

So, you want a dog?

If only it was that simple! Thousands of dogs are euthanized every year because they are homeless. They are most frequently homeless or in shelters because they were with people that were not equipped to be responsible dog owners or thought the dog was a problem. The problem is usually not the dogs fault, but a relationship issue. We each have ideas about what we find attractive about having a dog. We each have a particular look or breed of dog that we



are drawn to. And, we have expectations of how a dog “should” be. However, what we frequently don’t consider in getting a dog is the research and work it takes to have a satisfying relationship with the dog we choose to invite into our homes. When we primarily “like the idea” of having a dog or a dog with a certain look and don’t do our homework about the dog’s needs, the relationship is frequently unsatisfying and downright life threatening for the dog we choose.

Creating a “right” relationship with a dog requires four steps:

1. Assess what you bring to the relationship by reviewing the questions below. Choose your dog by what you are willing to contribute to the relationship and what the dog’s needs are. Be realistic! Don’t think you can walk a high energy dog if you don’t leave your sofa.
2. Clearly realize the needs of the dog you are considering adopting. Dogs have natural instincts that are just a part of their DNA. There are specific reasons that working breeds may require a lot of exercise, toy dogs require a lot of grooming, guard dogs require clear boundaries, mixes require careful consideration for energy level, and shelter dogs require special attention to create security, safety and bonding. Adding a second dog to a family also requires more work, special considerations of breed, pack order, and socializing.
3. Be prepared to provide a safe space (which may include adequate 6’ fencing), and engage with a 4-legged companion as part of the family. You will need to spend money on healthy pet food, medical expenses, including annual shots, special needs, dental care, and perhaps boarding fees. You will also need to commit to training and socialization, and creating a good and satisfying relationship between all pets and family members. Dogs should not be just left alone in a yard without human interaction. This may create neurotic behavior that you may judge as “bad” behavior, and punish the dog for something you have created by inadequate care or neglect.
4. Patience, patience, patience. It takes a while for two different species to learn each other’s language. Yelling doesn’t make it easier. Hitting adds to the anxiety and noise. Dogs are pack animals, you mean the world to your dog. Be a clear and kind leader.

If this seems like a lot of work, it is! If you are not fully committed to this, and are just looking for a dog to fit in to your home, it’s unlikely to work. Dogs leave dog hair, have their own needs to be physically and emotionally healthy, and to be a good companion. Not everyone has the time and funds to have a dog companion. It doesn’t make you a selfish or bad person. It makes you realistic and kind to dogs.

What do you bring to your relationship with a dog?

What type of home/living space do you have?

- It's bigger than a closet, so I call it an apartment
- "Cozy" House
- Large House

How big is your yard?

- None—but my NEXT house will have a yard
- Small
- Medium (mowing doesn't take all day)
- Large enough to help me forget I've got neighbors

Are you able to keep a dog secure?

- Yes
- No
- Usually

For how long would your dog be alone each week?

- Not at all
- 10–20 hours
- 20–40 hours
- More than 40 hours

What is your age group?

- 10–19 years
- 20–39 years
- 40–59 years
- Over 60

What is the age of the youngest child living in or regularly visiting your home?

- No children
- Under 5 years

How active are you?

- Infirm
- Not very active
- Moderately active
- Very active

How energetic should your dog be?

- "You don't really expect me to fetch that ball, do you?"

- "Let's play catch—but don't make me run around too much"
- "This is fun, throw the ball again!"
- "Why are you stopping? We've only been playing for 3 hours!"

How much daily exercise will you give your dog?

- None, I'm basically a couch potato
- 30 minutes
- 1 hour
- More than 1 hour

What size dog are you looking for?

- Toy: Compact enough to call my lap "home"
- Small
- Medium
- Large enough for people to say, "Now THAT's a dog!"
- Giant
- I don't care

How much money are you willing to spend each week to feed your dog?

- \$10
- \$25
- \$35
- More than \$35

How long do you want your dog's coat to be?

- Smooth
- Short
- Medium
- Long
- Wiry
- I don't care

How often will your dog be groomed each week?

- None
- Let's not go overboard, once a week should do it
- Two or three times a week
- Every day (I'm a neat freak—and proud of it!)

Do you want a dog that will protect your property?

- No, I'm looking for a cream puff
- He should bark loud enough to make strangers think twice
- Yes, I want a "Beware of Dog" dog

Have you owned a dog before?

- Yes
- No

Okay, now you've done some homework and can draw some intelligent conclusions of what you can offer to a dog. Now learn what the dog's needs are and how they may or may not fit with your lifestyle by researching dog breeds, talking to shelters or calling Stay and Play Dog Care (707-459-1377) for guidance or support.