

*Dogs can enrich our lives in numerous ways, especially as companions and healers. In return, we must provide them with all the care they deserve. This, however, requires time and costs.*

The minimum standard for the welfare of any animal is summarised by the **5 freedoms\***:

- 1. Freedom from hunger and thirst**
- 2. Freedom from discomfort**
- 3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease**
- 4. Freedom to express normal behaviour**
- 5. Freedom from fear and distress**

Accordingly, your dog will need:

- Appropriate food and clean water
- Comfortable shelter and bed
- Companionship
- A secure environment
- Space and regular exercise
- Vaccination (annual boosters)
- Neutering
- Veterinary care
- Regular worming

In addition, you are required by law to purchase a **licence** for your dog, and provide him/her with collar, leash and **identification** tag.

### **Costs and time**

Before deciding to get a dog, you must consider all the costs involved, including the ones mentioned. Also, can you spend some time every day playing with and walking your dog? This is essential, as dogs are social animals and will become bored and destructive if left alone for long periods of time.

### **What kind of dog?**

As you know, dogs come in a variety of sizes and breeds, selected for different aims, from herding to hunting. Therefore breeds will vary not only in appearance but also in temperament and levels of activity. Even within the same breed, each dog is an individual. When choosing a puppy or an adult dog, make sure it is the right size for your house and garden and its characteristics match your lifestyle. No point in getting a working dog if you live in a tiny apartment!

### **Where do I get a dog from?**

Considering that more than 30,000 dogs are put down in Ireland every year just because they are unwanted, the best choice is to adopt a rescue dog from the local pound or SPCA. If you want a pure-bred pup, only buy from reputable breeders who will allow you to see the premises and the pup's parents.

### **Dogs are not accessories, so avoid any choice dictated by fashion.**

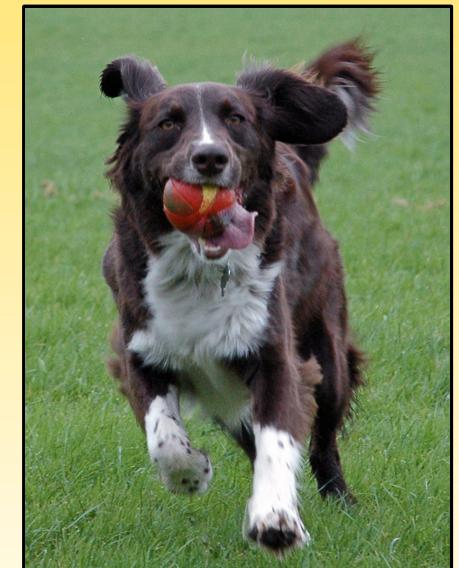
Be aware also that inbreeding can result in physical and behavioural problems. Mongrels are generally healthier and can make excellent pets!

### **Nutrition**

There are many varieties of commercially manufactured dog food available. Complete dry nuggets are generally a good choice. Be aware that a dog's dietary needs will depend on breed, age, size, condition, and level of exercise. Make clean, fresh water available to your dog at all times.

### **Exercise**

It is essential for a dog's well being to receive sufficient physical and mental stimulation. Not only exercise fulfils a dog's desire to stay fit, it also allows him to use up his energy. Otherwise, excess energy may be channelled into unwanted behaviour. Ideally dogs should be walked at least twice a day. Periods of freedom off the lead to run and play are also needed. A few toys will make play with your dog enjoyable for both, plus they'll provide some stimulation when the dog has to remain alone.



## **Training**

Dogs don't come pre-programmed to obey. If we want them to do as we ask, we need to teach them what we want from them, with lots of love, patience and a positive attitude. The most effective way to train a dog is by **rewarding** it: a behaviour followed by a reward will naturally occur more often. Some dogs will work for a treat, others for praise and cuddles: you need to find out what your dog finds most rewarding. Punishment can be counter-productive, especially when toilet-training a puppy. There are many books available to help you train your pet. If you think your dog has a behavioural problem, talk to your vet or the local SPCA. They might be able to help you or refer you to a behaviour specialist.

## **Health care**

Your dog must be vaccinated (from around 8 weeks) against common disease such as distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, leptospirosis, and parainfluenza. It will need an annual booster for continued protection. Regular worming – 4 times a year – is also necessary. Coat, teeth, ears, and nails must be accurately inspected.

## **Neutering**

Unless you plan to have puppies, it is kindest to have your dog neutered. The gain is twofold: first, you won't contribute to the thousands of dogs euthanised every year in the country. Second, you will avoid undesirable and stressful breeding-related behaviours. Additionally, research shows health benefits of neutering/spaying in both sexes. Contrary to popular belief, sterilisation does not affect weight or activity levels.

## **Holidays**

A reason for many dogs being abandoned is holidays. A responsible owner will plan in advance for a trusted person to look after his/her pet when he/she is away.

Alternatively, there are reputable boarding kennels which will take in a fully vaccinated dog for the duration of your holiday. It can be expensive, and you'll need to book well in advance, but these are the only options, unless you can organize to take your pooch with you!

If you plan to go further abroad than the UK with your dog, you can obtain a pet passport, but it's a lengthy and costly process (ask your vet for information).

## **Poop-scoop**

Always carry your poop-scoop or a suitable bag with you and clean up after your dog every time. This is your responsibility towards your fellow citizens, and stops dogs (and their owners) getting a bad reputation!

## **Dogs and children**

Dogs can be wonderful companions for children, teaching them compassion and responsibility. However, **never get a dog or any other animal as a toy for your child!**

Animals are sentient creatures with their own needs, whose well being depends on you. By understanding and respecting your dog's needs and dignity, you'll pass an important message to your child.



**YOU ARE  
a  
RESPONSIBLE  
DOG  
OWNER**



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