

# RSPCA.

## Getting ready for your RSPCA rescue dog



# Your dog's details

Name

---

Age

---

Weight

---

Microchip provider

---

Microchip number

---

Their diet while in RSPCA care

---

---

A little bit about them

---

---

---

Your notes

---

---

---

## Make sure you:

- register with a local vet – visit: [findavet.rcvs.org.uk](https://findavet.rcvs.org.uk)
- check your house is free from hazards – see page 9
- find a good dog trainer – see page 24
- arrange pet insurance – see page 32.

## Microchipping

It's a legal requirement for all dogs to be microchipped and for their details to be kept up to date. Your dog will have been microchipped by the RSPCA. If you move house or change phone number, you'll need to update your contact details on the microchip provider's database as well as on your dog's tag. You can find out more at: [gov.uk/get-your-dog-cat-microchipped](https://gov.uk/get-your-dog-cat-microchipped)





# Contents

<b>Thank you</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>The Animal Welfare Act 2006</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>Preparing for your RSPCA rescue dog</b>	<b>06</b>
What you'll need	06
Making a safe haven	09
Creating a hazard-free home	09
Preparing other pets	09
<b>Bringing your rescue dog home</b>	<b>10</b>
The journey home	10
Helping your rescue dog settle	10
Toilet training	14
<b>Learning to live together</b>	<b>17</b>
Introducing new experiences	17
Getting out and about	17
Meeting new dogs	17
Meeting new people	18
Spending time with children	19
Understanding your dog's behaviour	22
Training your dog	24
Leaving your dog alone	24
Preventing and managing behaviour problems	26
<b>Keeping your dog fit and healthy</b>	<b>32</b>
Finding a vet	32
Worms, fleas and ticks	32
Looking after their teeth	32
Grooming	32
Watching their weight	32
Poisoning	34
When to call a vet	34
<b>Useful contacts</b>	<b>35</b>









# Thank you

**Thank you for choosing to adopt a dog rescued by the RSPCA. The next stage of the process is for us to help you get ready to welcome your new dog into your home.**

We'll usually arrange for one of our adoption support volunteers to visit you at home, but in some circumstances this will happen online. They'll discuss with you any specific needs your dog has and, if necessary, suggest adjustments to your house, garden or lifestyle that will help you and your rescue dog settle into a safe, secure and happy life together.

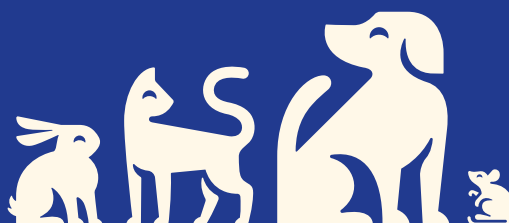
Introducing a new dog to your home will be exciting, rewarding and, at times, challenging. It may take a while for your new dog to settle into life with you, but don't worry – we're here to support you.

Each of the dogs in our care comes with a story. Some may have been a victim of cruelty, others are unwanted or have been abandoned, and some may never have experienced life in a loving home – until now.

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

Together, we can create a better world for every animal.

## RSPCA Rehoming Team



### The Animal Welfare Act 2006

All animal owners are required by law, under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, to care for animals properly by meeting their five welfare needs.

**The five welfare needs of animals are:**

1. a suitable place to live
2. a healthy diet, including fresh, clean water
3. the ability to behave normally
4. the right company, including any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
5. protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

# Preparing for your RSPCA rescue dog

If you're a first-time dog owner, here's a guide to what you'll need to think about and items to buy before your RSPCA rescue dog comes home.

## What you'll need

### Collar and ID tag

The law states your dog must wear a collar with an identity tag when they're out in public. The tag must include your name and address. We also recommend adding your phone number. Don't forget to update these if you move house or change your phone number.

Check the collar fits correctly. You should be able to comfortably fit two fingers side by side, one above the other, between the collar and your dog's neck.

### Lead

You'll need a lead that's strong enough to cope with your dog. It should have a strong (non-plastic) clip to attach to your dog's collar.

It must be long enough to hang loosely when you're walking your dog, so you'll need to bear in mind your height as well as your dog's.

Flexi or retractable leads can be useful when it's unsafe to let your dog off-lead, but they should only be used when there's no risk to you or your dog's safety (e.g. away from busy roads).

### Food

It's best to continue the diet your dog ate at the RSPCA, as sudden changes can cause stomach upsets. If you want to change their food, do so gradually over three to five days, mixing a little of the new food with the old to wean your dog onto their new diet.

“

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

***Jack's adopters***



### Essentials shopping list

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

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

- Harness/head collar
- Crate – find out more on page 9
- House line – a few metres long and used indoors
- Long line – 15–30 metres (approx. 50–100 feet) long and used outdoors for practising recall
- House camera – for keeping an eye on dogs who are learning to stay at home alone

**TOP TIP**

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

## Food and water bowls

Your dog will need separate clean bowls for food and water. Make sure they have access to fresh, clean drinking water at all times.

## Bed

Your dog will need somewhere warm, dry and quiet to sleep, away from draughts. Dogs like a soft bed that's large enough to stretch out on and curl up in, and allows them to go through the usual routine of turning around before going to sleep.

It's a good idea to get a bed that's washable and easy to dry – muddy paws and belly can mean frequent washing!

Your dog will also need a separate 'safe haven' where they can rest and relax undisturbed – find out more on page 9.

## Toys

Dogs love playing, so toys are very important. There are many types of toys available, such as balls, ropes, flying discs and squeaky toys. It's best to have a variety of toys to keep things interesting and fun for your dog but, of course, they'll probably have their favourite!

## Feeding toys

We recommend you buy your dog feeding toys, such as Kongs, treat balls and puzzle feeders, to help keep them mentally stimulated. They're also great for entertaining your dog when you go out.

## Poo bags

Poo bags are a must to take out on dog walks. You can also use nappy sacks, which do the job just as well. Make sure you 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 when travelling in a car, and to comply with the UK Highway Code, there's a range of safety harnesses, crates and dog guards available. You can find out more about travelling with your dog at: [rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](https://rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment)

## Grooming brush

Keeping your dog's coat in good condition is important for their health and wellbeing. Grooming gets rid of excess hair and dirt from their coat. When choosing a brush for your dog, make sure you consider the type of coat they have and whether they have sensitive skin. Here are some common types of dog brush and what they're good for:

- bristle brush – choose short bristles for short or wiry coats and long, soft bristles for long, silky coats
- slicker brush – soft slickers are good for fine coats and sensitive skin, while firm slickers are better for thicker, denser coats
- pin brush – this is a good option for dogs with medium to long hair
- rubber curry comb – this is a good choice for dogs with short, smooth coats.



**DOGS FORM STRONG  
SOCIAL BONDS  
WITH HUMANS.**



## Making a safe haven

In addition to any beds you give your dog, it's important they also have a 'safe haven'. This area should be somewhere they can go whenever they choose. Just like us, dogs can get stressed, worried and scared sometimes – a safe haven gives them a place to feel safe and rest undisturbed.

Your dog's safe haven should be somewhere out of the way, such as in a corner or under a desk that isn't often used, and away from direct sunlight or draughts. It can either be a comfy bed or a crate, which some dogs like because it's fully enclosed. If you choose a crate, make sure it's big enough for your dog to sit and stand at full height, turn around, stretch out and lie down comfortably. You can find lots more advice on using dog crates at: [rspca.org.uk/dogcrates](https://rspca.org.uk/dogcrates)

Next, you'll need to make your dog's safe haven a great place to be. If it's a crate, make sure you add some comfy, soft bedding for your dog to lie on. You could also put a cover, such as a blanket, over part of the crate to make your dog feel even more cosy and secure. Place some safe chew toys inside for your dog to enjoy. You could also try hiding tasty treats in the bedding for them to find, or feeding them a few meals in their safe haven.

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

- never sending them to their safe haven as a form of punishment
- always allowing them to decide when they want to go to their safe haven
- leaving them undisturbed
- never physically removing them from their safe haven – if you need to get them out then call them over or, better still, tempt them out with a tasty treat.



***Our cat isn't happy about Gabanna, so we're 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***

### TOP TIP

*If you already have a dog, make sure there are enough toys, beds and resting places for both dogs, as well as enough space for them to get away from each other. Let them get to know one another at their own pace – never force them to interact.*

## Creating a hazard-free home

Dogs love to explore their surroundings, which unfortunately can sometimes lead them into danger. Make sure your home and garden are safe for your dog. Check your garden, gates and fencing are 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 introduce your rescue dog to other family pets before they actually meet by swapping the bedding of your family cat or dog with your rescue dog's bedding while they're still at the RSPCA. It's almost like us seeing photographs of someone before we meet them! Another option is to take two cloths and stroke your family cat or dog with both cloths, then stroke your rescue dog with both cloths. Leave one cloth with your rescue dog and take the other one home to your family pet.

To make sure the first meeting is a positive experience for all of you, plan it well in advance. Read our step-by-step guide at: [rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](https://rspca.org.uk/dogs/company)

Remember, the better prepared you are, the more likely your pets will live in harmony.

# Bringing your rescue dog home

No doubt you'll be feeling excited – and maybe a little bit anxious – about bringing your rescue dog home. This is likely to be how your rescue 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

To help your rescue dog feel more at ease on their journey home, take a familiar-smelling item from their kennel at the RSPCA, such as a blanket, and place it next to them in the car.

Make sure they're safe and secure in the car while you're driving. We recommend you use a travelling crate or a harness. You can find more advice on travelling in the car with a dog at:

**[rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](https://rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment)**

Your rescue dog may whine, bark, poo or vomit during the journey because they're nervous or not used to travelling. If they do, please be patient and don't tell them off. It's a good idea to line the seats/boot of your car or your dog's crate with towels, and have a spare set ready in case they become soiled during the journey.

If your rescue dog is very unsettled or has vomited or toileted in the car to the extent you need to stop and clean up, then find a safe place to do so, such as motorway services or next to a park. Give your dog a short break to go to the toilet, remove any soiled towels and replace them with clean ones, then continue your journey.

When you get home, let your dog go to the toilet again before you both go into the house. Make sure you give them lots of praise when they go to the toilet.

## Helping your rescue dog settle

It will naturally take your rescue dog a while to settle into their new home, in the same way that it will take time for you to get to know them. If they've been living in a kennel, they'll find your home very different and there might be things there that make them feel anxious or scared. Here are some tips to help you during the first few days.

### Keep things familiar

Your dog may have had a favourite toy or a blanket they loved to lay on when they were with the RSPCA. Bring this home with you and put it into their bed. The familiar smells can help to settle them when everything else around them is very new.

### Establish 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'll need to be flexible, but try to keep to the routine as much as possible.



## Remember

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



# He deserves a higher welfare meal

McAdams is the only pet food made with free-range  
meat and fish from RSPCA Assured farms



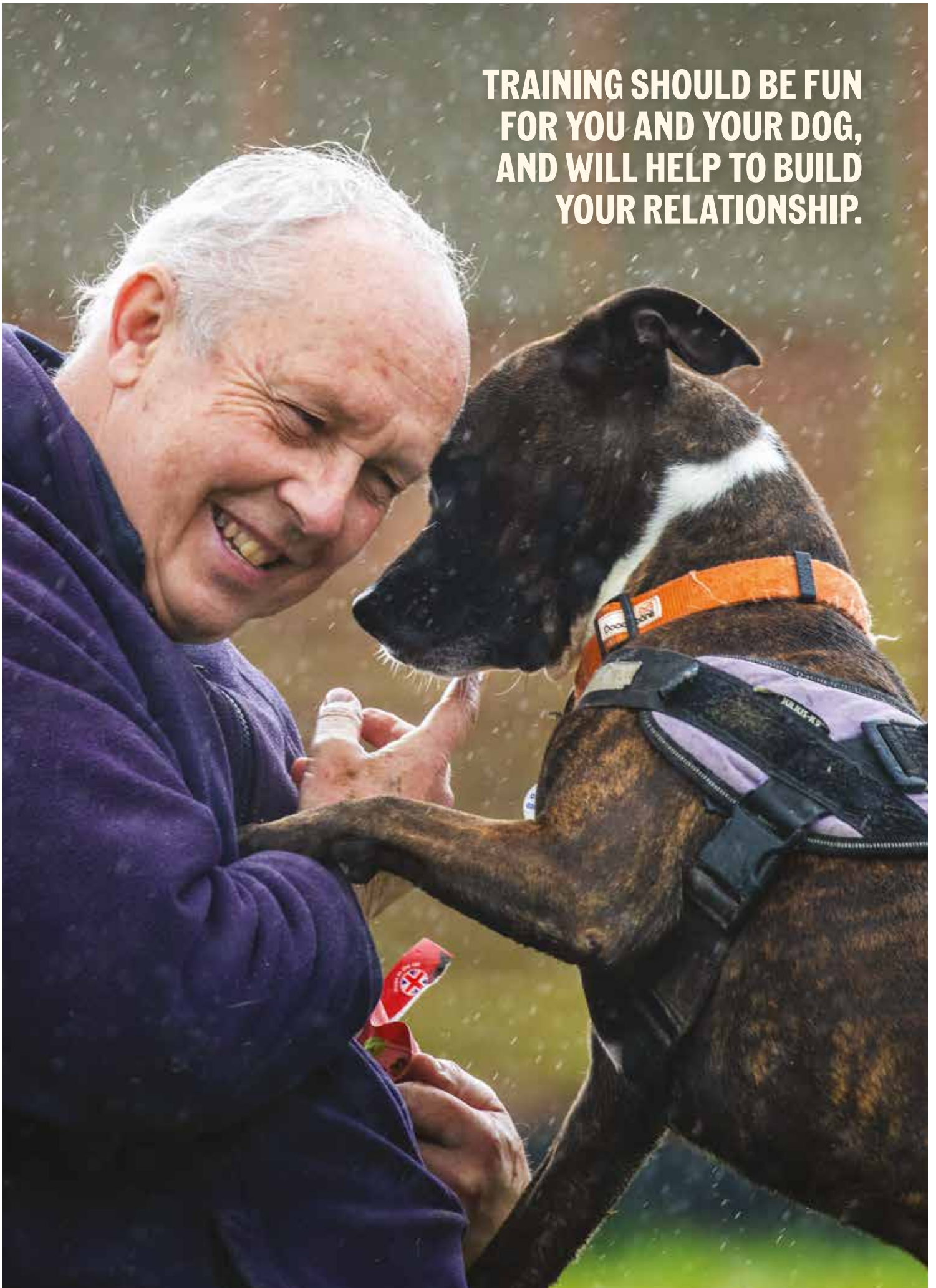
**RSPCA**  **× McAdams**

Available at Pets Corner and selected independent pet stores

\*The RSPCA name and logo are trademarks of the RSPCA used by McAdams Pet Foods Limited under licence from RSPCA Trading Ltd. RSPCA Trading Ltd pays all its taxable profits to the RSPCA. The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered Charity no. 219099. © RSPCA 2025



**TRAINING SHOULD BE FUN  
FOR YOU AND YOUR DOG,  
AND WILL HELP TO BUILD  
YOUR RELATIONSHIP.**



## TOP TIP

We all need a break sometimes. Give your dog a cosy spot in a quiet room where they can be alone if they want. Make sure your family and friends don't disturb your dog when they're in their private spot. See 'Making a safe haven' on page 9.



***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's relaxed and happy sleeping on his own now.***

***Bowie's adopter***

## Be consistent

Getting things right from the beginning 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 can go in and whether they're allowed on the furniture. Any areas you don't want your dog to have access to should be out of bounds from the beginning.

Make sure everyone in the family behaves the same way towards your dog, otherwise it will confuse your dog and they won't understand how you want them to behave. Teaching children how to interact with dogs will keep them, and your dog, safe and happy – check out pages 19–21 for more information and advice.

## Take things slowly

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 might also have places you want to take them. But please be patient – leaving the RSPCA and going to a new home can be very overwhelming for your dog, so take things slowly. Give your dog plenty of time to settle into their home and with your family, before gradually introducing them to different activities and people. You'll find more advice on introducing your dog to new people, dogs and places on pages 17–18.

## The first few nights

With so many changes, new people, smells, sights and sounds, your rescue dog is likely to feel 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 set up a bed with them downstairs or in another room. Do whichever works best for you. Don't worry if in the long term you prefer for your dog not to sleep in your room – dogs can easily learn to sleep alone downstairs after they've settled in.

If your dog makes a lot of noise during 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 they're 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'd prefer not to have your dog in the bedroom with you, they'll need to learn to feel comfortable sleeping alone. For help with this, follow our step-by-step guide on page 25.

For a while, you may still have to get up in the night to take your dog to the toilet as they get settled into a routine.

## The good night routine

Before settling your dog down for their first night's sleep in your home, try to make sure they're as sleepy as possible.

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



## Toilet training

Whether your dog is house trained, and where they like to go to the toilet, will depend on their background. We'll be able to give you more information on 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 it. Remember, toilet training should be fun and rewarding for you both!

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'll need to give them the chance 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're 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 when they've been left alone.

When you spot the signs, or if you think they might need to go to the toilet, then it's best to do the following.

- Go with them to a place in the garden that you'd like them to use as a toilet. Keep this consistent, so they learn the route.
- If they go to the toilet, reward them straight away with lots of praise, a treat or play.
- If they go to the toilet in the wrong place, don't shout at them or tell them off. This can make them worried about going to the toilet when you're there. Instead, gently take them to the correct place and praise them when they go.

Continue to go with them and reward them with lots of praise when they get it right. If you have any difficulties, please get back in touch with the RSPCA centre you adopted them from.

### What to do if your dog has an accident

It can be very common for even the most house-trained dog to have toilet accidents in their new home. To help prevent this, make sure you take them outside regularly to establish a routine.

If you find they've had an accident, or you see your dog going to the toilet in the house, please don't shout at them, smack them or punish them in any other way. This will only make them more anxious and could make accidents more likely. Instead, stay calm while you clean up.

You can clean up 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.



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

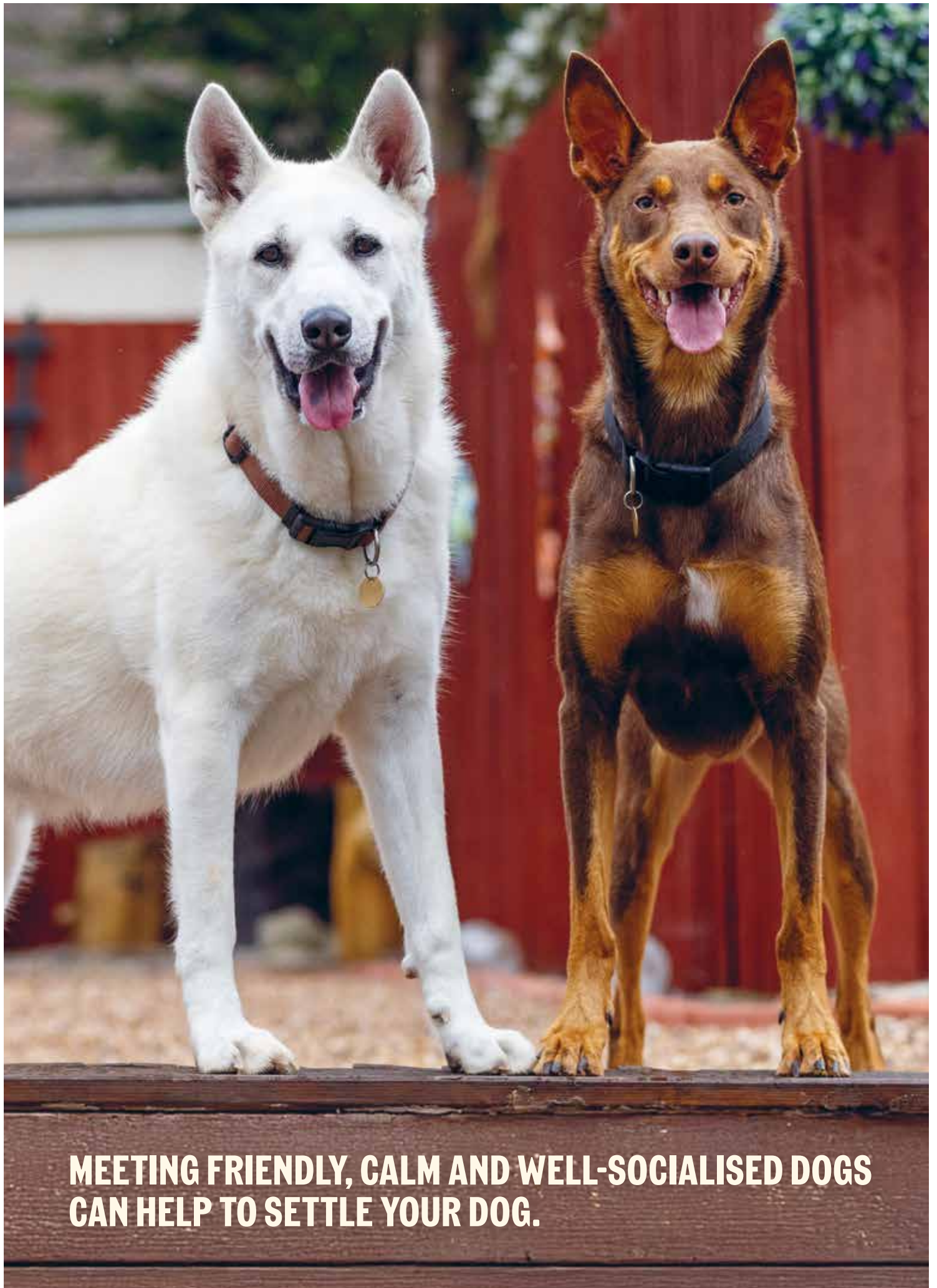
***Sparky's adopter, three days into the adoption***





**LEAVING THE RSPCA AND GOING TO A NEW HOME CAN BE OVERWHELMING FOR YOUR DOG, SO TAKE THINGS SLOWLY.**





**MEETING FRIENDLY, CALM AND WELL-SOCIALISED DOGS  
CAN HELP TO SETTLE YOUR DOG.**



# Learning to live together

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

You'll also take your dog out and about with you, and introduce them to lots of new things. 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 they were growing up. Over the next few pages you'll find advice on how to help your dog when introducing them to different situations.

## 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 your dog by making sure new experiences are positive. The key to this is helping them to feel safe.

### Help your dog feel safe by:

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

## Getting out and about

While you're getting to know your dog and they're getting to know you, it's important you don't let them off the lead. To begin with, walk your dog on the lead and practise their recall in the garden, before progressing to a small, enclosed public area where they can't escape and you can keep a good eye on them. You can also use a long training line to practise 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 to teaching your dog recall at: [rspca.org.uk/recall](https://rspca.org.uk/recall)

On some roads it's an offence to have your dog off the lead. To stay within the law and to keep your dog safe, we recommend keeping your dog on a lead at all times when you're on a road. Dogs also have to be kept on the lead in certain areas, such as some public gardens and parks, and around wildlife and grazing animals, such as sheep and cows. Contact your local council for information about your area.

## Meeting new 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's important not to force your dog to interact with other dogs. Instead, allow them to meet and mix with friendly dogs as they choose.

Meeting other dogs should be a relaxing experience for both you and your dog, and all introductions should take place on a slack lead. You may find your dog is more cautious when approaching some dogs but not others. Always allow them to make their own decisions.

### TOP TIP

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 bottom in the air – it shows they want to interact and play!

Dogs communicate through body language, and the signals being sent out by another dog may warn your dog to approach them more cautiously or to keep away.

During the early days, if your dog appears frightened or worried around other dogs, it may be because they're 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. It's important not to rush them.

### Meeting a dog who's off the lead

If your dog is on a lead, you may find they feel threatened by another dog approaching them off the lead. This is because they can't run away. If your dog becomes anxious, move away until the other dog owner is there and your dog relaxes. If your dog starts to play with the other dog, keep an eye on them, as the energetic levels of play that some dogs enjoy could cause your dog to feel anxious again.

When looking for signs of anxiety in your dog it's important to consider the situation. For example, it's normal for a dog to pant after exercise or to sniff the ground and objects around them. But if your dog seems worried when you approach another dog, then distract your dog, move away from the situation, and offer them a toy or treat for focusing on you. Continue your walk at a distance that makes your dog feel safe and relaxed.

## Meeting new people

For most dogs, meeting new people and spending time with them is a great source of interaction and fun. But all dogs are different and some may be a little worried or nervous around new people. Watch your dog closely to help you understand how they're feeling. By learning to read your dog's behaviour, especially the subtle signs, and by avoiding situations that make your dog nervous, your dog will begin to trust you.

If your dog seems scared or worried, don't force them to greet people, because this can worry them even more. Instead, allow them to move away from the situation, or distract them with something fun and positive, such as their favourite toy. It's important you never punish your dog if they're scared or worried, as this can make their behaviour worse and may also negatively impact the bond you're building with them.

If your dog is on a lead and obviously very worried or frightened, then guide them away from the situation. If they're loose, call them in an upbeat, positive way and reward them with a treat or lots of praise when they come back to you.

Even if your dog appears happy to meet new people, it's important you take things slowly so they don't get overwhelmed. Avoid exposing your dog to lots of people all at once and never force them to interact.

Reward your dog when they're around strangers so they have a positive association. It's best if new people only greet your dog and make a fuss of them once your dog has got over any initial excitement. This is because you should always reward your dog for calm behaviour.



*Your new-found friend will be looking to you for protection, so make sure you always keep a look out for situations they might find scary.*

## Spending time with children

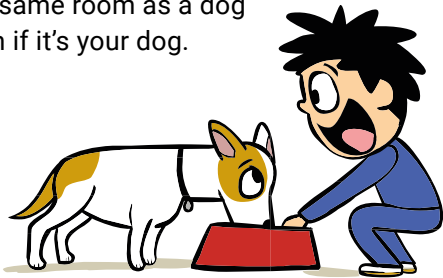
Dogs can find children hard to understand because they behave in a very different way to adults. They can be loud and unpredictable, and many show their feelings by using lots of physical contact, such as hugs and kisses. For a lot of dogs, this type of behaviour can be threatening, particularly for those who weren't introduced to children when they were puppies.

It's important to look out for signs that your dog may feel uncomfortable around children and give them somewhere they can go where they'll feel safe and will be left alone (see 'Making a safe haven' on page 9).

It's wise to have some rules in place to help keep children safe and dogs happy – see below and pages 20 and 21 for more information.

## The six golden rules for keeping children safe and dogs happy

1. Never leave a child alone in the same room as a dog – even if it's your dog.



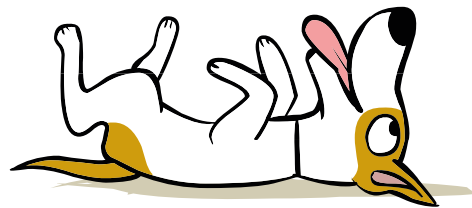
2. Teach children not to go up to a dog if the dog is:

- eating or has a treat
- near a toy or something else they like
- sleeping
- unwell, injured or tired
- blind or deaf.

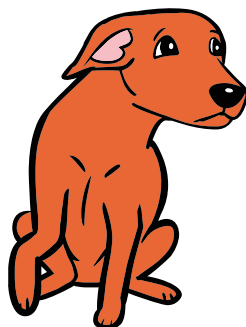
3. Teach children to be kind and polite to dogs. Don't let them climb on them or scream around them, pull their ears or do anything you wouldn't allow them to do to another child.



4. Teach children to play nicely with dogs – for example, by helping them learn fun tricks, such as shake a paw, play dead or roll-over.



5. Supervise children when they're with dogs. If a dog looks unhappy, let the dog go somewhere they feel safe and happy.



6. Never allow children to approach a dog they don't know – for example, when they're in a park.





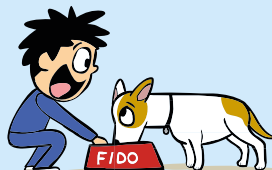
## How children **shouldn't** interact with dogs

It's common sense – just think about how people shouldn't interact with each other.

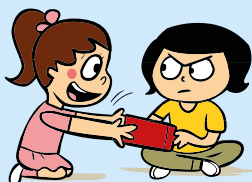
We shouldn't take people's food.



We shouldn't bother dogs when they're eating.



We shouldn't take other people's toys.



We shouldn't take a dog's chews or toys.



We shouldn't put our face right up to someone else's face.



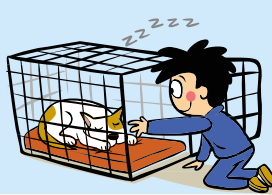
We shouldn't put our face right up to a dog's face.



We shouldn't bother people when they're asleep.



We shouldn't bother dogs when they're resting.



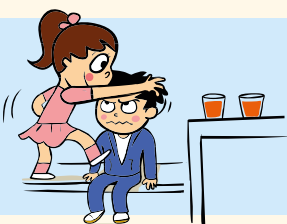
We shouldn't pester people.



We shouldn't grab at a dog's tail or ears.



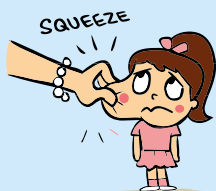
We shouldn't climb on or trample over people.



We shouldn't climb on or trample over dogs.



We shouldn't pinch people.



We shouldn't hug dogs – most dogs dislike it.



We shouldn't scream and shout around people.



We shouldn't scream and shout around dogs.



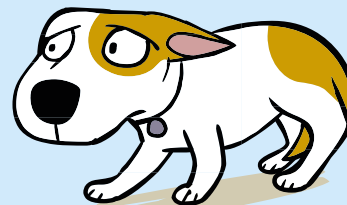
## How children **should** interact with dogs

Use common sense and be kind to dogs.

Be polite and kind to dogs.

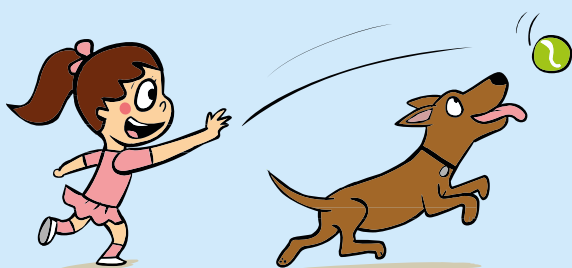


Learn to spot when your dog is scared or anxious.

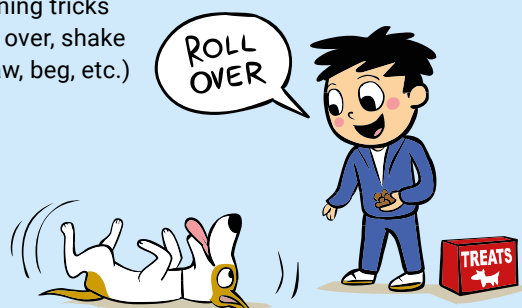


### PLAY APPROPRIATE GAMES WITH DOGS, SUCH AS:

Fetch



Training tricks  
(roll over, shake  
a paw, beg, etc.)



Walking and running  
together

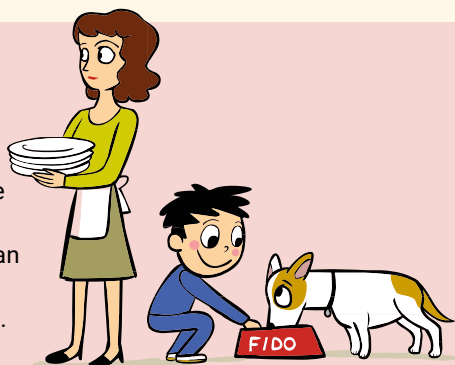


Hide-and-seek



### ALWAYS REMEMBER:

Supervise  
children  
and dogs  
when they're  
together –  
accidents can  
happen in a  
split second.



Train your dog to  
associate children  
with positive  
experiences. This will  
make them more  
likely to tolerate  
children accidentally  
treating them in  
a negative way.



## Understanding your dog's behaviour

Dogs communicate mainly through body language. They use different parts of their body, including their tails, ears and eyes, to signal how they're feeling.

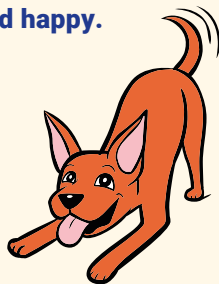
Just like you, your dog can experience a range of emotions, including happiness, anxiety, fear and anger. It's important to understand the emotions your dog is feeling so you can make sure they're happy and healthy. Use the guide below and share it with your friends and family, so you can all recognise important body language signals and get to know how your dog is feeling.

## Recognise your dog's body language

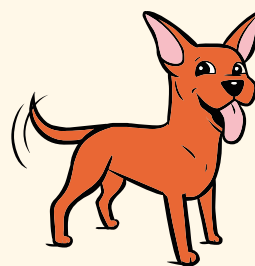
### A HAPPY DOG – this dog is relaxed and happy.



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

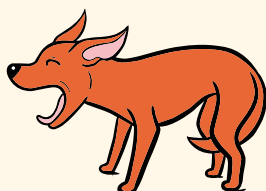


2. Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, ears in a natural position, eyes a normal shape, and they may be barking excitedly.

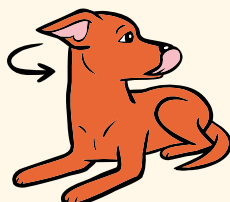


3. Dog is standing with weight distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, a wagging tail, an interested and alert face, and a relaxed and open mouth.

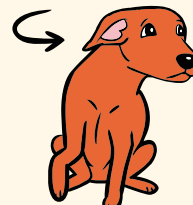
### A WORRIED DOG – this dog is uncomfortable and doesn't want you near them.



1. Dog is standing with body and head lowered, tail tucked under, ears back, and they're yawning.

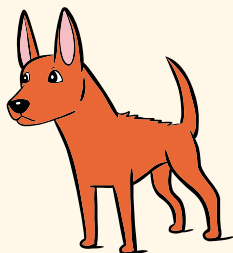


2. Dog is lying down, avoiding eye contact or turning their head away, ears are back and they're licking their lips.



3. Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears back, tail tucked away, front paw raised, and they're avoiding eye contact.

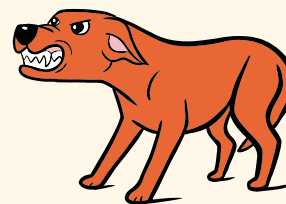
### AN ANGRY OR VERY UNHAPPY DOG – this dog isn't happy and wants you to stay away or go away.



1. Dog is standing stiffly with body weight forward, ears up, hair raised, tail up and stiff, nose wrinkled, and they're looking at you with dark and enlarged pupils.



2. Dog is lying down, cowering, with ears flat, teeth showing and their tail between their legs.



3. Dog is standing with body lowered, weight towards the back, head tilted up, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth showing, eyes staring, ears back and down, and they're snarling.





# Caring for your pets is what we're all about.

## **RSPCA.** Pet Insurance

Find out more at: [rspca.org.uk/petinsurance](https://rspca.org.uk/petinsurance)

RSPCA Trading Ltd is an introducer-appointed representative of Pinnacle Insurance plc. Pinnacle Insurance plc is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority (register number 110866). Registered Office: Pinnacle House, A1 Barnet Way, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire WD6 2XX. RSPCA Pet Insurance is a trading style of, and arranged, administered and underwritten by, Pinnacle Insurance plc. RSPCA Trading Ltd and Pinnacle Insurance plc are not part of the same corporate group. The RSPCA name and logo are trade marks of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and used by Pinnacle Insurance plc under licence from RSPCA Trading Ltd, which pays all its taxable profits to the RSPCA. The RSPCA is a registered charity, number 219099, helping animals throughout England and Wales.



## Training your dog

Once your dog has settled into their new home and routine, it's time to think about training them. Training should be fun for both you and your dog – it can help to build your relationship and it's a great way to enjoy each other's company. Teaching your dog basic obedience, such as sit, wait and come back when called, gives them the freedom to do the things they like to do while staying safe and being under control. Most dogs love to learn, so as well as training them in basic obedience, teaching them tricks such as giving a paw and playing dead can be a good way to stop them from getting bored.

All training should be reward-based. Giving your dog something they really like when they show a particular behaviour means they're more likely to do it again. It's important to find out what your dog's 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 are different and each will have their favourite. Have fun getting to know your dog so you can find out what motivates them the most.

It's important that you never shout at or punish your dog for mistakes they make, or use training methods designed to force, frighten or hurt them. It won't help your dog learn and it's very likely to damage your relationship because it can make them afraid of you. Instead, be patient. If mistakes are made during training, or your dog shows behaviour you don't want, it's much better to ignore them. Your dog won't understand why they're being punished, even if you do it right away.

### 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. Break training up into short but regular sessions so your dog isn't overloaded. And always try to end with something your dog is confident doing so the session finishes positively. If you need some advice, please speak to a local trainer.

Training classes can be great for new dog owners and anybody who's feeling a little rusty or needs extra help and advice. Finding the right training class is important for your dog to be happy. Visit: [abtc.org.uk](http://abtc.org.uk)

Visit: [rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour) for more information on teaching your dog basic commands.

## Leaving your dog alone

Dogs who struggle to cope when left alone can be destructive and may bark or howl, and some may go to the toilet. One of the best ways to prevent 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's never frightening and always associated with something nice. If you're likely to be out of the house for a long period of time (especially soon after you've adopted your dog), then please arrange for friends, family or a dog sitter to help keep your dog company so they feel safe and secure. Ideally, dogs should never be left alone for more than four hours.







## Five-step plan

These five steps will help your dog get used to being left on their own. Make sure you take your time and repeat each of the steps until you're certain your dog is happy. How quickly you progress will depend 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're still in the room. Reward your dog for staying quietly in their bed.
2. Next, ask your dog to stay in their bed as you move away, then return and reward them.
3. Bit by bit, move further away and stay away for longer. If your dog reacts or moves, don't reward them and return to the previous stage.
4. Start going out through the front door before returning. Then, going out and shutting the door. Then, going out for a short while (around 10–20 minutes), before gradually going out for a little longer.
5. Once you reach the stage where your dog is happy to be left for up to an hour, you should have no problems leaving them for longer. However, we advise they're left for no longer than four hours without a friend, dog walker/sitter or a member of your family popping in to keep them company and letting them out to go to the toilet. To avoid boredom (which may lead to mischief) and to make the experience more positive for your dog, remember to give them something to occupy them while you're out, such as a Kong or puzzle feeder.

If your dog barks, howls, is destructive or goes to the toilet while you're out, please don't react badly when you come home. If you find a mess, remember your dog isn't doing it on purpose. Please don't ever physically punish or shout at your dog, and try to avoid letting your dog see you're annoyed. Instead, calmly let your dog outside, away from the mess, before you clean it up.

Remember, separation-related behaviour problems get worse if owners punish their dogs when they get home. This is because your dog will link the punishment to you coming home, rather than the destruction, barking or toileting they did some time ago. Your dog will then become anxious about what you'll do the next time you return home. As a result of this increased anxiety, your dog is more likely to chew or lose toilet control, making the problem even worse.

## What to do before leaving your dog alone

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

## Preventing and managing behaviour problems

As your dog settles into their new life and routine you may start to experience some problems or see behaviour you didn't expect, which might worry you. If this happens, it's a good idea to step back and try to think about things from your dog's perspective. This can help you to understand why they're behaving in a particular way. It will also help you to find ways to prevent problem behaviours, as well as manage and improve them.

### Try to understand your dog

How we think about our dogs can influence their behaviour. For many people, dogs are a significant member of their family and they can be treated very much like people. There's nothing wrong with this, as long as we don't forget that dogs are dogs and not people.

Although dogs are smart, they don't experience all the same emotions as us and they're unable to think about lots of things in the same ways we can – 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 make the problem worse, or even create other problems. It's much better for us – and them – to try to understand how they think and feel. This will make it easier for us to communicate with them without damaging our relationship.

### Make sure they're not bored

Some unwanted behaviours can happen because of boredom. Without toys to play with or things to chew, dogs may create their own entertainment, such as destroying furniture or digging up the garden! So, give them lots of activities to keep them occupied.

### Take the time to train them

A lack of training can also cause behaviour problems. For example, if you're in the garden your dog might come back to you when you call them. But to be sure they'll always return, no matter where you are, you'll need to practise calling them back in lots of different environments.

### Be consistent

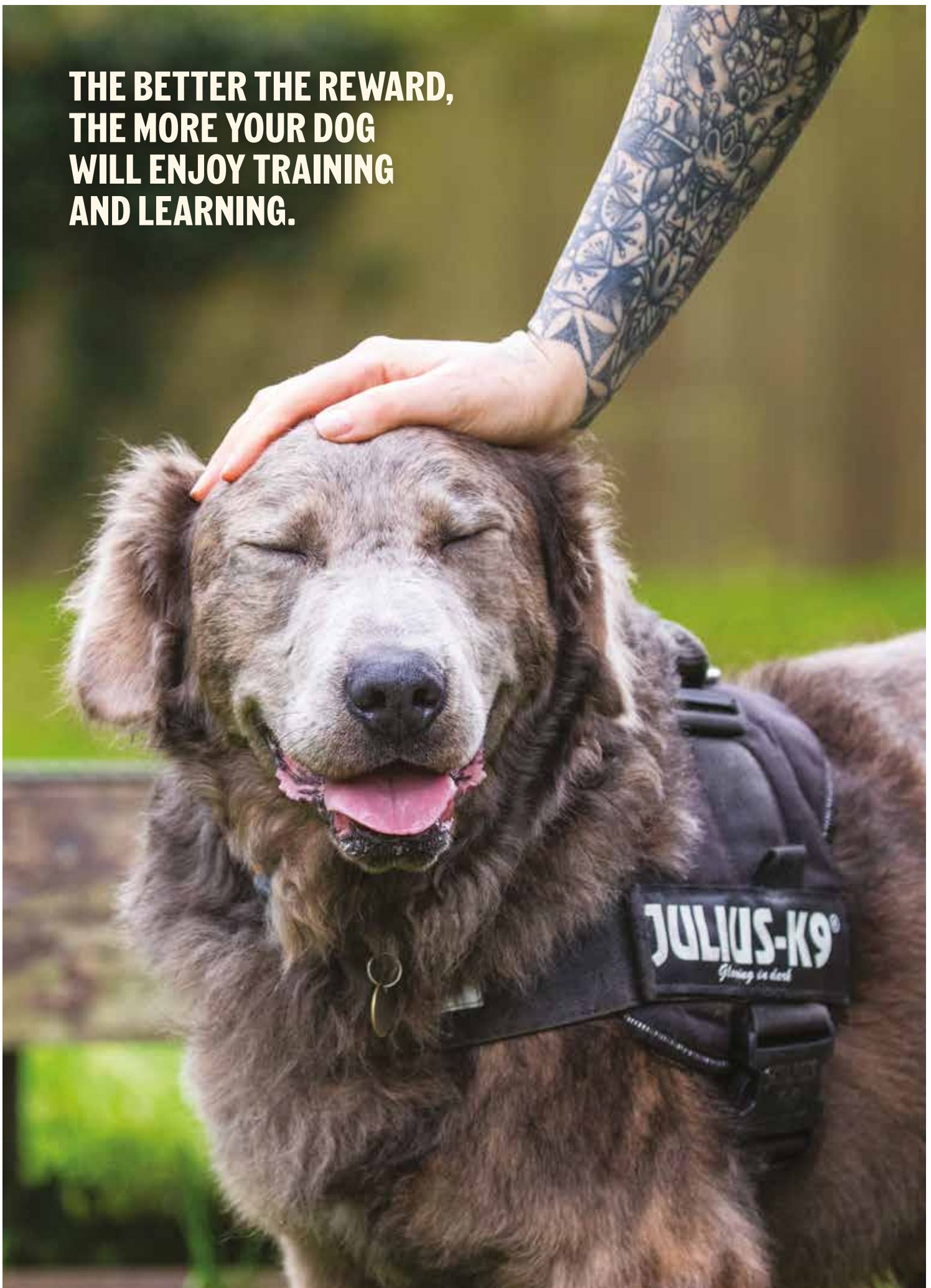
Sometimes, our inconsistent behaviour can cause problems. Dogs may get told one thing by one member of the family, then be told something very different by another. For example, Mum might let the dog on the sofa but Dad doesn't, so this can cause confusion. It can also be very puzzling for a dog if they're allowed on the sofa in summer but not in winter when they're dirty. So it's important that everyone treats your dog in the same way, all of the time.

### Communicate and praise positive behaviour

We're often quick to tell dogs what we don't want them to do, but then forget to tell them what we do want! For example, we might tell our dog not to bark or jump up, but forget to praise them when they stop and are quiet, or they're standing or sitting on the floor. Make sure you communicate with your dog often and praise positive behaviour to help reinforce it.



**THE BETTER THE REWARD,  
THE MORE YOUR DOG  
WILL ENJOY TRAINING  
AND LEARNING.**





## Look out for signs of fear and anxiety

Fearful or anxious behaviour generally means your dog is unhappy in certain situations. This can be a result of poor breeding, or 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 so it's 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's important to seek expert help.

If you're worried about how your adopted dog is behaving, please get in touch with the RSPCA as soon as possible. We'll work with you to help understand why your dog is behaving in a certain way and offer advice to help you manage the problem. In some cases, we may refer you for more specialist advice, especially if we're 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

- If you're having problems and would like some help, please contact the RSPCA branch or animal centre where you adopted your dog.
- If you're still concerned about your dog's behaviour, it's a good idea to get them checked over by a vet to rule out illness or injury as the cause. If necessary, the vet can refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist (CAB) for further help. Be careful though – anyone can call themselves an animal behaviourist, so make sure 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 ([apbc.org.uk](http://apbc.org.uk)) and The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour ([asab.org](http://asab.org)).

### TOP TIP

Many dogs become anxious at the sound of fireworks. If possible, avoid

having your own celebrations with fireworks and don't attend organised firework displays with your dog. Walk your dog during the day before fireworks start and give them a place to rest (a safe haven) in the quietest part of the house. Offer plenty of reassurance and try to distract them by encouraging them to play. Preparing in advance for the fireworks season is key. You can find out more at: [rspca.org.uk/fireworks](http://rspca.org.uk/fireworks)





Kills fleas, ticks and lice

# FLEAaway®

SPOT ON SOLUTION

- RSPCA FLEAaway® can help provide effective control against fleas and ticks all year round.\*
- RSPCA FLEAaway® can kill fleas for up to eight weeks in dogs and provides up to four weeks' tick control.
- Four weeks' flea and tick control for cats.
- RSPCA FLEAaway® comes in an easy-to-use, award-winning pipette.



Available online at: [shop.rspca.org.uk](https://shop.rspca.org.uk)

RSPCA 

\*Provides control if used as part of a monthly flea and tick control programme (RSPCA FLEAaway® SPC).



**REMEMBER, ALL  
DOGS ARE DIFFERENT.  
SOME ENJOY THE  
COMPANY OF OTHER  
DOGS, WHILE OTHERS  
PREFER THEIR OWN  
COMPANY AND THAT  
OF THEIR HUMANS.**





# 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 vaccinations and a health check. You can speak to your vet to see if they offer a healthcare plan for your pet. This allows you to spread the cost of preventative veterinary treatment, such as regular health checks, annual vaccinations and flea and worm treatments, while making sure your pet remains fit and healthy.

**For more information, visit:**

- [thehealthypetclub.co.uk](http://thehealthypetclub.co.uk)
- [companioncare.co.uk/pet-health-plans](http://companioncare.co.uk/pet-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. Worms can also pose a small risk to your family's health. Make sure you clean away dog mess in your garden often and give your dog 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 to your dog, so it's best to remove them as soon as possible – speak to your vet about how to do this safely.

## Looking after their teeth

Having clean and healthy teeth is as important for your dog as it is for you. Without regular brushing with a special dog toothpaste and brush, and using safe chew toys, your dog could develop painful dental disease that can be costly to treat and make it difficult for your dog to eat.

## Grooming

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

## Watching their weight

Always follow the instructions on the food packet to make sure you give your dog the correct portion size. Remember that treats and titbits count towards your dog's daily calorie intake, so they should be given as part of their daily allowance, not in addition to it.

Check on a regular basis that your dog is the right size and weight – you can use the guide opposite. If you're worried about your dog's weight, or you think they may be overweight or underweight, please speak to your vet.

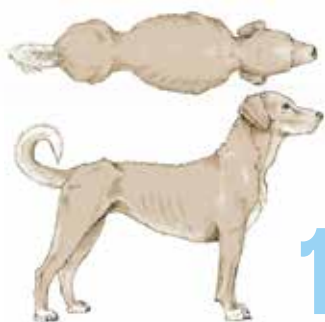
**TOP TIP**

*Having pet insurance can help you cope with unexpected vet bills for illness or injury.*

*For information on the benefits of pet insurance, visit:*  
**[rspca.org.uk/petinsurance](http://rspca.org.uk/petinsurance)**

# The body condition system

## TOO THIN



1

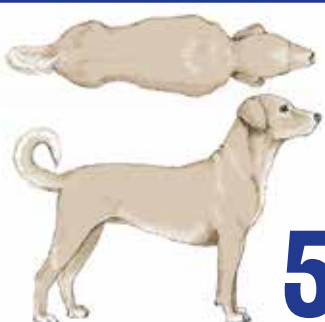
1. Ribs, spine, pelvic bones and all other bony areas are visible from a distance. No obvious body fat. Clear loss of muscle mass.

2. Ribs, spine and pelvic bones are easily visible. No noticeable fat. Some other bony areas can be seen. Minimal loss of muscle mass.



3

3. Ribs easily felt and may be visible, with no noticeable fat. Top of spine can be seen. Pelvic bones are sticking out. Obvious waist, and tummy is tucked up.



5

4. Ribs easily felt, with minimal fat covering. Waist easily seen from above. Tummy is tucked up.

5. Ribs can be felt, with no excess fat covering. Waist can be seen behind ribs when viewed from above. Can see the tummy tucked up when viewed from the side.



7

## TOO HEAVY

6. Ribs can be felt, with slight excess fat covering. Waist can be seen from above but isn't defined. Can clearly see the tummy tucked up.

7. Ribs can be felt but not easily, and there's a thick layer of fat. Noticeable fatty areas over spine and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. May be able to see tummy tucked up.



9

8. Ribs can't be felt and are under a very thick layer of fat, or felt only with significant pressure. Large fatty areas over spine and base of tail. No visible waist, and tummy isn't tucked up. Tummy might be clearly swollen.

9. Massive fatty areas over chest, spine and base of tail. No waist or tummy tuck. Fatty areas on neck and limbs. Obvious swollen tummy.

Adapted from The BODY CONDITION SCORE, The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) Global Nutrition Committee.



## Poisoning

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).

Never 'watch and wait' if you think your dog might have been poisoned. Act fast. Contact your nearest vet for advice immediately. There's also an Animal Poison Line at: [animalpoisonline.co.uk](https://animalpoisonline.co.uk)

More information on poisoning can be found at: [rspca.org.uk/poisoning](https://rspca.org.uk/poisoning)

## 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 they're distressed, bored, ill or injured. Once your dog has settled into your home you should take time to get to know how they usually behave – that way you'll be able to spot any changes in their behaviour.

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



# Useful contacts

## Your RSPCA contact

---

---

---

## RSPCA branch/animal centre

---

---

---

## RSPCA telephone number

---

---

---

## Vet

---

---

---

## Pet insurance policy and telephone number

---

---

---

## Dog behaviourist/trainer

---

---

---

## Dog sitter

---

---

---

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





**For more information on dog adoption, please visit:  
[rspca.org.uk/rehomeadog](https://rspca.org.uk/rehomeadog) or scan the QR code**

**RSPCA.**

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals  
Parkside, Chart Way, Horsham RH12 1GY ■ 0300 1230 100 ■ [rspca.org.uk](https://rspca.org.uk)  
Patron: HM King Charles III ■ We exist to inspire everyone to create a better world for every animal  
facebook.com/RSPCA x.com/RSPCA\_official @instagram.com/rspca\_official  
tiktok.com/@rspca\_official linkedin.com/company/rspca  
The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales ■ Registered charity no. 219099  
The RSPCA only exists with the support of public donations © RSPCA 2025. All rights reserved ■ P94 3/25