



# CARING FOR YOUR RSPCA FOSTER DOG



**Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

Telephone: 0300 1234 999 [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)

The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no. 219099.

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## Thank you for fostering a dog for the RSPCA.

This booklet is designed to help and support you in caring for your RSPCA foster dog.

Please read this booklet before you welcome a foster dog into your home – it includes important preparations which need to be made prior to their arrival, which will help them settle into their new life with you. You should also read this information in conjunction with the *General information on fostering an animal in RSPCA care* booklet. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your RSPCA fostering coordinator.

The number of dogs you can foster at any one time will be dependent on your facilities, the time you have and the individual dogs. Your RSPCA fostering coordinator will decide what they feel is best in conjunction with you. It is unusual for more than three adult dogs to be placed in an individual foster home.

If you already own or foster animals of a different species then the suitability to foster dogs will need to be considered, bearing in mind the individual dog, your individual animals and your facilities/time. The fostering coordinator will do this in conjunction with you.



## RSPCA foster dogs

RSPCA foster dogs are examined by a vet and their behaviour is observed before placing them with a foster home. Every effort is made to ensure that fosterers and their families are not placed at unreasonable risk but please bear in mind that it is not always possible to predict a dog's behaviour.

## Preparing for your RSPCA foster dog

### Before collecting your foster dog

The RSPCA website has lots of useful information on dog care so we recommend that you read the information on the website before collecting your foster dog:  
[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs).

The Animal Welfare Act Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs in England can be accessed at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and we recommend that you are familiar with this so you understand your obligations to meet your foster dog's five welfare needs as set out in the Animal Welfare Act 2006. If you live in Wales, the Welsh Government Code of Practice can be accessed at: [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk).

If you are thinking of fostering a puppy, we also recommend that you read the latest edition of *The Perfect Puppy* by Gwen Bailey before you apply to foster.



## RSPCA Minimum Expectations applicable to dog fostering *(at time of publication)*

**RSPCA Minimum Expectations are the RSPCA's 'rules'. We expect you to follow these when looking after an animal for us. Deviations are only possible on the advice of a vet or the RSPCA's chief veterinary officer.**

New RSPCA Minimum Expectations are issued by the RSPCA as and when new evidence is presented on the best welfare for the animals in our care. Your fostering coordinator will keep you up to date with any new 'rules' issued.

- Dogs are to be kept on a lead in unsecure areas to prevent escape/loss.
- Dogs are to be under control at all times.
- Dogs are to wear a collar and identification with the RSPCA's or fosterer's details.
- Dogs are to be provided with continual access to a comfortable, dry, draught-free, clean and quiet place to rest. Every dog is to be provided with somewhere they can go to avoid things that frighten them – a 'safe haven'.
- During transportation, dogs are to be securely and comfortably restrained. The Movement of Animals form will need to be used for case animals.
- Electric shock devices, pinch collars, choke/check chains, spray collars and other aversive training techniques and methods are not to be used. Half-check or slip leads are not to be used. When walking, dogs are to be correctly fitted with and walked using a suitable flat collar and/or harness.
- Puppies are not to be housed away from the bitch until they are at least eight weeks of age, unless this is under veterinary guidance.
- Dogs' coats are to be maintained in a healthy condition and free from matting.
- Dogs are to receive deworming at least every three months and in accordance with data sheet instructions and veterinary advice.
- All dogs are to receive defleaing as per data sheet instruction and veterinary advice.
- Puppies are to be vaccinated at eight weeks of age unless advised otherwise by a veterinary surgeon.
- Dogs show a natural drive to chew and are to be provided with safe, suitable toys or other items as an outlet for this behaviour. Toy and food enrichment is to be provided and should be presented in such a way as to maintain interest and activity in dogs. Enrichment resources are to be provided for dogs left alone for any period.
- Puppies are to be adequately and appropriately socialised and habituated to prevent fear behaviour towards animals, situations, environments and people.
- A dog is not to be housed with another dog if they try to avoid them or appear fearful of them.
- Dogs are to have continuous access to clean, fresh water suitable for human consumption.
- Dogs are to be provided with a suitable diet; the quantity, frequency, delivery and type of food should be determined by what is appropriate to the animal's nutritional and behavioural needs. ○

**PLEASE NOTE: this is not an exhaustive list of all RSPCA Minimum Expectations applicable to dogs in RSPCA care.**



### Introducing other pets

If you already have a pet dog, then both dogs will have met prior to you taking your foster dog home. 'Scent swapping' is also a good idea to prepare both dogs. When you get home, you will need to introduce the dogs again on neutral territory while both are on loose leads. Take them for a short walk together before entering the house. Before going into the house, check there are no toys or food lying about that may cause a disagreement. Make sure the dogs have a bed each and that these are located away from each other initially.

If you have a pet cat, it can be useful to 'scent swap' before the foster dog comes to your house. Your fostering coordinator will help arrange this. There is no accurate way of knowing how an individual dog will react to an individual cat. We do try to minimise problems by not placing foster dogs with a known history of chasing cats, displaying aggressive behaviours towards cats or dogs known to have

a high chase drive, with a foster home that has cats.

Advice on introducing dogs and introducing dogs to cats is available at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company).

Dogs may be interested in caged animals if they are not used to them. Ensure that such animals are kept securely out of reach, ideally in their own room which your foster dog will not have access to.



## How can Adaptil help your foster dog?

Canine companions are always by our side but sometimes our lifestyle can make them worried. The signs can be subtle such as holding ears back, yawning inappropriately or a reluctance to go places or do things. Other signs can be more noticeable such as drooling, excessive barking, panting and pacing.

Dogs around the world have benefited from Adaptil. Owners have noticed many advantages, from their dog feeling more confident to helping them settle when left home alone.

### What is Adaptil?

Shortly after birth the mother will produce a pheromone that gives her puppies the confidence and support to learn about the world around them. Adaptil is a copy of this dog appeasing pheromone and has been proven to have the same reassuring effect on adult dogs, helping them adapt to new situations and provide support when feeling anxious. Adaptil is available in a plug-in diffuser for support in the home environment, a collar for both indoor and outdoor worries and a spray for intermittent use. The collar and diffusers will last approximately four weeks.



### Feeding

You will be advised on what to feed your foster dog and how often by your fostering coordinator. It's important that you do not suddenly change your foster dog's diet to avoid causing stomach upsets. Speak to your fostering coordinator if you wish to change foods.

Please do not feed bones and do not encourage scavenging or begging.

To avoid conflict, feed any existing pet dogs separately or carefully supervise meal times. Monitor your foster dog's body condition to ensure they are not gaining or losing weight. Your fostering

coordinator can provide you with the Purina body condition score chart to help you monitor your foster dog's weight.

If you have any concerns about your foster dog's eating or drinking habits, or weight concerns, talk to your fostering coordinator with a view to seeking veterinary advice. [📍](#)





## Helping your RSPCA foster dog to settle in

### Arriving home with your foster dog

**Do not expect your foster dog to settle in straight away. Some of the dogs that enter our care may never have experienced a 'normal' home environment, so it may take time for them to settle.**

Allow your foster dog time to settle. It is easy to underestimate

how stressful the transition from kennel to home life can be, so avoid busy family gatherings or inviting friends and family over to meet the dog until they have had time to settle down. There's

more information on introducing your foster dog to new people on page 15 of this booklet.

Remember, we do not know exactly what has happened to these dogs, so any common or garden object might stimulate a fearful response. Some of these dogs have genuine dislikes that have been caused by previous negative experiences. Do not attempt to cure them without seeking advice from your fostering coordinator. Dogs can often be unhappy in noisy, crowded areas such as open days or fetes; so avoid these, at least to start with.

Consistency and routine in the home are important for keeping your foster dog happy and healthy. If all members of the household handle and care for the dog consistently then your foster dog should settle into a routine and feel happier. Although it may seem kind changing food, feeding and exercise times, and rules about the sofa, this can all lead to a confused and unsettled dog. Ask visitors to be consistent with your foster dog too; for example, ask them not to encourage the dog to jump up.

We encourage fosterers to take their foster dogs along to training/socialisation classes, at their own expense, to help in the rehabilitation of their foster dog. A trained and well-socialised dog is more likely to find a loving new home. Details of how to find an approved trainer can be found at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour) or your fostering coordinator may be able to put you in touch with an approved trainer in your area.

Training should always be done using reward-based techniques.

You can speak to your fostering coordinator about Adaptil, an artificial pheromone product (a plug-in diffuser) – this can help your foster dog feel more secure and help them settle.

Fostering a rescue dog is an extremely rewarding experience, however it can sometimes take time for your foster dog to settle into your home.

### Toileting

Many dogs will urinate on arrival at a new property. This does not necessarily mean that they are not house trained.

You should structure toilet breaks into your foster dog's day so they have predictable times they can relieve themselves. A typical structure is first thing in the morning, immediately after meals and last thing at night. You'll need to add in opportunities throughout the day when your foster dog shows signs that they may need to relieve themselves – learn to look for the signs. There's a factsheet on teaching toileting techniques with lots of handy advice and tips at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour).

Always take a dog waste bag with you wherever you go! It is an offence to not clean up dog mess and you can be fined. Ensure that dog mess is cleared up regularly from your garden to keep your family safe.

### Familiar foods

In the first few days of a dog being in a new environment, it is normal for the dog to have loose motions brought on by the change in environment and stress associated with that change. A change of diet can also cause loose motions, which is why it's important to stick to the dog's normal food as advised. If your foster dog experiences loose motions, you could consider reducing the next feed by one quarter to give their tummy a rest.

Diarrhoea is loose and watery poo. As long as your foster dog is bright, not lethargic and is showing no other signs such as vomiting or blood in the faeces, a raised temperature or dehydration, it's not necessary to go to a vet but please inform your fostering coordinator so they are aware. Feed your foster dog a light diet of white fish or RSPCA Assured chicken and rice. Once the faeces are normal, you can wean them back onto normal feed. If your foster dog does not improve or shows other signs of illness, they must be taken to the vet for treatment and to prevent dehydration. Diarrhoea can need more urgent attention in puppies and ill or elderly dogs. ○



# The 6 Golden Rules for keeping your child safe and your dog happy


**1** Never leave your child alone in the same room as a dog, even your own.



**2** Teach your child never to approach dogs when they:

- are eating or have a treat
- have a toy or something else they really like
- are sleeping
- are unwell, injured or tired
- are blind or deaf.

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



**4** Teach your child how to play nicely with your dog. For example, your child can teach your dog some really fun tricks like shake a paw, play dead, or roll-over.



**5** Supervise your child when they're with your dog – if your dog looks unhappy, let him/her go somewhere they feel safe and happy.



**6** Never allow your child to approach a dog they don't know, for example when out in the park.



**TOP TIP** We all need a break sometimes – give your dog a cosy spot in a quiet room where they can have their own space. Teach your child to leave your dog alone when they're in their private spot.

[www.rspca.org.uk/safeandhappy](http://www.rspca.org.uk/safeandhappy)



## Learning to live together

### Leaving your foster dog on their own

If you spend 24 hours a day with your foster dog and then suddenly leave them on their own, this can be very confusing for them and may lead to separation-related behaviours. From the moment you arrive home with your foster dog, you will need to get them used to being left on their own.

Gradually increase the time that you leave them alone so that it is never a distressing experience. How long your foster dog can ultimately be left on their own will depend on a number of factors: how long they can go in between toileting; whether they are suffering from separation-related behaviours; and how often they need feeding.

There are no hard and fast rules – every animal is treated as an individual – but ideally we would prefer foster dogs are left on their own for no more than four hours and never more than six hours.

Resources, such as a food-stuffed Kong, should be provided for dogs left alone for any period of time.

For more information, including a leaflet on how to prevent separation-related behaviours developing, go to: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company).

### Children stay safe

Dogs can make excellent companions for children but there are some basic rules that should be observed in order to teach children

how to stay safe around dogs – to protect both child and dog. Advise children to try their best to remain calm, quiet and seated when meeting your foster dog for the first time. Children should let the dog come to them, and sniff their hands and clothing to become used to the scent before they attempt to touch the dog. Children should never be left unsupervised with any dog.

It is advisable for you to arrange an area that your foster dog can retreat to at all times – well away from children and busy areas of the house. It is good practice to be consistent and keep dogs off sofas, chairs and beds to help reduce the chance of problems between children and the dog. More detailed information can be found at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogsandchildren](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogsandchildren).

### Play time

Dogs show a natural drive to chew and should be provided with safe, suitable toys or other items as an outlet for this behaviour. The same toy every day can get boring and your foster dog may lose interest. Try to have a stash of toys and give a differing type of toy each day (removing the previous day's toy).

Toys cover a range of different items including balls, ropes, pulls, tug toys and soft toys. This range reflects the variation in behaviour and needs between individual dogs. Some dogs will benefit from toys which they can carry e.g. soft toys, others will benefit from those which





provide mental stimulation e.g. activity feeders, and some the opportunity for interactions between dogs and owners or between dogs e.g. pull/tug toys.

Make sure that the toys are indestructible and large enough that the dog cannot swallow them. When introducing a new toy, supervise so you are aware if the dog chews bits off. Any damaged toys should be disposed of.

Over the years, some fosterers have reported dogs finding it difficult to walk on laminate flooring and sadly dogs have injured themselves on occasions. If you notice your foster dog is finding it difficult, or seems reluctant to walk on your laminate flooring or is regularly slipping, please consider putting a temporary surface, such as a rug, on the floor to help them. If suitable, you could restrict access to the area with the laminate floor.

### Getting out and about

It's important that the RSPCA does everything possible to prevent the loss, straying or escape of all the animals in its care. This is even more important for animals who are not in the ownership of the RSPCA – for instance if you are fostering a 'case' dog or a PetRetreat dog – see accompanying booklet: *General information on fostering an animal in RSPCA care*. This is why dogs should be kept on a lead in unsecure areas to prevent escape/loss.

Only use equipment (leads, collars, harnesses, muzzles) as supplied or advised by your fostering coordinator. If you want to try a new piece of equipment (e.g. muzzle), talk to your fostering coordinator first. An operational guide on introducing and using muzzles, harnesses and head collars is available from your fostering coordinator.

Electric shock devices, choke/check chains, spray collars, pinch collars and other aversive equipment are not to be used. Half-check or slip leads are not to be used for training dogs.

Dogs need regular opportunities to have off-lead exercise, for example, running around in your garden, so it is really important that you make sure any areas you believe are secure are actually secure. Regularly check your garden to ensure that fences and gates are still in a secure state. Make sure that family members, friends and visitors close gates behind them and take care when opening external doors. You might want to prevent your foster dog having access to the front door to minimise the risk. You could use baby gates or keep your foster dog in a room when the front door is being used.

Make sure you are using the correct size collar and harnesses so your foster dog can't slip out of them and check leads for signs of wear and tear so they don't break. A correctly fitted collar will allow two fingers to be placed between the dog's neck and the collar.

Never leave your foster dog tied up outside a shop or anywhere there is no supervision to stop them being stolen. It is worth remembering that dogs are sometimes stolen from gardens.

You may be able to arrange for access to a secure area such as a fully fenced tennis court, with the owner's permission, to provide some off-lead time for your foster dog. Before allowing your foster dog off-lead, you must ensure the area is fully secure to prevent escape or loss. Remember, many foster dogs will not have good recall and even if they do, the motivation to reach a desired object or person may override the best of recall. Do not be tempted to let your foster dog off-lead because you feel guilty.

### Travelling by car

When transferring your foster dog into and out of your car, make sure that their lead is securely fitted and the dog is under your control. During transportation, dogs should be securely and comfortably restrained. You may wish to use a cage or a car harness.

NEVER leave your foster dog unattended in a car.

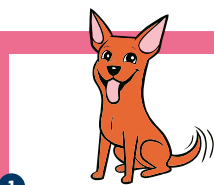
The RSPCA has strict rules on the transport of animals, so in addition to this information, you will be given an operational guide on the transport of dogs.

## Understanding your foster dog's behaviour

It is good to be able to understand and recognise what your foster dog is feeling, so you need to be familiar with signs of stress and good or poor welfare. Dogs communicate mainly through body language and they have a wide range of behaviours to communicate how they are feeling. Recognising and understanding these behaviours will allow you to respond appropriately. ●

### A happy dog

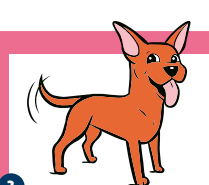
A dog who is happy will be relaxed.



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



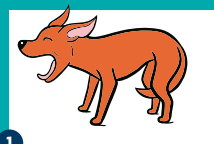
2 Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, eyes normal shape, ears in natural position, may be barking excitedly.



3 Dog's weight is distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, tail wagging, face is interested and alert, relaxed and mouth open.

### A worried dog

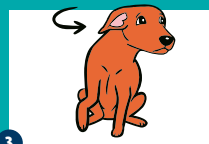
These dogs are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you to go near them.



1 Dog is standing but body posture and head position is low. Tail is tucked under, ears are back and dog is yawning.



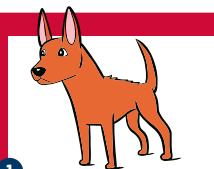
2 Dog is lying down and avoiding eye contact or turning head away from you and lip licking plus ears are back.



3 Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears are back, tail tucked away, not making eye contact, yawning, raising front paw.

### An angry or very unhappy dog

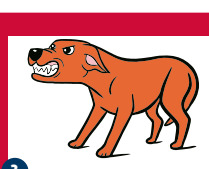
These dogs are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.



1 Dog is standing with a stiffened body posture, weight forward, ears are up, hair raised, eyes looking at you – pupils dark and enlarged, tail is up and stiff, wrinkled nose.



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



3 Dog is standing with body down and weight towards the back, head is tilted upwards, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth exposed, eyes staring, ears back and down, snarling.

Illustrations: Lili China © 2011. All rights reserved. With thanks to Julie Bedford, certified clinical animal behaviourist.

## Training and socialisation

Fosterers have a vital part to play in the rehabilitation of dogs to make them ready for rehoming. The following guidance gives fosterers basic information on introducing their foster dog to new people, dogs and everyday objects.

The vast majority of the dogs which end up in RSPCA care will have had very little socialisation in the critical period from three to 13 weeks of age. They may often have suffered cruel or neglectful treatment and so your foster dog may be nervous of people, other dogs or new things. They may therefore require gentle and sympathetic training in order to help them realise that the world and the people in it are not a threat to them. ●

### Getting your foster dog used to meeting new people

Make sure your foster dog gets to meet as many different people as possible (men, women and children) in a gradual, positive way. Try to get new people to feed your foster dog especially tasty treats when they meet them. If this isn't possible then you should hand feed your foster dog near to these people. This will make your foster dog think that new people are great and help to prevent any future fear or possible aggression towards strangers.

If your foster dog refuses to take food, or shows any other signs of nervousness or aggression in the presence of new people, dogs or situations you will need to take things very slowly. Ask your fostering coordinator for advice on how best to proceed.

Make sure people behave appropriately around your foster dog. If you have a dog that is a little shy then don't force them to interact with strangers as this will only make them more fearful. Instead, let them interact in their own time and give your foster dog loads of praise and tasty treats when they do so. If your foster dog is nervous of new people, ask them to avoid direct eye contact with your foster dog, and ensure they don't force themselves on them. Allow the dog to approach them of their own accord and at their own pace. It's especially important that children stay calm and quiet around your foster dog. Watch your foster dog closely for any signs that they are feeling anxious or uncomfortable.

Further information about how to ask people to act around dogs, and dog body language, is available from:

[www.rspca.org.uk/dogsandchildren](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogsandchildren)  
[drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/dog-bite-prevention-week-poster-on-the-body-language-of-fear-and-aggression](http://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/dog-bite-prevention-week-poster-on-the-body-language-of-fear-and-aggression)  
[drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/preventing-dog-bites-by-learning-to-greet-dogs-properly](http://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/preventing-dog-bites-by-learning-to-greet-dogs-properly).

### Getting your foster dog used to meeting new dogs

If you praise and reward your foster dog whenever they meet another dog, they will then see other dogs as a good thing. It takes time for a dog to build the social skills needed to greet, interact and play with other dogs appropriately, but if they have good experiences each time this will help to build their confidence.

There are some important points to remember when introducing your foster dog to a new dog.

Interactions between your foster dog and a new dog are best done outside of the home in a location where both dogs have plenty of space to avoid each other if they want or need to.

- Get your foster dog used to walking past other dogs calmly. Start at a distance at which your foster dog shows no reaction to the other dog. Try to keep your lead loose and keep them focussed on you, using food or a toy and a happy tone of voice.
- Praise and reward them immediately after you have passed the other dog calmly. Once they are calm and relaxed when passing other dogs at this distance you can reduce the distance slightly and repeat the training. Only move on to allowing dogs to briefly greet each other once your foster dog is calm and relaxed passing another dog at a normal distance (i.e. shows





no barking, lunging, hiding or wanting to get away, or any other signs of stress or anxiety).

- Choose the right dogs for your foster dog to greet. This can be difficult to tell when you are out and about in public with your foster dog but, in general, look for dogs which are calm and relaxed on the lead. Avoid dogs which seem overexcited (e.g. barking and pulling at the lead), dogs that are barking or growling at a distance, dogs that seem nervous or afraid, or owners who look like they are having trouble controlling their dog. Give these dogs a wide berth.
- Ask the other dog's owner

first before allowing them to interact. If they say their dog is not happy to greet other dogs, take this seriously and move on.

- Try to keep the lead loose. Your foster dog will pick up on any tension which may make them anxious, or feel like they have less freedom to retreat if needed. Don't allow the leads to get tangled – keep moving around so you and the other owner stay directly opposite each other.
- Watch both dogs' body language closely at all times to identify if either of them is beginning to feel uncomfortable. Look out for either dog trying to move away, raising their hackles, looking stiff and tense, cowering or licking their lips. If you see any of these signs (or others), calmly move your foster dog away. Never force your foster dog to interact with another dog.
- Keep interactions brief to begin with. Allow each dog to sniff and investigate each other for a few seconds, then call your foster dog away in a happy voice and/or a favourite toy to get their attention, then reward with praise and a brief game or treat and move on. Once your foster dog is becoming more relaxed and confident you can let them interact for a few seconds longer, as

long as both dogs are happy, but never let interactions go on for too long – try to always end on a positive note when both dogs are relaxed.

- Never shout at or punish your foster dog in any way if something goes wrong, this will only make them more anxious about interacting with other dogs the next time.

### Dog fights

Learn to identify aggressive signs in dogs, for example, standing with a stiffened body posture, long stares and eye contact, and raised hackles.

Try to prevent fights from occurring by moving away from anything which is making your foster dog exhibit these signs or moving away from other dogs exhibiting these signs. Never approach a dog which is not on a lead and try to encourage owners of off-lead dogs not to allow their dogs to approach the on-lead dog as this will be extremely intimidating for your foster dog. Do not scream and shout or stare down a dog.

If your foster dog does get into a fight, do not attempt to pick them up or restrict their movement by holding them on a short lead since this will make the situation worse. Do not put your hands down to try to split the dogs up as you could get bitten. Call out and wait for assistance, it is much easier to split up a fight with two people.

If one dog has hold of another, do not try to pull them off as

this can cause a lot of tearing damage. If possible, prevent the dogs from moving as much as possible until help arrives.

Witnessing a dog fight can be very scary but try to remain calm. Do not panic as this can make the situation worse. Dogs can go into a state of shock after being in a fight even if they have not sustained severe wounds so keep a look out for any signs of this in your foster dog.

### Getting your foster dog used to new experiences

It's important to get your foster dog used to a variety of things which they are likely to experience in a home environment – for example, vacuum cleaners, the television, livestock and cars.

Remember to make all new experiences positive for your foster dog by introducing them very gradually, hand-feeding them or playing a game while they are getting used to a new experience.

For example, with a vacuum cleaner you could select a setting which produces the least noise and turn it on in another room with the door closed. Reward your foster dog with food or a game for calm, relaxed behaviour. If they are happy at this stage, then you could try opening the door, and reward again if they are relaxed. Next you could try turning the setting up, or moving the vacuum cleaner around a bit, and rewarding them for remaining calm and settled.

While introducing your foster dog to new experiences make sure you praise them for calm and confident behaviour. If they do show any signs of fear it's ok to comfort them if you think it will help them to feel safe but it's likely to be a sign that you are going too fast. Go back a step, make sure they are happy and confident with this, and then move on very gradually – remembering to praise them for calm behaviour.●

## Common problems and how to avoid them

All foster dogs will experience a few problems now and again. The following is a short guide to some of the common problems seen in foster dogs. If you are having problems with, or concerns about, your foster dog, then please contact your fostering coordinator for more support and information.

In order to give our dogs the best chance of being rehomed it is essential that they are as well behaved as possible. These are all problems which can be prevented from occurring with the correct training.

## Jumping up

In order to teach a dog not to jump up it is vital that they are given absolutely no attention for doing so. This includes looking at them, pushing them down or telling them off. This is because a dog will find it rewarding to jump up because they get attention for doing so, this will therefore maintain the behaviour.

Every time your foster dog jumps up simply turn your back to them but as soon as they have all four feet on the ground they can be praised and given lots of attention.

## Fears and phobias

Noise phobias can be generalised, for example any loud bangs, or they can be very specific sounds such as fireworks or thunder. There can also be a knock-on effect of these phobias – for example, a dog who is frightened of thunder may refuse to go outside in the rain due to an association with thunder while it is raining.

Signs your foster dog may be feeling anxious about noises include restlessness, panting, refusal to take a treat and escape behaviour. As long as you are not also afraid of the noises it's ok to comfort your foster dog if they are scared. However it's important that dogs can cope when people are not around so comforting should only be a short-term solution – in the long term we need to help them feel less afraid of the noises. Provide your foster dog with a den to hide in (a covered crate) with

plenty of blankets for them to dig – playing music with a regular beat can also help dogs to cope. Desensitisation CDs can help to start rehabilitate firework phobias in dogs – ask your fostering coordinator for more information.

Other phobias can range from car travel to balloons! The advice for this would be as much early socialisation as possible, however this may not have been done when the dog was younger, so if you find that they are scared of a certain thing then don't force them to approach it but let them take their time and reward them for being less fearful around it. Build up a positive association, using food or toys, with whatever scares them.

It's best to start at a distance from the fear-inducing thing, and reward them for calm behaviour. Gradually reduce the distance, making sure the dog is happy and relaxed at each stage. Asking your foster dog in an upbeat and jolly tone to carry out basic obedience commands in the presence of the scary thing may help to take their mind off their fear and allow them to think about something else.

If you have a very nervous dog you may need some extra help and advice; speak to your fostering coordinator.

## Fireworks

Many dogs become anxious at the sound of fireworks. Please do not visit organised firework displays with your foster dog and please avoid having your own celebrations with fireworks. Avoid walking or letting out your foster dog when there are likely to be fireworks going off. Preparing in advance for the fireworks season is key. You can find out about how to prepare for fireworks and how to help your foster dog cope at: [www.rspca.org.uk/fireworks](http://www.rspca.org.uk/fireworks).

## Unwanted barking or vocalisation

Dogs bark for many reasons: attention seeking, alerting others to danger, fear or anxiety, or simply because it feels good! It is vital never to reward your foster dog for any inappropriate vocalisation or else they will be much more likely to repeat the behaviour. It is best to walk away from your foster dog and return and praise them when they are quiet. Giving your foster dog lots to do will also make them much less likely to bark excessively as they will be far too busy with other rewarding activities.

Barking can occur for complex reasons in some dogs, so if you are having problems please talk to your fostering coordinator.



If you are having difficulty with training your foster dog, or have further questions, please contact your fostering coordinator.







### Separation problems and destructiveness

Most foster dogs will have had a very bad start in life, some may have been very cruelly treated and others may have been abandoned. It is therefore fairly likely that they will bond closely to you. However this should be discouraged as it may mean that your foster dog is unable to cope when apart from you. To prevent this from happening try to only give them attention when you say, not the other way around. It is also important that your foster dog becomes accustomed to being left alone for short periods so that they don't become too reliant on your presence. It's best to gradually teach a dog to be happy to settle in a room to be left on their own. Never leave your foster dog so long that they start to become distressed.

There are other causes of separation problems and destructiveness, such as frustration or a fear-inducing event happening in your absence. If you are having problems please talk to your fostering co-ordinator.

If your foster dog is showing signs of destructive behaviour, then please get in contact with your fostering coordinator. They may advise that the dog is left in an indoor kennel for their safety. However, this needs to be undertaken on advice as, while crates can provide a safe resting place to reduce anxiety, whether it will help will depend on the underlying cause of the destructive behaviour. Ensuring your dog has something suitable to chew on might also help but again will depend on why the behaviour is being performed.

It is best to make sure that your foster dog is only left after a period of exercise so they will be tired. Also, when leaving your foster dog, make sure that they have access to a stuffed Kong, chews and their own toys. This will help to ensure that they don't become bored and start eating things they shouldn't.

If you do find a mess when you come home, it is essential that you never physically punish or shout at your foster dog.

More information about separation anxiety and crate training can be found on the RSPCA website at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs).

### Managing mouthing and play-biting behaviour

Fosterers have a vital part to play in the rehabilitation of dogs to make them ready for rehoming. One of the requirements of a rehomeable dog is the control to not bite or mouth. The following information gives fosterers a guide to managing mouthing and play-biting behaviour.

### Why do dogs mouth and play-bite?

- Puppies tend to investigate the world with their mouths and this often includes people's clothing, hair and fingers. Even as a puppy, their needle-sharp teeth can be painful and if this behaviour persists into adulthood it can be dangerous.
- Play-bites are part of exaggerated play and are a normal dog-to-dog interaction. Puppies usually learn the rules of play with other puppies and dogs; they learn that the play stops if they bite their playmates too hard and this teaches them to bite with a soft mouth. Sometimes dogs and puppies direct excited play-biting towards their owners/carers.
- Puppies find chewing objects useful in relieving the discomfort of teething and dogs also find chewing enriching.

### How to manage mouthing and play-biting

- It is best to not engage in rough play with your foster puppy or dog, so do not wear gloves to permit hand bites, or encourage them to attack and bite hands or feet.
- Mouthing and play-biting should always be redirected onto a suitable toy. Make sure you always have a toy in your hand when playing with a puppy or any dog who tends to mouth or play-bite. If your foster puppy or dog makes contact with your hands or any

part of your body or clothing, keep that part of your body still and distract them at once by offering a toy instead. Keep the toy interesting by moving it around, wiggling it or rolling it along the ground – the aim is to teach them that toys are more fun than your hands or clothing.

- Make sure safe chew toys are also available to your foster puppy to relieve any discomfort from chewing. Food enrichment toys such as Kongs filled with a small amount of peanut butter can be a great choice. ○

## Keeping your RSPCA foster dog healthy

### Health checks

Every day, your foster dog should be given a quick visual check for any signs of illness, injury or disease. This can be done during normal interaction with them such as grooming, stroking or playing.

Your foster dog requires a monthly health check that is recorded on a health check form. You can perform this basic health check yourself and there is a simple tick-box form to complete. The RSPCA has an online health check training module which is available to any RSPCA volunteer with an email address. Let your fostering coordinator know if you would like to do this.

Part of the health check is to weigh your foster dog. We appreciate that fosterers do not often have scales to weigh dogs, so you will need to speak to your fostering coordinator. It may be that they have an arrangement with a local veterinary surgery or that you can take the dog to an RSPCA facility.

You can find some information on how to check your foster dog remains at a suitable weight at: [www.rspca.org.uk/pets](http://www.rspca.org.uk/pets).

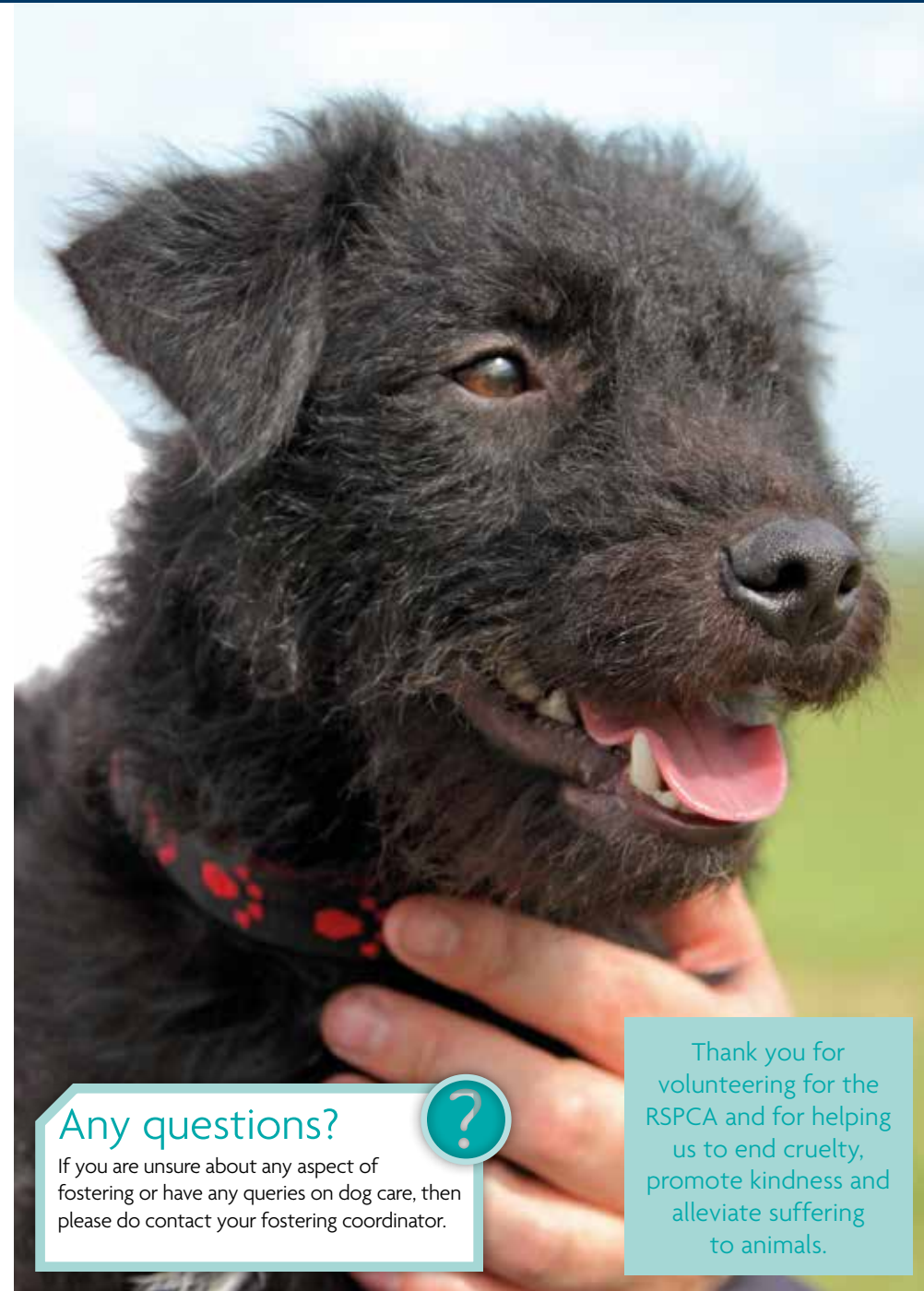
Any behaviour problem can arise due to, or be influenced by, underlying medical conditions. If you are concerned about your foster dog's behaviour, talk to your fostering coordinator as your foster dog may need to be examined by a vet.

### Grooming

Under the RSPCA Minimum Expectations, dogs' coats need to be maintained in a healthy condition and free from matting. Regular grooming will keep your foster dog's coat in a good condition, provide an opportunity to carry out health checks and, if introduced positively and slowly, can help improve your bond with your foster dog. Be aware that some dogs are sensitive about certain parts of their bodies; ears and feet are common areas that dogs can feel sensitive about. Please make a note of any sensitive areas on the dog's paperwork so we can communicate this to animal centres/potential adopters. Some dogs may never have been towel dried so you will need to introduce this gently to start with. Your fostering coordinator can provide you with an operational guide on grooming to give you more information.

### Poisons

Never 'watch and wait' in any case of suspected poisoning. If you suspect your foster dog has been poisoned, act fast and contact your nearest vet for advice immediately. Remember, common household items such as chocolate, grapes, raisins, weedkiller, and human medicines can be poisonous to dogs. More information on poisoning can be found at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/health](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/health). ○



### Any questions?

If you are unsure about any aspect of fostering or have any queries on dog care, then please do contact your fostering coordinator.



Thank you for volunteering for the RSPCA and for helping us to end cruelty, promote kindness and alleviate suffering to animals.