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Dog Ownership Guide



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The Dog Ownership Guide (DOG) is a universal definition of 'responsible dog ownership'. Created by Dogs Trust and the RSPCA, it's designed to help both new and experienced dog owners have a better, more consistent understanding of what it means to be a responsible dog owner.

As a dog-loving nation, we should all be working towards a society where dogs, their owners and the wider community live peacefully side by side. And by following the key themes of this guide, we can take giant steps towards that future.

We hope this will lead to happier dogs, more harmonious and loving dog-owner relationships, and ultimately fewer dog control incidents over time; protecting more people, dogs and other animals from harm.

Good life



Overview

Making sure your dog is happy and healthy, and that you have a good life together by:

- **Caring for the physical and nutritional health** of your dog. Avoiding injury or disease, and finding appropriate and preventative vet care quickly, e.g. vaccinations or worming. Noticing signs of pain and disease and arranging treatment plans so they have a good quality of life and don't have to live in chronic pain.
- **Caring for your dog's behavioural health** so they are relaxed and happy. Things like putting in place regular exercise, mental stimulation, training, socialisation and managing problem behaviours.
- **Creating a suitable environment around your dog.** One that enables good physical and behavioural health, leading to an overall healthy mental and physical state.

Examples of 'good life' behaviours:

- **Thinking carefully if you can provide for a dog's welfare needs** as required by law, before you decide to get one. **Dogs Trust** and the **RSPCA** both have resources to help you decide if a dog is right for you.
- **Getting your dog from a widely trusted rehoming organisation or breeder.** Wherever you search for a dog, it's important to ask lots of questions. This can help you understand whether that dog is right for you. It's also important for avoiding scams and spotting dodgy breeders and sellers who don't prioritise dogs' health and welfare.
- **Preparing your home and outdoor space for a dog.** Young dogs can be very curious, risking harming themselves as well as your home. Older dogs can also chew and take things they shouldn't, so it's still a good idea to make some adjustments.
- **Making sure your dog gets a full health check from their vet** early on and that they get treatment if they become injured or ill.
- **Getting your dog vaccinated at the right time.** Vaccinations will protect them from common infectious diseases. Without this protection, they could develop serious illnesses with lasting, even life-threatening, effects. You can also talk to your vet about other preventive health care actions.
- **Speak to your vet about whether you should neuter your dog.** Neutering can help to prevent health risks including some serious infections. Your vet will be able to advise on your individual dog.
- **Reward-based training with your dog** to teach them important life skills and behaviours. Using positive reward methods in your training will also help prevent unwanted behaviours from developing. Dogs keep learning throughout their lives - you can train with your dog at any age.



- **Socialise your dog.** Puppies need to be carefully introduced to different people, dogs, other animals, noises, objects and experiences early on in their life. This helps them accept these things as normal so that they cope well and feel confident as they age. You should also support your dog to feel comfortable in new and unfamiliar environments and situations throughout their adult life.
- **Feeding your dog a balanced diet** to keep them happy and healthy. Every dog is an individual, so the perfect diet depends on their age, size, activity levels, and what they like.
- **Making sure your dog gets enough exercise and enrichment.** Dogs are social, intelligent and active animals. It's important to give them safe and suitable opportunities to exercise their bodies and minds during every stage of life.
- **Planning ahead for times when your dog may need to be left home alone.** This includes appropriate care for them if you're going on holiday.
- **Making sure everyone who interacts with your dog is kind and gentle and respects their need for space.** Aim for consistent care, no matter who's with your dog as they may not always want to be touched or interacted with. Bearing this in mind gives both your dog and other people the best chance of a safe and positive outcome.



Dogs should have comfort and stimulation when left alone

Safe and secure



Overview

Making sure you prioritise safety by:

- Keeping yourself safe and secure.
- Keeping your dog safe and secure.
- Keeping others safe and secure.

Examples of 'safe and secure' behaviours:

- **Learning how to read your dog's body language and understand their behaviours.** Every dog is unique, with their own quirks and challenges. You can find resources on dog body language on [Dogs Trust's website](#), or on the [RSPCA website](#).
- **Keeping your dog under control and in sight at all times when in public**, whether they're on or off the lead. Ensure your dog returns on command, you follow access rules, and do not let your dog disturb wildlife, people, or animals. This isn't just the law; it's the right thing to do.
- **Supervising your dog when they're around other people**, especially children or animals in your home or outside, making sure they're under control. This will help you notice when other people are behaving in a risky way around your dog, or when your dog is feeling uncomfortable, so you can step in to keep everybody safe.
- **Keeping your dog safe around water.** Water can be dangerous, especially in unpredictable conditions. Avoid frozen lakes and floodwater, as both are hazardous. If visiting the seaside, check dogs are allowed and stay aware of weather and tide times. When near fast-flowing water, quays, or cliffs, keep your dog on a lead to reduce risks and if your dog falls in, do not follow them into the water.
- **Preparing your dog so they feel calm** and can be kept separate when visitors knock on your door or come into your home. This helps everyone, including your dog, to feel more comfortable when someone comes knocking. When introducing your dog to people or other dogs, do so in a controlled and relaxed way.
- **Supporting your dog through fireworks season.** Loud or unexpected noises like fireworks are frightening for many dogs. The [RSPCA](#) have created guidance on how to support your dog if they're afraid of fireworks.



Loud or unexpected noises like fireworks are frightening for many dogs

- **Making sure your dog is safe and secure when travelling.** Some dogs can find transport a stressful and scary experience. Remember that if you're driving, it is a legal requirement to suitably restrain dogs to prevent driver distraction. Make sure to also consider your dog's needs and welfare before travelling.
- **Getting your dog used to going to the vets** to make sure each visit is safe for everyone.
- **Having a plan for your dog's care in an emergency.** Accidents and emergencies happen so, it's important to think about an emergency plan for your dog's care so they can be looked after.
- **Engaging in reward-based, fear-free training** if your dog shows unwanted behaviours, including signs of aggression.
- **Securing your home and outside space.** Make sure you've got sturdy locks on doors and gates. **Check your fences are secure** with no broken panels or gaps your dog could wriggle through. Check whether the **plants** in your garden are dog-friendly, and that toxic house plants, chemicals and other hazards are out of reach.
- **Familiarise yourself with nearby emergency veterinary services**, including finding out-of-hours care options.



Good citizen



Overview

Making sure you and your dog get the most out of interacting with the wider world by:

- Following local and national rules.
- Being considerate of others. Keeping your dog under control and cleaning up after them in public spaces.

Examples of 'good citizen' behaviours:

- **Getting your dog a collar and a tag with your address and contact information.** By law, you need to make sure your dog wears a collar with an identity tag attached in public, even if you're walking them using a harness.
- **Training your dog to come when called before letting them off the lead in public.** Possible dangers of your dog running around unsupervised include:

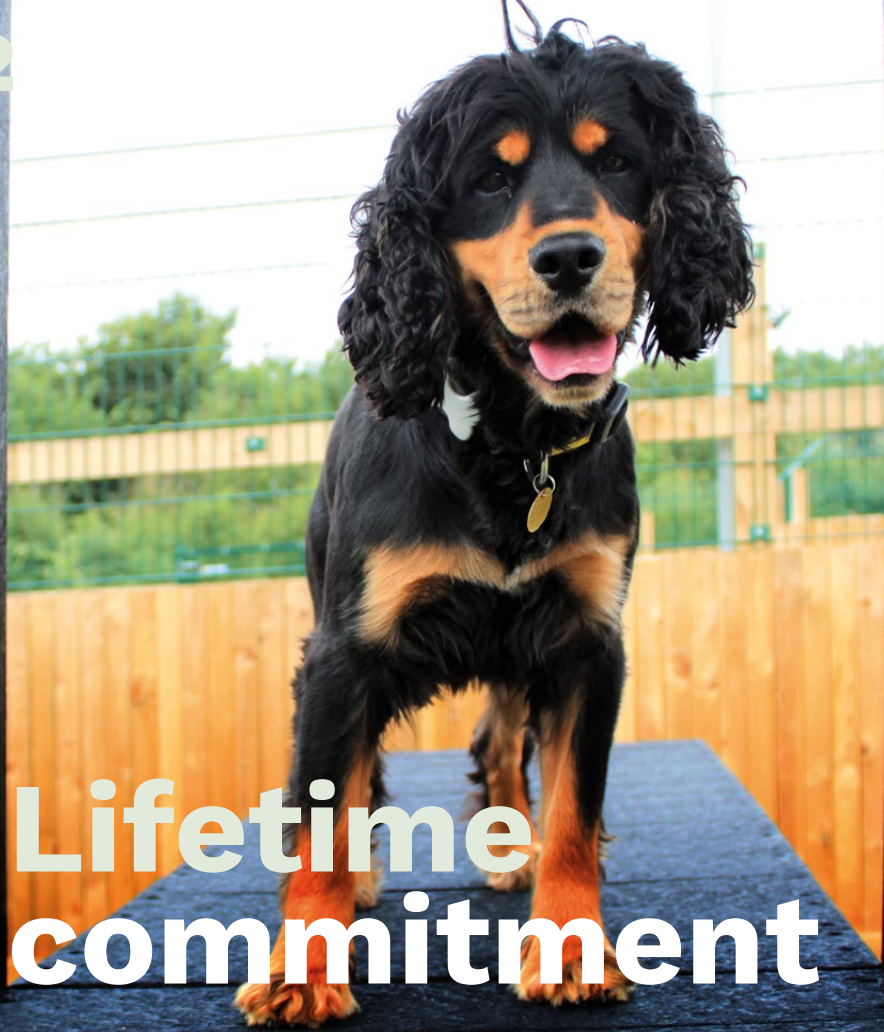
- ⚠ Busy roads
- ⚠ Other dogs
- ⚠ Other animals
- ⚠ Dog thieves
- ⚠ Becoming lost



You need to teach your dog that coming back is a good thing. Use treats, fuss, or their favourite reward to encourage them.

- **Making sure your dog is microchipped** and that you keep your microchip details up to date. By law, you need to make sure your dog's details are updated. Also, the microchip is useless without them.
- **Following specific dog-related rules in public.** E.g. within designated dog-on-lead areas at parks or beaches.
- **Cleaning up after your dog.** Pick up poo, then put it in a dog bin. It's an offence to leave it behind as dog poo can cause infections and disease in humans and other animals.
- **Following any relevant rules or laws if you own a dog whose breed type is restricted, or who is subject to restrictions due to their behaviour.** This could be under the Dangerous Dogs Act, the Control of Dogs Act 2010 (Scotland), or the Dangerous Dogs Order 1991 (Northern Ireland).





Lifetime commitment

Overview

Making sure you can support your dog through life's twists and turns, by:

- Supporting them through short, medium and long-term changes.
- Planning ahead for changes that could affect your dog's care. E.g. your living situation, finances or health.
- Handing your dog over to a safe, ethical and responsible rehoming organisation, should this ever become necessary.

Examples of 'lifetime commitment' behaviours:

- **Making sure you have the time to help your dog adapt to and thrive within your lifestyle.**
- **Preparing for unexpected vet bills or lifelong medical conditions.** Caring for your dog can be expensive. It's important to plan for future vet bills so they can get any emergency treatment they may need down the line. Depending on your financial situation, this might include:
 - Getting pet insurance
 - Putting money aside
 - Investigating what support is available.
- **Finding out where you can go for dog ownership advice,** e.g. animal welfare organisations. Everyone needs a little bit of extra support from time to time, to help you and your dog cope with changes in your lives.
- **Setting your dog up for success by considering the expectations you have for them** and the training you can give them. Understand and adapt to situations where your dog may not feel comfortable e.g. in a busy restaurant.
- **Preparing your dog for a new baby or child in your home.** Welcoming a new child into your family can create a busier-than-usual home environment. Your dog will be adjusting to your new baby alongside different sights, sounds and smells in the house. Even if they're generally relaxed and friendly, your dog may find this a worrying time.



Community



Overview

You can make sure that you're set up for success in the community, by:

- **Learning how to interact with dogs safely.** This includes respecting working or assistance dogs who shouldn't be disturbed. Dogs are individuals with their own thoughts and feelings. We should treat them with that in mind and learn more about safe ways to interact with them and prevent incidents.
- **Knowing where to find support services and facilities** within your community and using these as part of being a good citizen.

Additional information on how your community can support you:

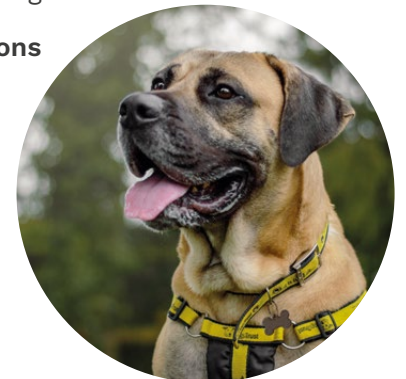
The wider community, including institutions and members of the public, can also help to support responsible dog ownership by:

- Creating spaces for dogs.
- Helping people with dogs.
- Providing support when and where it's needed.



Examples of how communities can support dog owners:

- **Designating spaces for dogs to exercise and socialise.** Dogs need fair access to public spaces so they can stretch their legs, have a sniff around and meet other dogs.
- **Creating dog-friendly housing policies** which encourage responsible dog ownership.
- **Pointing dog owners towards trusted dog-related services.** E.g. groomers, walkers, day care, and boarding organisations. With so much choice, your community has an important role in highlighting trustworthy services with dog welfare at their core.
- **Giving those in need affordable vet care options.** Caring for a pet can be expensive. It's vital that those most in need have options to provide health care for their dog.
- **Working with animal welfare organisations** to give best practice advice and behaviour support for dog owners. Animal welfare organisations like Dogs Trust and the RSPCA live and breathe dogs. Using their resources can be a quick and easy way to give dog owners the best possible advice.





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For more information

dogstrust.org.uk

rspca.org.uk