

ADOPTING A SHELTER DOG

choosing the right companion

Ontario SPCA adoption centres have a wide range of wonderful dogs available for adoption. Dogs who are surrendered to animal shelters represent every breed, age, size, health and temperament. Like people, dogs have varying needs and personalities so it's important to find the right match between you, your lifestyle and your new canine companion. Don't judge a dog by his appearance! Not all terrier or terrier-crosses are high energy and not all retrievers or retriever-crosses are great family pets. The benefit of adopting is discovering characteristics you love in an unlikely package.

To help you choose a dog that will fit with your lifestyle and expectations, below is a list of four age categories and the general characteristics (benefits and challenges!) of each. That being said, often the dog we pick is one that steals our hearts regardless of prior research - if so, make sure you are willing to give the animal the love, energy and devotion they deserve! Most dogs available for adoption are simply the victims of unfortunate or tragic circumstances in a previous home.

Sweet seniors: Eight and older

Adopters of seniors say that despite the short time the dog may spend in their life every moment is a blessing - whether it was three months or three years. Indeed the beauty of adopting senior dogs is their wonderful temperaments and training - and how gratifying it is to help make a dog's last years - the best of its life. Benefits and challenges include:

Senior dogs are almost always housetrained.

Even if a senior dog is raised outside he will generally be clean inside because he's used to



eliminating on outdoor surfaces (he's developed a surface preference for grass, dirt etc.).

Senior dogs have long-since given up any destructive chewing habits.

Most senior dogs require minimal to moderate amounts of exercise.

Amazing adults: One and a half to eight years

Adopting adult dogs is an excellent choice if you want more of a ready-made dog than puppies or adolescents which require significant time and energy to raise. Adult dogs still have a good many years left, and mature dogs (five and older) often need little in the way of training or fine tuning. Benefits and challenges include:

Many adult dogs are often housetrained and already have some training.

Adult dogs are almost always finished with destructive chewing (dogs that are two-years-old or more seldom chew your belongings for

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reasons other than severe separation problems - which is quite rare).

Older dogs are usually the last to be adopted from shelters (homes are desperately needed for these animals).

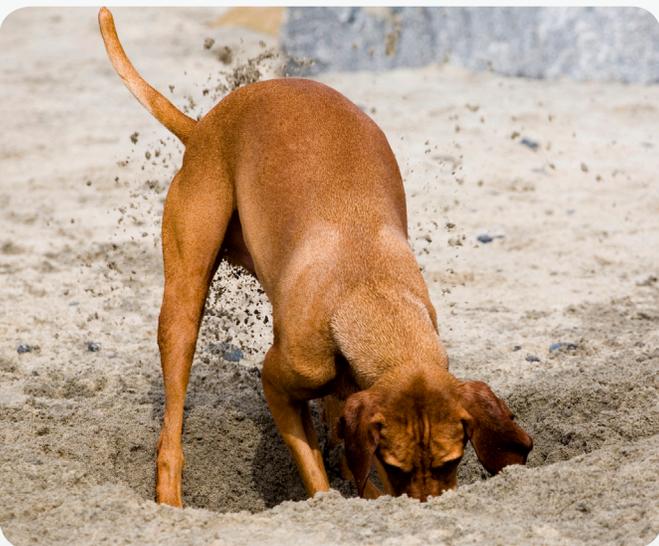
Adult dogs can be just as charming, cute, sweet and loveable as their younger counterparts (all dogs can learn new tricks - no matter what their age!)

You know the dog's full-grown size and have a better idea of his temperament (the adult dog is done developing most of his behaviours).

Action-packed adolescents: Five months to 18 months

This age category is a great age to adopt if you are committed to putting in the extra time and energy adolescents require. The dog has many years ahead of him but still retains the puppy cute factor you may crave. Benefits and challenges include:

Even if they're not fully housetrained they can hold their bladder and bowels longer - making them a better choice than puppies if you work outside the home.



During adolescence, dogs, like teenagers, become more independent and develop competing interests, many which become distractions to training. To maintain response reliability, all of the dog's hobbies and competing interests should be used as rewards. For example, request a sit before feeding meals or a down before taking the dog on a walk.

Training is considered essential at this age to help owners learn how to handle their dog's high energy level and growing independence with consistent and gentle guidance and leadership.

Two or three vigorous walks a day or visits to a secure off-leash area for doggie play or a rousing game of fetch is essential to help curb your dog's energy and youthful exuberance. Without adequate exercise your dog can start other recreational habits such as chewing, digging and barking to release pent up energy and to relieve boredom.

The formula for how long a puppy can be left alone and control their bladder and bowels is to take their age in months and add one, up to eight months - at which point nine hours becomes the very top limit (less for smaller sized dogs).

Playful puppies: Eight weeks to 20 weeks

Benefits of adopting a puppy include the ability, at this age more than any other, for you to influence your dog's temperament (the puppy's critical socialization period is up until 16 weeks). Yet taking care of a puppy is much more time-consuming than caring for most adult or senior dogs. Benefits and challenges include:

Puppies are like babies. They learn from every interaction with you and require consistent guidance, a patient teacher, and an extraordinary amount of attention.

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Puppies may engage in play biting and chew furniture or other household items.

A seven to nine week old puppy will need to go out and eliminate approximately every three hours during the day - however, a puppy must also be supervised continuously when you're together until he can hold his bladder and bowels and eliminate in the chosen area (crate training will help speed up this process). Will you or someone else be able to come home during the day to let your puppy outside?

Even puppies older than nine weeks can only be left alone for short periods. To determine the time, calculate one hour for every month of your puppy's age, then add one. For example, a four-month-old puppy can regularly be left alone for five hours.

You will need to wake up earlier in the mornings to let your puppy out and you may also need to set your alarm in the middle of the night for a couple of days or weeks if your puppy has a small bladder.

You are raising a puppy during its critical socialization period - if you spend little time at home and the puppy is not adequately socialized during this time you can contribute to future behav-

our problems including fear and/or aggression.

Fortunately, most people raise puppies well so if you don't have time to raise a puppy there are many adolescent, adult or senior dogs who have wonderful temperaments and need a home. Dogs of any age can bond very strongly to their new owner - and many older adopted dogs form a very quick and intense bond. Special notes:

Adopting a puppy before eight weeks of age is not recommended. Developmentally, puppies are not ready to leave their littermates or their mother until they are seven or eight-weeks-old.

Mixed breeds are considered more resistant to certain health problems than purebred dogs.

A dog's individual temperament, not his or her sex, determines their level of affection, activity level etc.

If you are a sedentary person, adopting a high-energy dog would be doing both the animal and yourself a disservice.

Now what?

If you are ready for a dog in your life, please visit your nearest Ontario SPCA adoption centre. If on your first visit you don't find the dog for you - don't worry - visit as many times as you like to meet the new dogs at the shelter and to find one that captures your heart!

For help making your adoption successful dog training is invaluable! Read our fact sheet on **How to Choose a Dog Trainer** to help you get started. Also, read the fact sheet **10 Tips to a Successful Adoption** for tips to help you make your adoption successful.