

12 Great Reasons to Adopt a Shelter Pet

Did you know you can often adopt a pet from a shelter or rescue for a fraction of the price of buying one? And possibly save on early ownership costs and receive valuable new-owner support?

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today is National Adopt a Shelter Pet Day!
- If you're thinking of adding an animal companion to your family, there are lots of great reasons to adopt from a shelter or rescue, for example, did you know that many of these organizations offer resources to help adopted pets with behavioral issues or training needs?
- Also, there's often a big selection of potential furry family members to choose from, and adoption is less expensive than purchasing a pet
- A senior adopted pet can be an ideal companion for a human senior; adoption can also help kiddos learn compassion and responsibility
- Finally, when you adopt rather than shop, you do your part to put a dent in the pets-for-profit trade; you also free up space for in the shelter or rescue for another homeless animal

If you're thinking about adding a pet to the family, I hope you'll visit local shelters and rescues in your area. And keep in mind that these days, many rescues can arrange transportation services, so if you don't find what you're looking for locally, you can expand your search to other areas of the country.

12 Reasons to Adopt Your Next Pet From a Shelter

1. Many shelters and most rescue organizations do assessments on every new pet taken in, to determine things like temperament, whether the pet has any aversion to other pets or people, whether she's housetrained, has had obedience training, etc.

Many of these organizations also have resources to help pets with lack of training or behavioral issues. So, when you adopt a pet from one of these organizations, you have a pretty good idea what to expect from your new dog or cat when you bring her home.

2. Compared to the cost of purchasing a pet, adopting one from an animal shelter is relatively inexpensive. And if you get a slightly older dog or cat, there's a good chance they're already fully vaccinated and sterilized.
3. There are plenty of animals to choose from at most rescues and shelters. They come in every age, shape, size, coat color, and breed mix, and you can find purebreds at shelters as well. In fact, many breeds have their own

rescue organizations, so if you're looking for a purebred, make sure to check both your local shelter and breed rescue organization.

4. Adopting a mature dog or cat takes the guesswork out of determining what your pet will look like as an adult — what size she'll grow to, the thickness and color of her coat and her basic temperament, for example.
5. Adopting an older pet also allows you to skip over the time consuming, often frustrating puppy or kitten stages of development.
6. Depending on her background, your older pet may already be house trained or litterbox trained and know basic obedience commands like come, sit, stay, and down.
7. An older adoptive pet can be the perfect companion for an older person. Many middle-aged and senior dogs and cats require less physical exertion and attention than younger animals.
8. If you have kids, and especially if the new pet will belong to a child, adopting a shelter animal can open a young person's eyes to the plight of homeless pets. It can also help him learn compassion and responsibility, as well as how wonderful it feels to provide a forever home to a pet that might otherwise live life in a cage or be euthanized.
9. Many shelters and rescues provide lots of new owner support in the form of materials about training, common behavior problems, nutrition, basic grooming, and general care. In some cases, there are even free hotlines you can call for questions on behavior, training, and other concerns.
10. Every dog or cat not purchased from a pet store or backyard breeder improves the pet overpopulation problem created by irresponsibility and greed.
11. Adopting a dog or cat from a no-kill shelter can free up space for older or special needs pets that may not find new homes before the end of their natural lives.
12. An adopted pet can enrich your life in ways both big and small. The unconditional love and loyalty of an animal companion can lift depression, ease loneliness, lower blood pressure, and give you a reason to get up in the morning. A kitty asleep in your lap feels warm and comforting. A dog who loves to walk or run outdoors can be just the incentive you need to start exercising regularly.

There are countless benefits to being a pet parent, and when you know you saved your furry friend from an unpleasant fate, it makes the bond you share that much more meaningful.

5 Questions to Ask the Shelter or Rescue

Contrary to what some people believe, shelter pets are not all damaged goods. However, each abandoned animal has a past, so the more you can learn from the shelter about a pet you're considering, the more prepared you'll be to make the right choices for them.

1. **What is your prospective pet's history?** — How did he wind up at the shelter? Was he picked up as a stray, or did a previous owner turn him in? Generally speaking, the behavior of an animal who has survived living on the streets will differ from that of a relinquished family pet. This is good information to have for a better understanding of your new dog's or cat's behavior and training needs.
2. **Does your prospective pet have a known history of being abused?** — If you know or suspect a dog or cat was abused before she came to you, it's important to keep two things in mind: you shouldn't expect an overnight change in her, and you shouldn't count on a complete turnaround in her trust level or behavior. It takes time to help an abused animal learn to be less fearful and develop trust in humans again.

With knowledge, hard work and commitment, a previously abused pet can be transformed into a much-loved member of your family, but she can't be reborn. It's important to always remember that.

3. **Has she been behavior-tested?** — Most large shelters and rescue organizations perform basic behavior testing as part of their assessment of the adoptability of the animals they take in. Knowing what types of tests were conducted on your future pet and her results will help you fill in the gaps in her training if you decide to take her home.

Some shelters conduct very thorough behavior assessments on dogs that go far beyond determining adoptability and can provide insight into whether a particular dog is a good fit for your lifestyle. For example, if a dog you're interested in is very high-energy and you're looking for a lower energy lapdog, she's probably better suited to someone else's home.

A comprehensive behavior and temperament assessment can determine a dog's level of sociability with other pets, her degree of independence and whether she's suited for a home with children or an adult-only home.

4. **What veterinary care has he received?** — Most animal adoption organizations arrange to have pets' health checked by a veterinarian before they become adoptable. Adoptive owners typically receive paperwork detailing the medical care the animal received while at the shelter.

It's not unusual for large shelters to err on the side of over treating dogs and cats with an unknown medical history, so your new pet could come home with a fresh spay or neuter incision, dewormed and/or heavily vaccinated. However, some shelters are starting to recognize over-vaccination in rescued pets is a real problem and even suggesting titers in place of unnecessary vaccines.

Many shelters recommend that new owners take their pet to a veterinarian for an exam within a specified number of days from the date of adoption. Sometimes local veterinarians contract with shelters to provide the exams at no charge.

If you feel your dog or cat may have been medically over treated at the shelter, I suggest also making an appointment with an integrative veterinarian who can recommend a detoxification protocol to help bring your pet's body back in balance.

5. **What food has she been eating?** — Some shelters send newly adopted pets home with a supply of the food they've been eating, but if this isn't the case with your prospective dog or cat, ask what the shelter is feeding and continue that diet for at least a week or two once she's home.

It's likely you'll want to transition her to a different food, preferably a nutritionally balanced, species-specific fresh food diet, but it doesn't need to happen on day one. Everything in your pet's new life with you will be a bit overwhelming and stressful for her in the beginning, so it's best not to add a dietary change to the mix right away.

If you're considering adopting a dog, I highly recommend a program called A Sound Beginning, which was lovingly and expertly designed to help rescue dogs and adoptive guardians learn to communicate effectively and form an unbreakable bond.

If you're thinking about adding a kitty to the family, I recommend you watch my interview with cat expert Jackson Galaxy, in which he explains feline behavior and offers brilliant tips on how to bring out the best in your pet, especially if you've adopted a cat with a traumatic past.

Sources and References

[National Today, National Adopt a Shelter Pet Day, April 30, 2024](#)
