Crates should never be used as the only way to prevent behavioural problems such as destroying furniture. Find out more on page 26 about getting help with behavioural problems.

## Getting a good night's sleep

### The first few nights

With so many changes, new people, smells, sights and sounds, your rescue dog is likely to feel a little unsettled and in need of some comfort during the night, so be prepared for a few nights of disrupted sleep.

You may choose for them to sleep in your bedroom for a few nights, or you could set up a bed downstairs or in another room – do whichever works best for you. Don't worry if in the long term you prefer your dog not to sleep in your room, as dogs can easily learn to sleep alone downstairs after they have settled in.



If your dog makes a lot of noise in the night they may need to go to the toilet, so be prepared to take them out. Praise them calmly if they go to the toilet outside but if they don't avoid giving them lots of fuss and attention. If they continue to whine or bark, it may be a sign that they are feeling anxious. If they don't settle after a toilet break then some gentle and calm stroking may help to soothe them.

### Moving forward

If you would prefer not to have your dog in the bedroom they will need to learn to feel comfortable sleeping alone. For help with this follow our step-by-step guide on 'Learning to be left alone' on page 16. For a while, you may still have to get up in the night to take your dog to the toilet as they get settled and into a routine.

### THE GOODNIGHT ROUTINE

Before settling your dog down for their first night's sleep, try to make sure they are as sleepy as possible before bed.

- Tire them out with a good walk a while before bedtime.
- Have some relaxed, calm time together.
- Make sure they have been to the toilet just before bed.
- Give them something safe to chew, which can help them settle down.
- Settle them down with the familiar smelling item or blanket from their kennel.

You can find a step-by-step guide to crate training at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment)

*“There was so much going on for Bowie when we first took him home, he was still recovering from a bad skin condition as well as trying to settle into a new home with new people. We wanted to keep him company at night to help him settle so my partner and I took turns sleeping downstairs with him for the first few nights. He is relaxed and happy sleeping on his own now.”*

*Bowie's adopter*



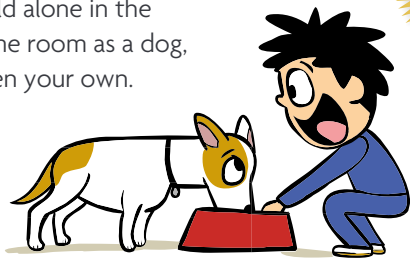


# The 6 Golden Rules

## for keeping your child safe and your dog happy

1

Never leave your child alone in the same room as a dog, even your own.



2

Teach your child never to approach dogs when they:

- are eating or have a treat
- have a toy or something else they really like
- are sleeping
- are unwell, injured or tired
- are blind or deaf.

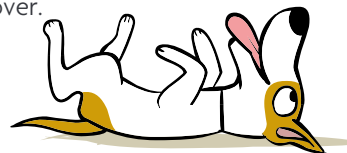
3

Teach your child to be kind and polite to dogs. Don't let your child climb on dogs, pull their ears or do anything you wouldn't allow them to do to another child.



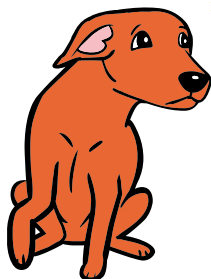
4

Teach your child how to play nicely with your dog. For example, your child can teach your dog some really fun tricks like shake a paw, play dead, or roll-over.



5

Supervise your child when they're with your dog – if your dog looks unhappy, let him/her go somewhere they feel safe and happy.



6

Never allow your child to approach a dog they don't know, for example when out in the park.



**TOP TIP**

We all need a break sometimes – give your dog a cosy spot in a quiet room where they can have their own space. Teach your child to leave your dog alone when they're in their private spot.

[www.rspca.org.uk/safeandhappy](http://www.rspca.org.uk/safeandhappy)

## Helping your rescue dog settle in to their new home

*“We had a little walk around and Alan was not phased at all by the cars and noise. The kids and him have developed a strong bond, as he wants to be with them all the time for attention. I asked them to slow down a bit as he needs some time off and be able to cope without full attention all the time. He did not sleep the whole day, and I had to teach him to stay in his bed and sleep alone while we watch TV. Not an easy task, but he is learning fast. He has started to understand the concept of sitting!”*

*Alan's adopter*

It will naturally take your dog a while to settle into their new surroundings, in the same way that it will take time for you to get to know them. If your dog has been living in a kennel for a while, it will take time to get used to living in your home. Here are some tips to help you during the first few days.

### Help to keep things familiar

Your dog may have had a favourite toy or a blanket that they loved to lay on when with the RSPCA. Bringing this home with you and putting it into their bed will provide familiar smells which can help them feel a bit more settled when everything else is very new.

### Establishing a good routine

Set out a good routine from the beginning – this will help your dog settle in by knowing what's going to happen and when. Organise walks, feeding, play, rest and bedtime around the same time each day. Some days you will need to be flexible, but try to keep to the routine as much as possible.

### Start as you mean to go on

Getting things right at the start can make things much easier further down the line. Be consistent from day one about house rules, for example which areas of the house your dog will be allowed in or whether they will be allowed on the furniture. Any areas that you don't want your dog to have access to should be out of bounds from the beginning. Being consistent from day one will make things much clearer for your dog to understand and can avoid problems at a later stage.



Make sure everyone in the family behaves the same way towards your dog otherwise they will become confused and won't understand how you want them to behave. Teaching children how to interact with dogs will not only keep them safe but will mean your dog is happy too. See: 'The 6 Golden Rules' on the opposite page.

### Take your time

Getting a new dog can be very exciting. You'll probably want to show them off and lots of people may want to meet them. You may also have lots of places that you want to take them to. But, be patient – leaving the RSPCA and going to a new home can be quite overwhelming so it is best to take things slowly. Give your dog time to settle into their home and with your family and then start to introduce different activities and people gradually.

**We have more advice on introducing your dog to new people, other animals and places on pages 20 and 21.**

## Getting used to being left alone

Dogs who struggle to cope when left alone can be destructive and may also bark or howl and some will go to the toilet. One of the most effective ways of preventing this is to teach them right from the start that being alone is nothing to worry about.

This should be done very gradually, increasing the time you leave your dog alone so that it is never frightening and always associated with something pleasant.

If you are likely to be away from the house for a long period of time, shortly after you have adopted your dog from the RSPCA, please arrange for friends or family to help out for a while to make your dog feel safe and secure.

### Five-step plan

These five steps will help your dog to get used to being left alone – take your time and repeat each of the steps until you are sure your dog is happy before progressing. How quickly you progress depends on how well your dog responds.

- 1 Start by encouraging your dog to go to their bed and stay there for a short time while you are still in the room. Reward your dog for remaining quietly in the bed.
- 2 Next, ask your dog to stay in their bed as you move away, then return and reward.
- 3 Move progressively further away and for longer. If your dog reacts or moves then don't reward but go back to the previous stage.
- 4 Start going out through the door before returning, then going out and shutting the door, then going out for longer periods of time. When you get to this point start to vary the length of time that you are out.
- 5 Once you reach the stage where your dog is happy to be left for up to an hour you should then have no problems leaving them for longer periods. To avoid boredom and to make the experience more positive, remember to give your dog something to occupy them while you are out!

If your dog barks, howls, is destructive or goes to the toilet while you are out, please do not react badly when you come home. Although it is not easy to stay calm if you find a mess when you come home, remember that your dog isn't doing it deliberately and you should never physically punish or shout at your dog. Also try to avoid letting your dog see that you are annoyed and let them go outside away from the mess before you clean up.

#### What to do before leaving your dog:

- Leave a safe, suitable toy/bone with your dog when you go out.
- Try to leave something that your dog really loves such as a Kong stuffed with food (peanut butter or cheese mixed with dog biscuits is popular) or a meat-flavoured chew.
- Give your dog a treat ball or cube filled with dried treats – your dog will have to work to get them out.
- Always try to exercise your dog before leaving them. Take your dog for a walk and return home half an hour before you are due to leave.
- Always make sure your dog goes to the toilet before being left alone.

*“We have been leaving Chloe for short periods and she has been OK. We leave her with a treat ball or chews and she always eats all the food she is left with.”*

*Chloe's adopter*

Separation-related behaviour problems get worse if owners punish their dogs when they return home. This is because the punishment will be associated with your return rather than what the dog has done. Your dog will then become anxious the next time they are left alone about what you will do when you return, which can make the problem worse.

## Toilet training your dog

Whether your dog is house trained and where they like to go to the toilet will be dependent on their background, and we will be able to give you more information as to what their toilet behaviour is like when you collect them. If your dog hasn't been toilet trained then the following advice and tips should help them quickly get the hang of what to do.

**The key to successful house training is making sure your dog has frequent opportunities to go to the toilet outside.**

At the very least you need to give them the opportunity to go to the toilet when they wake up in the morning, after every meal and before bed.

There are also signs in your dog's behaviour that can help you predict when they need to go to the toilet; they are likely to become fidgety, often sniffing around and will start to circle before squatting. Make sure you look out for these signs when they wake up, after feeding and after they have been left alone.

When you recognise the signs or if you think they might need to go to the toilet:

- Go with them to a place in the garden you would like them to use as a toilet. Try to take your dog to the same place so they learn the route.
- Reward them immediately if they go to the toilet with lots of praise, a treat or play.
- If they go to the toilet in the wrong place please don't shout or scream as this can make them worried about going to the toilet in your presence and they may then only want to go when they are alone. Instead, take them to the correct place and praise them when they go.

“Sparky has had a few accidents urinating inside, but yesterday he was completely clean so hopefully he is getting reminded of house training and learning the routine. He mostly toilets outside.”

*Sparky's adopter, three days into the adoption*

**TOP TIP** If you find a toilet accident or you see your dog going to the toilet in the house please do not punish them because they will not understand they are being punished for something they did earlier. Clean up any accidents using a warm solution of biological washing powder (mixing one part biological washing powder to nine parts water before rinsing with water). This will help to remove all traces of the smell from your house and reduce the chance of your dog using this area as a toilet again.

**Toilet training should be fun and rewarding for you both!**

Continue to accompany them and reward their actions with lots of praise. If you run into any difficulties please get back in touch with the RSPCA.



## When Stanley met the Bradfords

Stanley resembled a bag of bones when he came into the care of the RSPCA. He was found tied with a rope to a drainpipe and had clearly been suffering for a long time.

It took many months for Stanley to find a new home. Richard Bradford, from West Sussex, read about his plight online and with his wife Claire and their two daughters they travelled more than 100 miles to meet him at RSPCA Blackberry Farm Animal Centre in Buckinghamshire.

“At first we walked right past him,” says Richard. “He had his back to us, sitting quietly, while all the other dogs were jumping up and barking as if to say ‘choose us, choose us’. But Stanley was the only one for us.”

However, it was not an instant happy ending for Stanley and the Bradfords. “We soon discovered that he was scared of other dogs, which made walking him in public places, where other dogs would be off the lead, quite difficult,” explains Claire.

“We sought the assistance of the RSPCA and a behaviourist which has helped us feel more confident and know what to do when faced with a difficult situation.”

**Stanley also has some long-term health issues, but he is still a much-loved fifth member of the Bradford family.**

“Even with his health issues and fear of other dogs, it has been a lot easier to integrate a more mature dog into our family,” says Claire.

“He’s certainly unique – there’s only one Stanley, and he’s ours.”



“He’s certainly unique – there’s only one Stanley, and he’s ours.”

Claire Bradford,  
Stanley’s adopter



## Learning to live together

Over the next few weeks you will start to discover your new dog's true personality and what they are like in the home. You will also learn about how they like to play, what their favourite toy is and where they like to sleep.

And you'll be taking your dog out and about with you, and introducing them to new things.

This will provide them with lots of experiences, some that may be new to them. Some dogs will take this in their stride but others may find it a bit difficult especially if they didn't have good experiences when growing up. Follow our advice on the next few pages on how best to manage your dog when introducing them to new experiences.

### Getting out and about

While you are still getting to know your dog and they are getting to know you, it's important not to let them off the lead when walking.

**To begin with, walk your dog on the lead and practice recall in the garden and then in small, enclosed public areas.**

You can also use a long training line to practice recall – make sure you have plenty of treats and toys with you to reward them for coming back. Read the RSPCA's step-by-step guide 'Teaching your dog recall' at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour)

Please be aware that on some roads it is an offence to have your dog off the lead. In order to stay within the law and to keep your dog safe, we recommend keeping your dog on a lead at all times when you are on a road. Dogs also have to be kept on the lead in certain areas such as some public gardens and parks. Contact your local council for information about your area.



Dogs are vulnerable to heat stress and should never be left in a car on a warm day. If you see a dog in a car in distress, please call 999.

### Introducing new experiences

There may be things your dog has never experienced before, or they may have had a bad experience, which can make them feel anxious. Help them by making sure any new experiences, places or people are positive. The key is to help them feel safe, you can do this by:

- always remaining calm
- making introductions a gradual process
- using treats or toys to create a positive association
- always allowing your dog to move away from anything they are worried about.

*“ Mia is settling in really well. She is frightened of the TV and sits at one end of the lounge, but she is getting better every day and is coming into the lounge more often. We are really pleased with her. She has a lovely personality and is coming out of herself every day. ”*

*Mia's adopter*



## Meeting new people

For most dogs, meeting new people and spending time with them is a great source of interaction and fun. Of course, all dogs are different and some may be a little worried or nervous around new people. Watching your dog closely can help you understand how they are feeling.

If your dog seems to be scared or worried, it is important not to pressure or force them to say hello as this can worry them even more. Allow them to move away from the situation or try to distract your dog with something fun and positive such as their favourite toy. Never punish your dog if scared or worried as this can make their behaviour worse.

If your dog is obviously very worried or frightened then guide them away if they are on a lead. If they are loose then call them in an upbeat positive manner and reward with a treat or praise when they return to you.

By learning to read your dog's behavioural signs, especially the subtle ones, and avoiding the situation before nervous behaviour develops, it will help your dog to begin to learn to trust you and know that you will not be forcing them into any situations they are nervous of. Your new-found friend will be looking at you for protection so be prepared to look out for potentially scary situations to prevent them from feeling nervous.

Avoid exposing your dog to lots of people all at once; even if your dog appears happy to meet new people it is important to take things slowly and avoid overwhelming them. Your dog should never be forced to interact.



Reward your dog in the presence of strangers so they associate the unfamiliar person with a positive reward. It's a good idea to make sure new people only say "Hello" and make a fuss once your dog has got over any initial excitement – always reward your dog for calm behaviour.

## Meeting children

In general, dogs find children hard to understand as they behave in a very different way to adults. They are loud, unpredictable and many show their feelings using lots of physical contact such as hugs and kisses. For many dogs this type of behaviour can be threatening, particularly dogs who were not introduced to children when they were puppies. It is important to look for any signs that your dog may feel uncomfortable when near children and provide them with somewhere to go where they will be undisturbed and safe. Putting in place some rules can also help keep children safe and dogs happy. See pages 32 and 33 for more information.

## Meeting unfamiliar dogs

Some dogs are very sociable and enjoy the company of other dogs, while others prefer their own company and that of their humans. It is important not to force your dog to interact with other dogs but allow them to meet and mix with friendly dogs as they choose.

**Finding friendly, calm and well-socialised dogs can help to settle your dog into their new surroundings.**

*“Astro has been aggressive towards other dogs. He is fine at a distance of five metres, but if they enter closer he reacts. I gave advice about showing him the attention exercise, to teach him to watch them and then he can receive nice, tasty rewards when dogs approach. Start with practice at home, then at a distance from other dogs.”*

*Rebecca, Kennel Supervisor*



“ She met a few dogs on her walk. A male dog came and was a pest, sniffing her and wouldn't leave her alone until the owner took him away but Ivy was fine. She then met two large dogs who she was worried by and just stopped and watched them, but then happily walked past when they had gone.”

Ivy's adopter

Meeting other dogs should be a relaxing experience for you and your dog and all introductions should take place on a slack lead. Your dog may be cautious when approaching some dogs but not others. Always allow them to make their own decisions. Dogs communicate through body language and the signals being sent out by the other dog may warn your dog to approach more cautiously or stay away from the other dog.

During the early days, if your dog appears frightened or worried in the presence of other dogs, it may be because your dog is just feeling anxious about experiencing new situations in a new environment. Dogs need time to build relationships at their own pace, and in a relaxed open, environment and so it is important not to rush.



When dogs are interacting look out for a behaviour known as a 'play bow'. This is where dogs drop down on their front legs and raise their rear end in the air, and it signals they wish to interact and play.



### Encountering a dog that's off the lead

When on a lead many dogs can feel threatened by dogs that approach them and are off lead because they cannot run away. If your dog becomes anxious then move away until the other dog owner is present and your dog's anxiety reduces. If your dog engages in play monitor the interaction, as the energetic levels of play demonstrated by some dogs can make other dogs anxious.

When looking for signs of anxiety in your dog it is important to take into account the situation. It is normal for a dog to pant after exercise or to sniff the ground and objects around it, but if, as you approach another dog, your dog seems worried then distract your dog and move away offering them a toy or titbit for becoming focused on you. Continue your walk at a distance that your dog feels safe and relaxed.

## Understanding your dog's body language

Dogs communicate mainly through body language. They use all different parts of their body, including their tails, ears and eyes to signal how they are feeling. Just like you, your dog can experience a range of emotions including happiness, anxiety, fear and anger. It's important to understand which emotions your dog is feeling so that you can take any action necessary to make sure they are happy and healthy. Use our guide opposite and share it with your friends and family so you can all recognise important body language signals and get to know how your dog is feeling.

## Training your dog

Once your dog has had time to settle into their new home and routine, it's time to think about training.

Training should be fun for both you and your dog – it helps build your relationship and is a great way to enjoy each other's company. Teaching your dog basic obedience like sit, wait and coming back when called gives them the freedom to do the things they like to do, while being safe and under control. Most dogs love to learn, so as well as training them in basic obedience, tricks like giving a paw and playing dead can be a good way of stopping them from getting bored.

All training should be reward based. Giving your dog something they really like such as food, toys or praise when they show a particular behaviour means that they are more likely to do it again. It is important to find out what your dog really likes and what their favourite things are. Some dogs love to play tug with a rope toy while others are happiest chasing a ball. Favourite treats are often small pieces of meat or cheese but all dogs will have their favourite. Have fun getting to know your dog to find out what motivates them the most.

**The better the reward the more your dog will enjoy training and learning.**

Please don't shout or smack your dog for mistakes they make and avoid using any training methods which are designed to force, frighten or hurt dogs – this doesn't help them to learn and is very likely to damage your relationship. In some cases it can cause behaviour problems. If mistakes are made during training, or your dog is showing behaviour that you don't want, ignore it.

### Practice makes perfect

Just like us, dogs learn at different rates so don't worry if your dog doesn't pick things up straight away. Practice makes perfect and training can take time. Break training up into short, but regular, sessions so your dog isn't overloaded and always try to end with something that your dog knows so the session finishes positively. If you need some advice then speak to a local trainer.

Get more information on teaching your dog basic commands at:

[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour)



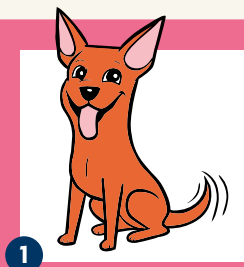
Training classes can be great for new dog owners and anybody who is feeling a little rusty or needs some extra help and advice. Finding the right training class is important to make sure your dog is going to be happy. Visit: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour) for advice on how to find a good trainer.

## Understanding your dog's behaviour

Your dog's body language can help you to understand how they are feeling.

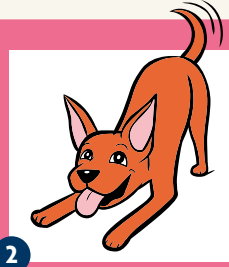
### A happy dog

A dog who is happy will be relaxed.



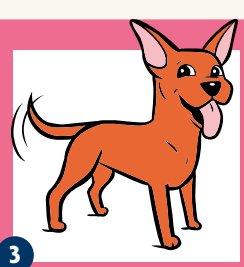
1

Dog has a relaxed body posture, smooth hair, mouth open and relaxed, ears in natural position, wagging tail, eyes normal shape.



2

Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, eyes normal shape, ears in natural position, may be barking excitedly.

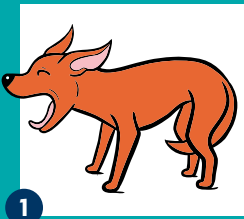


3

Dog's weight is distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, tail wagging, face is interested and alert, relaxed and mouth open.

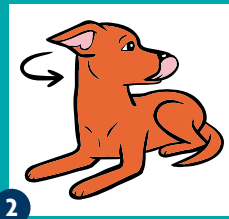
### A worried dog

These dogs are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you to go near them.



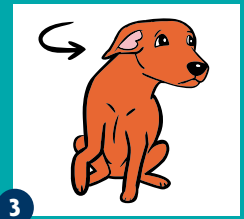
1

Dog is standing but body posture and head position is low. Tail is tucked under, ears are back and dog is yawning.



2

Dog is lying down and avoiding eye contact or turning head away from you and lip licking plus ears are back.

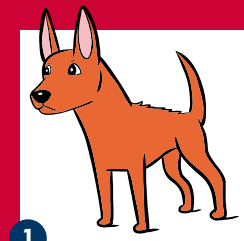


3

Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears are back, tail tucked away, not making eye contact, yawning, raising front paw.

### An angry or very unhappy dog

These dogs are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.



1

Dog is standing with a stiffened body posture, weight forward, ears are up, hair raised, eyes looking at you – pupils dark and enlarged, tail is up and stiff, wrinkled nose.



2

Dog is lying down cowering, ears flat, teeth showing, tail down between legs.



3

Dog is standing with body down and weight towards the back, head is tilted upwards, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth exposed, eyes staring, ears back and down, snarling.



## Preventing and managing behaviour problems

As your dog settles into their new life and routine, you may start to experience some problems or see some behaviour that you didn't expect and are worried about.

It's a good idea to step back and think about things from a dog's perspective, as this can often help you understand why dogs behave in a particular way. It will also help you find ways to prevent problem behaviours as well as manage and improve them.

Some problematic behaviours occur through boredom where a dog is not provided with enough to keep them occupied. Without toys to play with or things to chew, dogs may create their own entertainment such as destroying furniture or digging up the garden!

Other behaviours may happen due to a lack of training in all the situations we expect our dog to respond to. For example, a dog's recall can be perfect in our back garden but we need to practice and train in lots of different situations if we are to be sure they will come back wherever you are.

In some cases our behaviour can cause behaviour problems. Dogs may get told one thing by one member of the family and then get told something very different by another. Mum might let the dog on the sofa but Dad doesn't, so this can cause confusion. It can also be very puzzling if your dog is allowed on the sofa in summer but not in winter when they are dirty, so it is important that everyone treats them the same way all the time.

How we think about dogs can also influence their behaviour. For many people, dogs are a significant member of their family and can be treated very much like people. There is nothing wrong with this as long as we don't forget that dogs are dogs. Although dogs are pretty smart, they don't experience all the same emotions as us and are unable to think about lots of things in the same way we do. For example, they can't plan ahead or think about what happened yesterday; they don't do things to deliberately make us angry such as go to the toilet in the house and they don't know that stealing food off the counter when we turn our backs is wrong. This means that telling them off in the same way as we may do a child can often make the problem worse or create other



problems instead. It is much better for us and them to understand how they think and feel. This makes it easier for us to communicate with them without damaging our relationship.

Our lack of communication can also cause problems. We are quick to tell dogs what we don't want but forget to tell them what we do want. We might tell our dog off if they are barking or jumping up, but forget to praise them when they stop and are quiet, or standing or sitting on the floor.

Fearful or anxious behaviour generally means your dog is unhappy in certain situations. This can be a result of poor breeding, experiences during their learning period as a puppy or before coming into RSPCA care. If your dog regularly shows fear or is frightened of many things then they may not be enjoying life to the full and it is important to seek expert help. In the same way, dogs who show aggressive behaviour may be in pain or feel threatened and are unhappy. Again, it is important to seek expert help.

If you are worried about how your adopted dog is behaving, please get in touch with the RSPCA. We will work with you to help understand why your dog is behaving in a certain way and offer advice to help manage the problem. In some cases, we may refer you for more specialist advice, especially if we are worried about how your dog is feeling and think they may not be enjoying life to the full.

## What to do if you're having problems

- 1 If you do experience problems and would like some help, please contact the RSPCA branch or animal centre where you adopted your dog.
- 2 If you are still concerned about your dog's behaviour, it's a good idea to get them checked over by a vet, to rule out any illness or injury that may be causing the problem. The vet can then refer you to a Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CAB) for further help. Be careful though – anyone can call themselves an animal behaviourist, so do check that the one you use is qualified, experienced, knowledgeable and will protect your dog's welfare. You can find a CAB on the following websites: the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors ([www.apbc.org.uk](http://www.apbc.org.uk)) and the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour ([www.asab.org](http://www.asab.org)).





# RSPCA FLEAaway™ kills fleas ticks and lice.



Protects dogs for up to  
eight weeks against fleas.

100% of profit goes to the RSPCA.



Available at a variety of retailers and online at: [shop.rspca.org.uk](https://shop.rspca.org.uk)

# Keeping your dog fit and healthy

## Finding a vet

Your dog will need to visit the vet at least once a year for their annual vaccination and a health check. Speak to your vet to see if they offer a health care plan for your pet, which allows you to spread the cost of preventative veterinary treatment such as regular health checks, annual vaccinations and flea and worm treatments, while ensuring your pet remains fit and healthy.

For more information, visit:

- [www.thehealthypetclub.co.uk](http://www.thehealthypetclub.co.uk)
- [www.companioncare.co.uk/health-plans](http://www.companioncare.co.uk/health-plans)

## Worms, fleas and ticks

All dogs get worms at some point in their life. If regular worming treatment isn't given, your dog can get ill and worms can also pose a small risk to your family's health.

**Ensure you clean away dog mess in your garden regularly and make sure your dog is given worming treatments regularly as advised by your vet.**

Fleas can thrive in your home, so keep giving your dog monthly flea treatment using RSPCA FLEAaway™ to keep them at bay. If you do get fleas in your home, you'll also need to treat your carpets and soft furnishings with a suitable product. RSPCA FLEAaway™ also helps prevent ticks.

Ticks attach to any part of a dog's body and feed on their blood. Ticks can pass diseases on to your dog so it's best to remove them as soon as possible – speak to your vet about how to do this safely.

## Teeth

Keeping your dog's teeth clean and healthy is as important for your dog as it is for you. Without regular brushing with special doggy toothpaste and using safe chew toys, your dog could develop dental disease that can be costly to treat and make your dog unhappy.

## Grooming

Grooming can be a great way to bond with your dog and an opportunity to keep an eye on how healthy your dog is. Grooming should be introduced slowly, using rewards to make your dog feel happy. If you are having any problems grooming your dog, please speak to the RSPCA or your vet.

## How much to feed

Just like us, dogs can easily become overweight if they eat more calories than they use up. Being overweight can lead to health issues, such as diabetes, heart disease, respiratory distress, high blood pressure and cancers.

Always follow the instructions on the food packet to ensure you give your dog the correct portion size, but remember that treats and titbits count towards your dog's daily calorie intake.

Check on a regular basis that your dog is the right size and weight – use the guide opposite. If you are worried about your dog's weight or you think they may be overweight or underweight, it is best to seek advice about your dog from your vet.

### WARNING!

Most human foods don't provide dogs with the nutrition they need. The following foods, and food containing these ingredients, are poisonous to dogs:

- onions, garlic, grapes, raisins, sultanas, currants
- chocolate
- xylitol (sugar-free sweetener commonly found in chewing gum, sweets and toothpaste).

Visit: [www.rspca.org.uk/poisoning](http://www.rspca.org.uk/poisoning) for advice on how to prevent poisoning and what to do if your dog is poisoned.

## When to call a vet

Dogs can suffer from a range of diseases and other illnesses, but individual dogs show pain and suffering in different ways. A change in the way your dog behaves can be a sign that they are distressed, bored, ill or injured. Once your dog has settled in to your home you should take time to get to know how they usually behave, that way you will be able to spot any changes in their behaviour.

If you are worried about the health of your dog, if they are displaying any symptoms of ill health or you spot any changes in their behaviour please contact your vet.

*“He wasn't too keen on his food initially, but he is now eating really well.”*

*Teacup's adopter*



# The body condition system

TOO THIN

1

Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, pelvic bones and all bony prominences evident from a distance. No discernible body fat. Obvious loss of muscle mass.

2

Ribs, lumbar vertebrae and pelvic bones easily visible. No palpable fat. Some evidence of other bony prominence. Minimal loss of muscle mass.

3

Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat. Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible. Pelvic bones becoming prominent. Obvious waist and abdominal tuck.

IDEAL

4

Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering. Waist easily noted, viewed from above. Abdominal tuck evident.

5

Ribs palpable without excess fat covering. Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above. Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side.

TOO HEAVY

6

Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist is discernible viewed from above but is not prominent. Abdominal tuck apparent.

7

Ribs palpable with difficulty, heavy fat cover. Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. Abdominal tuck may be present.

8

Ribs not palpable under very heavy fat cover, or palpable only with significant pressure. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent. No abdominal tuck. Obvious abdominal distention may be present.

9

Massive fat deposits over thorax, spine and base of tail. Waist and abdominal tuck absent. Fat deposits on neck and limbs. Obvious abdominal distention.



The **BODY CONDITION SYSTEM** was developed at the Nestlé Purina Pet Care Center and has been validated as documented in the following publications:

Mawby D, Bartges JW, Moyers T, et. al. *Comparison of body fat estimates by dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry and deuterium oxide dilution in client owned dogs.* *Compendium* 2001; 23 (9A): 70

Laflamme DP. *Development and Validation of a Body Condition Score System for Dogs.* *Canine Practice* July/August 1997; 22:10-15

Kealy, et. al. *Effects of Diet Restriction on Life Span and Age-Related Changes in Dogs.* *JAVMA* 2002; 220: 1315-1320

## How kids SHOULD NOT interact with dogs

It's common sense. Just imagine how people should interact with each other.

Avoid taking people's food.



Avoid bothering dogs when they are eating.



Avoid stealing other people's toys.



Avoid taking a dog's bones or toys.



Avoid putting your face right up to someone else's face.



Avoid putting your face right up to a dog's face.



Avoid bothering when asleep.



Avoid bothering animals when they are resting. Let sleeping dogs lie.



Avoid pestering.



Avoid grabbing tails/ears.



Avoid climbing on or trampling.



Avoid climbing on or trampling.



Avoid pinching



Avoid hugging. Most dogs dislike it.



Avoid screaming around.



Avoid screaming and shouting. Use your 'inside' voice instead.



## How kids SHOULD interact with dogs

Use common sense.

Be polite and kind to pets.



Learn to recognise when your dog is scared or anxious.

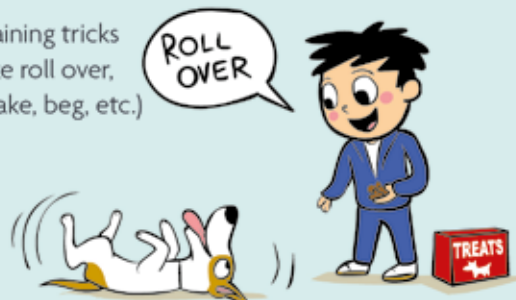


### PLAY APPROPRIATE GAMES WITH PETS, SUCH AS:

Fetch.



Training tricks (like roll over, shake, beg, etc.)



Walking and running with a dog.



Playing hide-and-seek.



### ALWAYS REMEMBER:

**Supervise all interactions. Accidents can happen in a split second.**



Train your dog to associate the kids with positive experiences so he'll be more likely to tolerate your child in case she accidentally interacts inappropriately.





## Useful contacts

Vet

---

---

Pet insurance policy number and details

---

---

Pet insurance phone number

---

---

Dog trainer/behaviourist

---

---

Dog sitter

---

---

- RSPCA dog care advice: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs)
- Find a vet: [findavet.rcvs.org.uk/home](http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/home)
- Association of Pet Dog Trainers: [www.apdt.co.uk](http://www.apdt.co.uk)
- Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors: [www.apbc.org.uk](http://www.apbc.org.uk)
- Association for the Study of Pet Behaviour: [www.asab.org](http://www.asab.org)

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



If you move house or change phone number, don't forget to update your contact details for your dog's tag and microchip. From April 2016, it is a legal requirement for all dogs to be microchipped and their details kept up to date. Your dog will have been microchipped by the RSPCA.



*“ All in all Dotty has really settled into her new family and routine amazingly well, especially knowing the life she had before she was rescued. We couldn't want for a better friend. Thank you so much for everything the dedicated RSPCA staff did to help and the advice about Dotty. ”*

**Dotty's adopters**



**Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**  
Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS  
Telephone: 0300 1234 999 [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)  
[facebook.com/RSPCA](https://www.facebook.com/RSPCA) [twitter.com/RSPCA\\_official](https://twitter.com/RSPCA_official)  
The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no. 219099.  
The RSPCA only exists with the support of public donations.  
Copyright © 2016 RSPCA. All rights reserved. This material must not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the RSPCA. P94