



# SOUTHERN PINES ANIMAL SHELTER

## ADOPTION COUNSELING GUIDE

Southern Pines Animal Shelter operates with a focus on adoption and an **open adoption philosophy**. In a nutshell, this means we seek to conduct adoptions in a manner that is not restrictive, complicated, judgmental, or suspicious. Our goal is to view every potential adopter as capable of providing an acceptable home for our pets and view them as worthy of such – even if it means a little extra coaching and follow-up. We won't rule out an adopter unless we feel the pet's basic physical and emotional needs won't be met or they will be unsafe. We won't judge a potential adopter by what they look like, their parenting skills, or how they interact with us. Again, if we feel the pet's physical and emotional needs will be met and they will be safe then we will complete the adoption. Please enter into any adoption counseling situation with this mentality.

Open-ended questioning, active listening and discussion will help you build a positive rapport with the adopter and will help with the education process. The old saying 'do not judge a book by its cover' is true, you never know who you are dealing with or what their background is no matter how they look. Judgmental attitudes, spouting facts only, accusations or accusatory tones and verbally attacking a potential adopter will only result in a mutually uncomfortable situation. Be aware of your own behavior, attitude, tones, and body language. As always if you are not comfortable with a situation, or do not know the answer to a question – ask a fellow adoption counselor or the Adoptions Coordinator for help. There are no scripts, each situation is different – empower yourself to make the right decision.

We should recognize that every interaction with the public is an opportunity to educate AND to learn. We can learn while we are teaching. If we don't educate and build relationships with our potential adopters, we aren't achieving what we could for the animals.

Communication is the cornerstone to any placement program. But do keep in mind that spending a long time screening does not necessarily result in a better match than spending less time. We want to be thorough but efficient when conducting adoptions. Giving the potential adopter your undivided attention during the conversation process will enable you to make the proper educated and caring placement. Remember a life is in your hands. This process deserves your undivided attention.

Below are a select few of the major topics that are particularly important to discuss with offsite adopters:

### **Heartworms**

Heartworm disease is a life-threatening condition that affects many of our dogs. Southern Pines requires that all heartworm positive dogs adopted from us go through heartworm treatment, whether at a reduced cost at our Spay and Neuter Clinic or through the

adopter's personal vet. Our Spay and Neuter Clinic does a fast kill treatment process that consists of 30 days of antibiotics given at home, a series of 2 injections give at the clinic, and then 30 days of crate rest at home. This process can vary slightly based on the health, age, and heartworm load of the dog. The cost of treatment is based on weight and can vary from \$250-450.

Every dog adopted from us, whether heartworm positive or negative, should be kept on regular heartworm prevention. There is a wide variety of preventive options from monthly topical or oral treatments to 6-month injections. Intestinal de-wormers DO NOT prevent against heartworms. For dogs in our care, we use Advantage Multi which is a monthly topical treatment that includes heartworm preventive, intestinal dewormer, and flea/tick prevention. Our Spay and Neuter Clinic sells this as well as Heartguard, which is a monthly chewable tablet. Even for puppies, it's incredibly important that every adopter understands heartworms and the importance of prevention.

### **General animal care (WELLNESS!)**

We give all the animals in our care age appropriate vaccinations. Puppies and kittens need additional boosters until they're at least 6 months old, and all animals need regular, annual boosters for their species-appropriate vaccines and Rabies vaccine. Adopters are encouraged to establish their new pet with a regular vet within the first 30 days of adoption. They always have the option of purchasing a wellness package from our Spay and Neuter Clinic. The clinic offers various packages for animals at every age as well as "a la carte" wellness services and, of course, spay and neuter services.

### **Bite histories**

Offsite events provide adoption opportunities for nearly all of our animals, but they are particularly important for our animals who have bite histories or behavioral issues. These animals are not eligible for our transport program, so onsite and offsite adoptions are generally their only options for adoption. Any animal with a bite history will have it notated on their folder with a brief explanation of their bite. Adopters must ALWAYS be notified of any animal's bite history and must sign a liability waiver. We always want to be honest and transparent with adopters in order to set them and our animals up for success in their new homes.

### **Example Adopter Questions and Suggestions for Answering Them:**

#### **1. "What are heartworms?"**

*Heartworms are a parasite that is transmitted from mosquitoes to dogs. The larva are deposited into the bloodstream through the mosquito bite, and from there they travel to the heart and other organs where they can live for years and do lots of damage. Heartworms can often be fatal and cut your pet's life short if not treated. All dogs are susceptible to heartworms, even if they live indoors, so the best thing to do is always have your pet on monthly heartworm prevention. There are quite a few options for providing heartworm*

preventative which you can get at your vet's office, and now they even offer heartworm injection that lasts six months so you don't have to remember to give them a pill or topical treatment every month. Just remember that it is much cheaper to prevent heartworms than it is to treat it, so you don't want to ever miss a dose of prevention. Our Spay and Neuter Clinic sells Heartguard for \$10, which is really affordable!

Heartworm pamphlets are available in the front office. Even if you discuss heartworms verbally, please provide them with a copy of the pamphlet to refer back to.

## **2. "Do you adopt dogs out of state?"**

We do allow people to adopt out of state. If the animal you're interested in is already fixed, you can take them with you today. If they're not fixed, you will have to pick them up from our Spay and Neuter Clinic after surgery. Unfortunately, you cannot take them with you and have them fixed at your own local vet. Also, please be advised that if you are crossing state lines with your new pet that you will need to get a health certificate from a licensed veterinarian. It is against the law to travel across state lines with a pet without a signed health certificate.

## **3. "Do you have to fix them?"**

It is part of our protocol and our mission to spay/neuter every pet that we adopt out. Not only do we risk losing our funding if we release animals unfixed, but fixing your pet is also the single best decision you can make for his long-term welfare. Altering your pets reduces the number of homeless pets euthanized in shelters, reduces your pet's unruly behaviors, reduces their desire to escape and roam to find a mate, saves on the cost of pet care, and reduces your pet's chances for several types of cancer. It is reported that fixed animals live about 20% longer than unaltered dogs in the United States.

## **4. "Why are your adoption fees so high?"**

Our adoption fee is actually a great deal! If you get a puppy from the side of the street, you have to factor in how much money you're going to spend on initial vaccines, deworming, flea treatment, heartworm preventative, a collar and tag, a microchip, a bag of food, not to mention getting them spayed/neutered which can cost as much as our adoption fee by itself. For our fee, you get all of that stuff included plus a super cute puppy. The fee that adopters pay barely covers the cost of the basic care that we give to the animals; we spend about \$350 on average caring for each animal while it's at the shelter. So, we absolutely do want to find dogs homes, but we also want to keep our doors open so we can continue to do this life-saving work.

## **5. "I am going to a work conference/the beach/a funeral/etc. for a few days, so I won't be able to pick him up until after I get back. Can you hold him for me if I pay the fee now?"**

Unfortunately, we aren't able to hold animals. You are welcome to adopt him when you get back from your vacation if you'd like, but there is the possibility he will get adopted while you are gone. Or you can go ahead and adopt him now and have him boarded at your vet clinic or boarding facility while you're out of town.

## **6. "Do you have any outside dogs?"**

Many of the dogs in our care came from situations where they lived primarily outside, though I'm sure none of them would mind coming inside from time to time. I can show you a few dogs that might be well-suited for outdoor living. I would encourage you to avoid dogs with very

long or thick coats or short muzzles as they can easily overheat on a hot day, and a heat stroke in a dog can quickly become fatal. I would also encourage you to bring your dog inside or have a secure place for him to stay when there is bad weather/fireworks/etc.

**7. “I am looking to adopt a puppy to live in my yard.”**

We recommend that puppies under six months old live indoors, at least until they have received all of their vaccinations and are fully protected from dangerous diseases like parvo which can live in the soil for years outside of your home. It is also important for them to receive training socialization that comes from spending lots of time with their new family members so that they can mature into well-adjusted adults. Spending a lot of time alone in the yard can lead to behavior issues, especially if they are tied out or tethered.

**8. “Do you have any house dogs?”**

What exactly do you mean by house dog? Are you looking for a certain size dog? Or are you looking for a dog that has lived inside before?

**9. “What is ringworm and can I catch it? Can my pets catch it? Can my kids catch it?”**

Ringworm is a fungus that dogs and cats can pass to each other and to humans. It is contagious, but it is also pretty easy to treat with athlete’s foot cream or other antifungals that you can get at the drug store.

**10. “How big is he going to get?”**

We can’t ever be sure exactly how big a dog will get, especially when they are adopted when they’re very young. We can guess for you, but it will just be a guess and it’s totally possible they will get much bigger or stay much smaller than our guess. So, if you are set on getting a dog that is a certain size, I would encourage you to look at our adults. If you are set on getting a puppy, think about whether they size they turn out to be is their most important quality or if you’d rather focus on their personality? There are plenty of big dogs that are well-behaved and do well living inside and vice versa.

**11. “Is he housebroken?”**

I can’t tell you for sure if he is housebroken, but the cool thing about how our kennels are set up is that they have a living space inside and potty space inside. We find that a lot of the dogs housed in our kennels go home and learn to potty train very quickly because of this head start. I would be happy to share some tips for housetraining as well.

**12. “Do you provide heartworm treatment?”**

Our Spay and Neuter Clinic offers low-cost heartworm treatment for adopted animals. If you are interested in adopting a heartworm positive animal, I can talk to you more about that process.

**13. “Does he get along with cats?”**

Unfortunately, we aren’t able to test our dogs with cats at this time. A shelter is a stressful place, and introducing dogs and cats are especially stressful for the cats involved and they can develop URI or other illnesses if they experience too much stress. However, I’d be happy to give you a handout on how to safely introduce your new dog to your resident cat.

**14. “Do they have all their shots?”**

We give all the animals in our care age appropriate vaccinations. Most puppies/kittens and some adults, depending on your vet’s preference, will require a series of follow up vaccines at your personal veterinarian after adoption to ensure they are fully protected from diseases like parvo and distemper which can be deadly. We encourage you to make an appointment with your vet soon after adoption to ensure your pet is as safe and healthy as possible

**15. "Does he get along with other dogs?"**

- a. *He has met several dogs here at the shelter and has done well with all of them. He seems to be very tolerant of other dogs, so hopefully, he would do fine with other dogs in his new home. However, the shelter can be a stressful place and can cause them to act differently than they would in their new home. Hopefully, in his case, this is an indicator that he can get along with other dogs even in the most stressful of situations, but we can't ever be 100% sure. I would be happy to give you a handout with some tips on creating a successful introduction.*
- b. *He has met a few different dogs since being here at the shelter. He liked a few of them, and he didn't get along with a few of the others. He seemed stressed out by the hyper ones but was much more tolerant of the more laid back dogs that he met. I would recommend introducing him to any new dogs slowly. Letting them meet in a calm, neutral place is best. That way your other dog doesn't feel threatened or territorial. Let them meet a few times on leash before letting them interact off leash. I would be happy to give you a handout with some more tips on creating a successful introduction.*
- c. *He hasn't had the best luck finding a friend here. We have introduced him to several other dogs, but he seems to want his own space right now. However, the shelter can be a stressful place and can cause them to act differently than they would in their new home. It is totally possible that he could leave here and do fine with other dogs when he is in a calmer, less stressful place. I would recommend introducing him to any new dogs slowly. Letting them meet in a calm, neutral place is best. That way your other dog doesn't feel threatened or territorial. Let them meet a few times on leash before letting them interact off leash. I would be happy to give you a handout with some more tips on creating a successful introduction.*
- d. *We haven't tested him with other dogs at the shelter yet. I would recommend introducing him to any new dogs slowly. Letting them meet in a calm, neutral place is best. That way your other dog doesn't feel threatened or territorial. Let them meet a few times on leash before letting them interact off leash. I would be happy to give you a handout with some more tips on creating a successful introduction.*