

The Special Dogs That Form Close and Enduring Bonds

Want a dog that is more likely than not to show you unconditional love and admiration? Because these pups seem to intuitively know that their lives were saved, they tend to form exceptionally close and enduring bonds with their new humans. Today we honor these special dogs.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today is May 20th, which means it's National Rescue Dog Day!
- If you're considering adding a canine family member to your household, I encourage you to consider adopting a dog from a local shelter or rescue
- Adult rescue dogs seem to instinctively understand that their adopters saved their life, and tend to form a close and enduring bond with their new humans
- Questions you should ask rescue or shelter employees include whether the dog you're interested in has been behavior tested in a low stress environment or has a known history of abuse
- It's also important to know what veterinary care a dog has received and the type of food he or she is currently eating

May 20th each year is National Rescue Dog Day — a day to celebrate all the rescue dogs we've known and loved, and also a day to raise awareness about the plight of abandoned dogs.

National Rescue Dog Day was founded by Lisa Wiehebrink, author and creator of **Tails that Teach**. Her work focuses on the human-animal connection, and her books for children talk about the virtues of kindness, unconditional love, patience, and empathy. Wiehebrink developed the concept of National Rescue Dog Day in honor of her rescue dog Cooper and several others.

10 Great Reasons to Adopt a Rescue Dog

1. Abandoned or relinquished dogs can be found at both rescues and shelters, but opening your heart and home to a dog from a kill shelter quite literally saves a life. Adopting from a no-kill shelter frees up space for another deserving dog waiting for a forever home, or for an older or special needs pet who may not find a new family before the end of his natural life.
2. Every dog who isn't purchased from a pet store or backyard breeder represents a vote against irresponsible breeding for profit. When the demand for puppy mill and other inhumanely bred dogs dries up, mill operators and other reckless puppy suppliers will be forced to find other "hobbies."
3. There are many adult rescue dogs to choose from. They come in both sexes and every shape, size, coat color and breed mix. If you're looking for a purebred dog, make sure to check both your local shelters and breed

rescue organizations.

4. If you can't find the pet you're looking for locally, consider widening your search. This is easy to do with online services like **Petfinder**. If you find an adoptable rescue dog that might be a good match, but he or she is located outside your area, contact the shelter or rescue to see if they do non-local adoptions and what transport arrangements are available.
5. Most rescues and shelters charge a nominal fee to adopt a pet — a fee that is quite a bit less than you'll pay to a breeder or pet store. That will leave you with some extra cash for essential supplies and a few goodies for your new canine pal. And don't forget to set a little money aside for that all-important first wellness visit to your pet's new veterinarian.
6. When you rescue an adult dog, what you see is what you get in terms of size, coat color, and basic temperament. And she might already be house trained and know basic obedience commands like sit, stay, and down.
7. Many shelters and rescue groups do assessments on each animal they take in to determine things like temperament, whether the dog is good with other pets and children, whether she's house trained, obedience trained, etc. Another benefit for adoptive families is that many of these organizations also have resources available to train pets and help owners deal with a new dog's behavioral or emotional issues.
8. If you have kids, and especially if the rescue dog will belong to a child, adopting a shelter animal can open a young person's eyes to the plight of homeless pets. It can also help them learn compassion and responsibility, as well as how wonderful it feels to provide a forever home to a dog that might otherwise live life in a cage or be euthanized.
9. An adult rescue pet can make a wonderful companion for an older person. Many middle-aged and senior dogs require less physical exertion and attention than younger animals.
0. A rescued dog can enrich your life in ways big and small. The unconditional love and acceptance of a dog can lift depression, ease loneliness, lower blood pressure, and give you a reason to get up in the morning. A dog that loves to walk or run outdoors can be just the incentive you need to start exercising regularly.

As many adoptive pet parents can attest, an adult rescue dog seems to understand you have saved his life. Often the bond that forms between these dogs and their new humans is exceptionally close and enduring.

6 Questions Adoptive Pet Parents Need to Ask

Contrary to what some people believe, rescue dogs aren't "damaged goods." However, each has a past, so the more you can learn from the shelter or rescue organization about the dog you're considering, the more prepared you'll be to make the right choices for him or her.

1. **Has the dog you're considering been behavior-tested?** — Most large shelters and rescue organizations perform basic behavior testing as part of their assessment of the adoptability of the animals they take in. Recent research suggests these tools are only accurate if the dog is tested in a low stress environment, which can be challenging for many shelters.

Knowing what types of tests were conducted on your future dog and her results will help you fill in the gaps in her training if you decide to take her home.

Some shelters conduct very thorough behavior assessments that go far beyond determining adoptability and

can provide insight into whether a particular dog is a good fit for your lifestyle. For example, if a dog you're interested in is very active and you're looking for a lower energy lapdog, this dog is probably better suited to someone else's home.

A comprehensive behavior and temperament assessment, done correctly, can determine a dog's level of sociability with other pets, his degree of independence, and whether he's suited for a home with children or an adult-only home.

2. **What is the dog's history?** — How did he wind up homeless? Was he picked up as a stray, or did a previous owner turn him in? Generally speaking, the behavior of a street dog will be markedly different from that of a relinquished family pet. This is good information to have for a better understanding of your new dog's behavior and training needs.
3. **What veterinary care has your prospective dog received?** — Most animal adoption organizations arrange to have pets' health checked by a veterinarian before they are put up for adoption. Adoptive owners typically receive paperwork detailing the medical care the animal received while at the shelter.

It's not unusual for large shelters and rescues to err on the side of overtreating dogs with an unknown medical history, so your new pet could come home with a fresh spay or neuter incision, dewormed, and/or heavily vaccinated.

Many shelters recommend that new owners take their pet to a veterinarian for an exam within a specified number of days from the date of adoption. Sometimes local veterinarians contract with shelters to provide the exams at no charge.

If you feel your dog may have been medically over treated at the shelter, I suggest also making an appointment with an integrative vet who can recommend a detoxification protocol to help bring your pet's body back in balance.

4. **Does the dog have a known history of being abused?** — If you know or suspect a dog was abused before she came to you, it's important to keep two things in mind: you shouldn't expect an overnight change in her, and you shouldn't count on a complete turnaround in her trust level or behavior.

It takes time to help an abused animal learn to be less fearful and develop trust in humans again. With knowledge, hard work, and commitment, a previously abused pet can be transformed into a much-loved member of your family, but she can't be reborn. It's important to always remember that.

Here are some general guidelines for creating a safe environment for a previously abused dog:

- Make her feel welcome and loved, and communicate clearly with her; I highly recommend the program A Sound Beginning, which is designed to help rescue dogs and adoptive guardians learn to communicate effectively and form an unbreakable bond
- Don't force anything on her — allow her to adapt to her new family and life at her own pace; provide her with a safe place where she can be alone when she feels like it
- Protect her from whatever she fears
- Create opportunities for her to be successful and build her confidence
- Feed her a nutritionally optimal, species-specific diet and make sure she gets plenty of physical activity she enjoys

Rehabilitating an abused pet presents a significant challenge, because these animals have been exposed to negative things they can't unlearn despite your best efforts. But it's important to feel hopeful, because life-changing progress can be made and there's nothing more rewarding.

Above all, work on training issues at a pace that minimizes additional stress, and use fear-free training principles to build trust and reduce anxiety.

5. **What are the steps involved in the adoption?** — Shelters and rescue groups vary widely when it comes to vetting prospective adoptive families. For example, some shelters allow adopters to take a new pet home immediately. Others require you to wait until the animal has been spayed or neutered, dewormed, and/or vaccinated at the shelter.

Some organizations require home inspections before releasing a pet; others require potential adopters to bring other pets in the household and family members for a meet-and-greet before the adoption is finalized.

6. **What food has your new dog been eating?** — Some shelters and rescues send newly adopted pets home with a supply of the food they've been eating, but if this isn't the case with your prospective dog, ask what the shelter is feeding and continue that diet for at least a week or two once he's home.

It's likely you'll want to transition him to a different food, preferably a nutritionally optimal, biologically appropriate raw or gently cooked diet, but it doesn't need to happen on day one. Everything in your furry companion's new life with you will be a bit overwhelming and stressful for him in the beginning, so it's best not to add a dietary change to the mix right away.

Sources and References

[National Today, National Rescue Dog Day](#)
