

# Adoption 101: Shelter Visits



10 questions to ask about an adoptable pet • Why do shelters charge adoption fees? • Should I adopt a young or adult pet? • 3 tips for acing your adoption interview • The great debate: Dogs vs Cats

---

Adoption 101:  
Shelter visits

---

1

So you're ready to  
adopt a pet?

Get prepped for pet  
adoption and shelter visits

---

2

First things first

10 questions to ask about  
an adoptable pet

---

3

The more you know

Why do shelters charge  
adoption fees?

Should I adopt a young  
or adult pet?

3 tips for acing your  
adoption interview

---

4

The great debate

Should I adopt a  
cat or dog?

---

5

First impressions count

How to perfect your intro  
to your new pet

---

6

Your adoption checklist

All the right boxes to check

“Saving one pet  
will not change  
the world,  
but surely for  
that one pet,  
the world will  
change forever.”

Photographed by: Taylor Catherine

Karen Davison

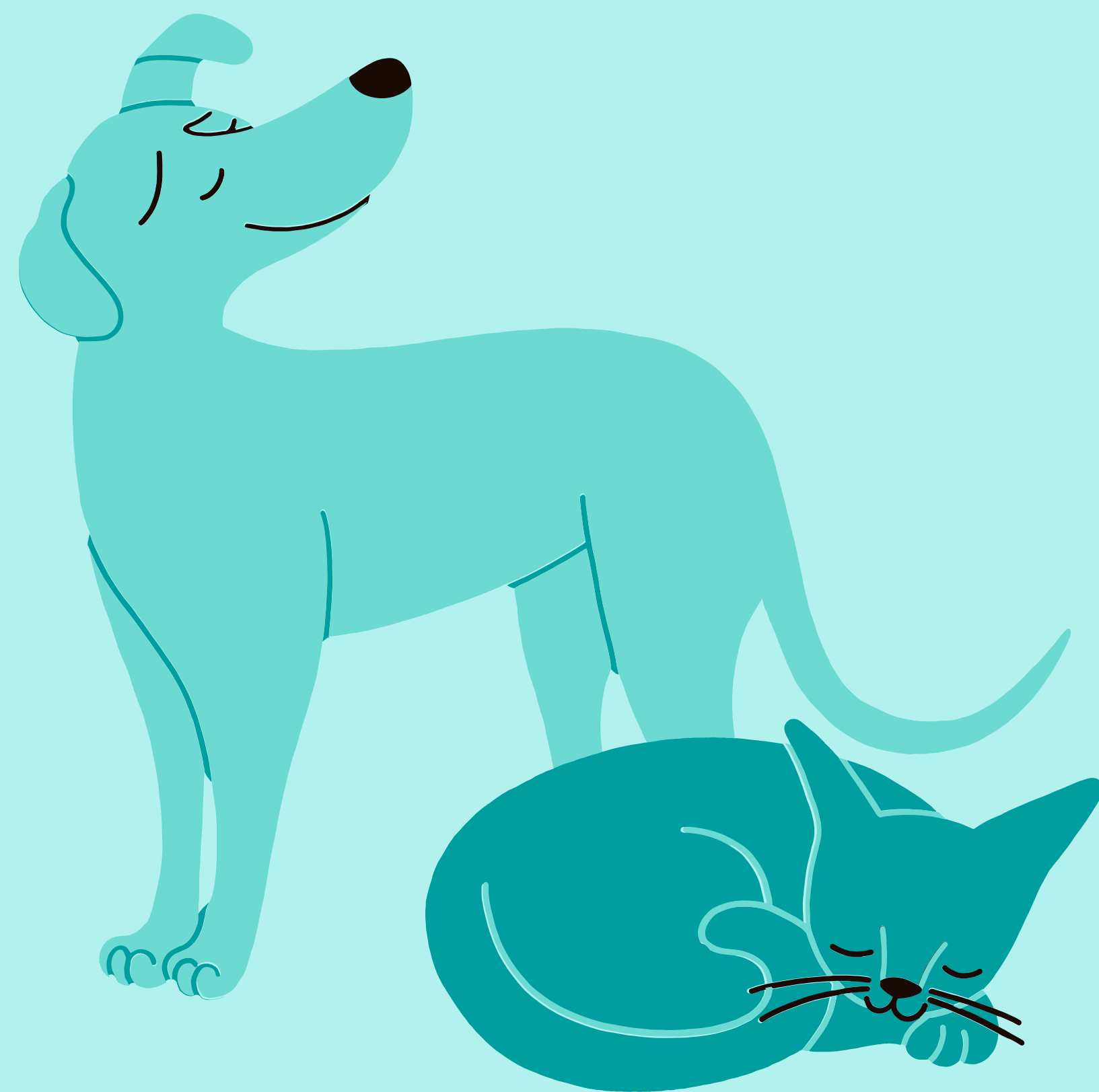
Dog trainer and author

# Adopt a Pet



# Welcome

Adoption 101:  
Shelter visits



**So you're ready to expand your family and adopt a new pet — congratulations! Few experiences match the joy and excitement of finding a new best friend to share your life with.**

Adopting a pet is not just about gaining a new friend, though; it's an important, compassionate choice that changes (and saves) lives. Adopting from a shelter or rescue organization offers a second chance to an animal in need, providing them with love and care. What's more, every adoption opens up space for another animal to be rescued, creating a ripple effect of live-saving efforts.

In this guide, you'll find all the essential information you need to navigate the process of adoption

with confidence. From learning the questions you should ask shelter staff about adoptable pets to helping you decide what kind of pet is right for you, we've got you covered.

The journey of pet adoption is as rewarding as it is fulfilling, and we're thrilled to be a part of it with you. Let the adventure begin! ●





# 10 questions to ask about an adoptable pet



Feature



You've checked out a lot of online profiles, and you're finally ready to swipe right. Your perfect match is short, with scruffy hair and a snaggleteeth—exactly what you've been looking for in a pet. But you still need to know some things before you bring them home. Before filling out an adoption application to make it official, ask these 10 questions about an adoptable pet.



# 1

## How did the pet end up there?

Pets are surrendered to shelters and rescues for a range of reasons, from pet parents moving or struggling with finances to pet illnesses or behavioral issues. Learning about their history can provide important clues about whether you can meet their needs, according to Caitlin Phillips, people and operations manager at [Animal Rescue League of Boston](#).

If your daily routine is drastically different from what the pet is used to, “you may have a longer **adjustment period** while they learn new things,” Phillips says. But if your pet used to live in a similar way to your family, “they may adjust quickly to your family.”

# 2

## Is there a particular pet we should consider?

No one knows the animals in their care better than shelter and rescue staff. Talk to them about your lifestyle and the qualities you want in a new best friend, and see if they can make a love connection.

That said, while shelters and rescue groups work tirelessly to make ideal matches, sometimes a particular pet isn’t the right fit for your family. Dr. Hurley believes it’s important to understand the policies and what you should do if the pet you bring home turns out to be a poor fit. “It’s an important relationship...and sometimes, in a shelter, you can’t tell if it’s the right match,” Dr. Hurley says.



**Tip:** If you have your heart set on a specific breed or breed mix (such as a *Goldendoodle*), there are many breed-specific rescue organizations that can help you adopt the breed you love.

# 3

## How old is the pet?

There is no perfect age to adopt a pet. While puppies and kittens, adults, and senior dogs and cats all make wonderful pets, knowing the age of an adoptable pet can help you better understand their potential training, behavioral, and health needs.

Young dogs will need a lot of teething toys to satisfy their urge to chew, while adult dogs have outgrown the “**chew all the shoes**” stage; senior dogs may need more medical care to keep them healthy into their golden years. Similarly, kittens have boundless energy and endless curiosity, so they require a lot of engagement and supervision to keep them happy and out of trouble. Senior cats may be content to sleep in a sunny spot but may need a special diet or additional vet care to keep them healthy in their advanced age.



## What age is right for your lifestyle?

### Puppies 🐾 🍼

These little ones need someone who can match their boundless energy, keep an eye on their desire to chew household items, and can devote plenty of time to training and regular vet visits.

### Adult dogs 🐾

They may not cause as much chaos in the house, but they still need plenty of attention and exercise. Breed type and size play a big role in the amount of activity adult dogs need—every dog is different.

### Senior dogs 🐾 🌴

Ah, the golden years. Sweet senior pups make fabulously chill companions and need less exercise than younger dogs, though they may require more medical care to keep them healthy.

### Kittens 🐾 🍼

These delightful bundles of energy will need plenty of supervision to keep them safe and out of trouble—and lots of play to keep them occupied.

### Adult cats 🐾

While not usually as feisty as kittens, adult cats still need plenty of play and stimulation (and will likely still enjoy causing some chaos now and again). Sometimes, they like their space but still need love and care from their pet parents.

### Senior cats 🐾 🌴

Senior cats are typically content to lounge the days away in the sunniest spot in the house. Budget accordingly: They may need a specialty diet or require additional vet care to keep them healthy and happy into old age.



# 4

## What is the pet's medical history?

The first health question to ask about a pet is whether they've been spayed or neutered. Not only does spaying and neutering prevent unwanted litters, but it can also impact health and behavior.

Adopting an intact pet “may lead to unwanted marking or territorial behaviors,” Phillips says. Many shelters and rescues only adopt altered animals, but some provide vouchers or referrals to low-cost spay/neuter clinics so adopters can have their new pets spayed or neutered.

More serious health conditions ranging from **diabetes** and **arthritis** to hip dysplasia and blindness may require extra TLC. Before adopting a cat, ask whether the shelter has tested for diseases like **feline leukemia** (FELV) or **feline immunodeficiency virus** (FIV), which can impact the type of care they need and their ideal living situations. Asking about any known health issues, Phillips says, “can help you realistically determine if you can afford future medical care and if the care that will be needed for that [pet] is something you can commit to.”

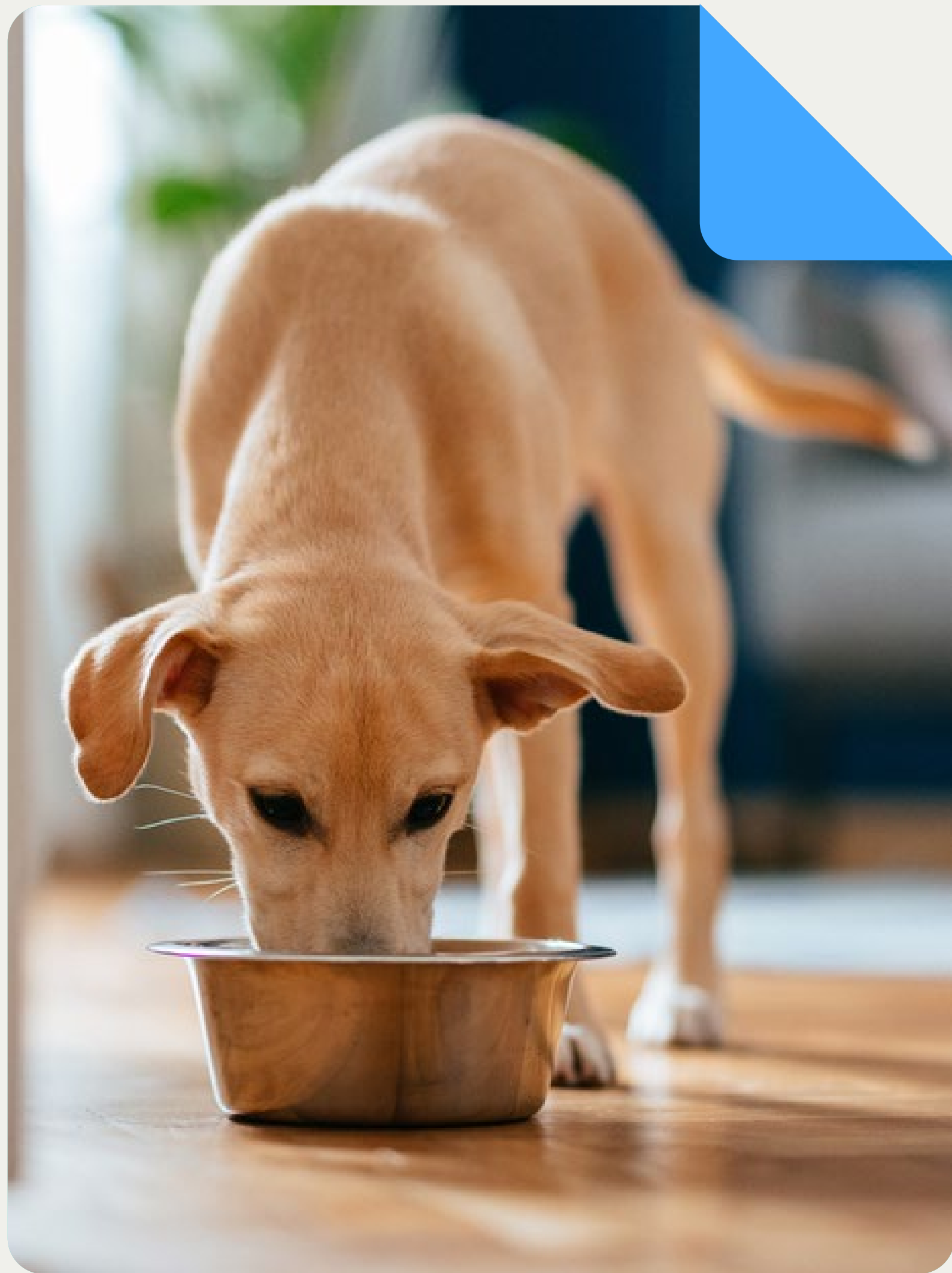
# 5

## What do you feed this pet?

Feeding your new pet may seem straightforward, but it actually requires a number of decisions, from type (wet, dry, homecooked, etc.) to price point (how much is too much) to brand (there are hundreds). As a starting point, ask the shelter what brand and type of food they have been feeding your pet.

Switching your pet's food can cause stomach upset, so it's a good idea to feed them what they're used to, at least at first. If you want to transition to a new brand or switch from dry food to wet food (or wet food to dry), doing so gradually can help your pet adapt without tummy troubles. It's also always a good idea to consult your vet about what food they think is right for your pet.

Asking about any known health issues, Phillips says, “can help you realistically determine if you can afford future medical care and if the care that will be needed for that [pet] is something you can commit to.”







“Even if you don’t have another pet or a child (yet!), it’s always important to ask and think ahead.”

6

### How much grooming does the pet need?

Pets who need to be groomed require additional care—and potentially money if you’re not into grooming them yourself. Some dog breeds need extensive grooming, and long-haired cat breeds like Persian and Angora cats may also require regular brushing or professional grooming, Dr. Hurley notes.

7

### How much exercise does the pet need?

While cats are often content to lounge about, they still need enrichment. It’s also worth asking if they are used to being indoors or outdoors because cats used to being outdoors may struggle to be confined in the house.

When it comes to dogs, breed matters: If your lifestyle is more Netflix and chill than weekend warrior, you probably shouldn’t adopt a Dalmatian, Jack Russell Terrier, Lab, or other breeds that require a long run and epic games of fetch to burn off their boundless energy. Similarly, if you want to spend weekends exploring local hiking trails, skip dogs like Basset Hounds, Shih Tzus, and Pugs, who would rather nap than run and play.

8

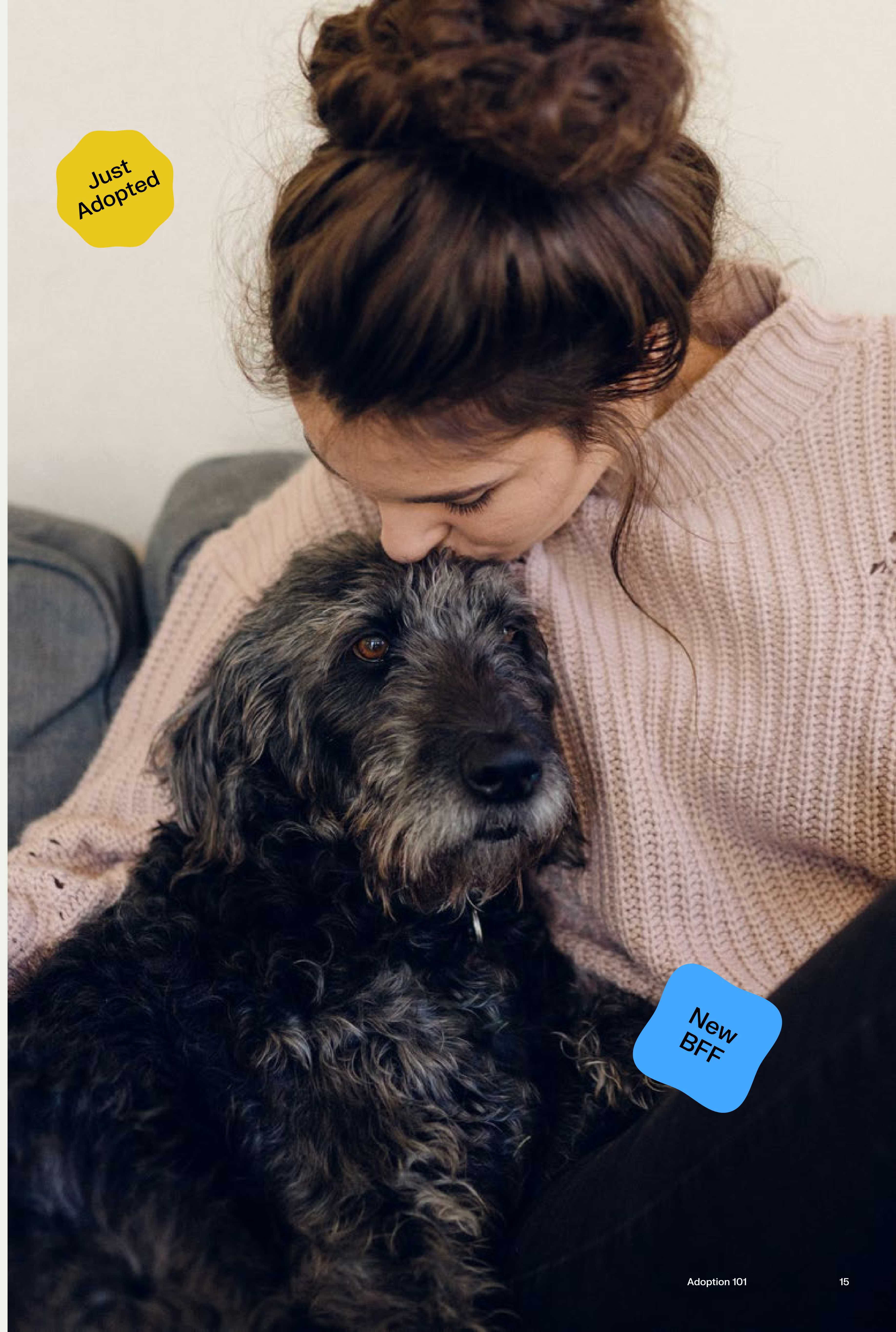
### Is the pet good with other animals and/or children?

Some pets have previously been in homes with other pets and/or children and didn’t get along with them, which is obviously good to know if you already have a pet or [kids at home](#). But even if you don’t have another pet or a child (yet!), it’s always important to ask and think ahead, as adopting a pet is a long-term commitment. It’s also “good information to know for all of the inevitable [times] in life when you pass other animals on the street or when the neighbor’s children walk up to your fence,” Phillips says.



**Fun fact:** High-energy dogs bred to work—think Retrievers and Sheepdogs—need at least 30 minutes of significant daily exercise. Hope you’ve got good running shoes!







---

# 9

## How is the pet doing on potty training?

Going outside the box is one of the [top reasons cats are surrendered to shelters](#). Yet, [poor litter box behavior](#) could be a sign of medical conditions—like urinary tract infections or kidney stones—or an aversion to a specific type of litter or the litter box’s location. Cats who are not spayed or neutered may also exhibit poor bathroom behavior. Knowing that an adoptable cat may need treatment or some trial and error with different kitty litter and litter box locations is an important factor in deciding whether they’re the right fit for your home.

Many dogs also enter shelters from the streets or situations in which they weren’t house trained. [Crate training](#) helps with everything from potty training to anxiety. Phillips also recommends it as a general safety measure, especially when your dog is in a new environment. Don’t dismiss an adoptable dog who isn’t crate trained or house trained yet. Instead, prioritize crate training until it’s their go-to chill spot.

“Crate training helps with everything from house training to anxiety.”

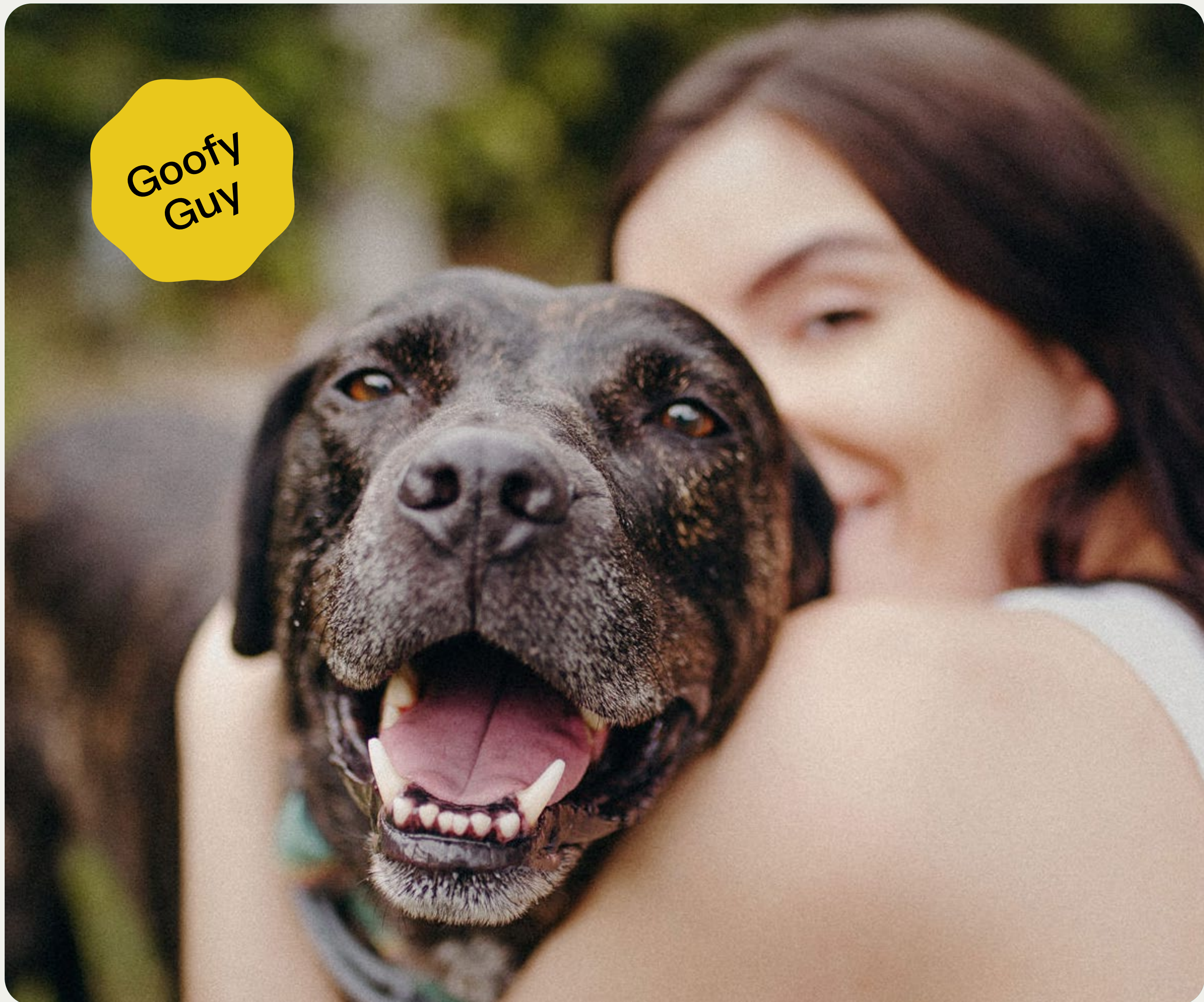
---

# 10

## How would you describe their personality?

It can be hard to assess whether a pet is snuggly or shy when they’re in a small cage, but shelters often have the 411 on which pets like attention and who just need a bit more time to adjust.

Pets often “show really different behavior before the shelter opens,” says Dr. Kate F. Hurley, director of the shelter medicine program at the University of California, Davis. Adopting from a foster-based rescue can also give you insights into how a pet acts in a home. ●





# Why do shelters charge adoption fees?

Almost every shelter and rescue group charges an adoption fee. These fees help cover everything from medical costs to transportation to essential needs, such as food. All these costs add up, and adoption fees help cover them and enable shelters and rescue organizations to continue their life-saving work.

## Why do animal shelters and rescue organizations charge an adoption fee?

Adoption fees help shelters and **rescue organizations** cover the costs of caring for the pets they rescue. Some rescue organizations have to pay to **transport pets** from one part of the country to another—generally from crowded shelters to another area where a pet has a better chance of finding a home. Shelters with facilities need to pay their staff, who care for the animals, clean up after them, and take care of the shelter's operations.

## How much is the typical adoption fee?

The typical adoption fee is typically **between \$50 and \$350**. However, many shelters and rescue organizations offer discounted fees, or may even waive fees, for certain pets or during certain times of the year. If you can't afford an adoption fee, ask your local shelter or rescue organization if they're waiving fees on certain pets or during specific times of the year.

## What benefits do I receive with the adoption fee?

The main benefit of an adoption fee is that it means your adopted pet will likely be vaccinated and spayed or neutered and will have had any other medical needs addressed. But you also have the benefit of knowing your adoption fee helps the animal shelter operate and save lives—not only the life of the pet you adopted but by creating space for the shelter to continue saving pets in need. ●





# Should I adopt a young or adult pet?

If you're looking to adopt a pet, it can be hard to ignore the incomparable cuteness of a puppy or kitten when deciding who to take home. But a grown-up pet might suit you and your lifestyle better. Plus, adults and senior pets often need homes more urgently than puppies and kittens do. Here's how to tell which is right for you.

## Adopt a puppy or kitten if:



### **You have the time and energy for training.**

Puppies need to learn potty training. They also need to learn basic commands (sit, stay, heel), leash training, and socialization with other people and animals. Kittens need to learn how to be handled by humans.

### **You don't mind cleaning.**

Combine house and litter box training with young pets' sensitive stomachs, and you'll likely have some messes on your hands.

### **You're home often.**

Young animals need more consistent care and attention, for training purposes and socialization and enrichment.

## Adopt an adult animal if:



### **You want a known personality.**

Most adult animals will come to you with some level of training and, as adults, their personalities are more likely to be developed as well.

### **You want a quieter household.**

Pets tend to mellow out as they age. Puppies and kittens will almost certainly need constant supervision, whereas adult pets can be more independent than younger animals.

### **You work long hours.**

Adult animals don't need the frequent hands-on care the way that extremely young ones do. Adult cats are generally fine all day, and adult dogs may only need a brief walk.



# Tips for acing your adoption interview

Once your adoption application is approved, an interview with an adoption counselor often follows. Every organization's process is a little different, but the goal is the same: to make sure you get a pet who fits your lifestyle and the pet gets the home they deserve.





---

# 1

**Have a plan for how you'll care for your pet.**

An adoption counselor may ask what food you plan to feed your pet or who will care for them if you're out of town or in an emergency. They may also ask how you'd handle unexpected veterinary expenses. **Be prepared with answers.**

---

# 2

**Share details about current or past pets.**

Adoption counselors want to understand how experienced you are as a pet parent, and if your new pet will get along with any pets you have.

---

# 3

**Ask questions.**

The adoption process is a two-way street; find out everything you can about the pet you're interested in adopting to make sure they're a good fit.

**“The adoption process is a two-way street.”**



# Cat



There are plenty of pets who need homes—there's no question about that. Around **two to three million cats** end up in animal shelters and rescues each year, and, according to **Shelter Animals Count (SAC)**, while 3.6 million dogs and puppies enter shelters annually in the United States.

But are you a cat person or a dog person?

# vs Dog







# You should adopt a dog if:

---

## 1

**You're ready to get out and about.**

All dogs need plenty of space and to be kept active and stimulated; exercise makes a huge difference in dogs' mental and physical well-being. Different dogs need **different amounts of exercise**, but every dog needs it.

---

## 2

**You're prepared to train your pup.**

Dogs are especially responsive to training, and many enjoy a challenge.

---

## 3

**You're ready to be best friends.**

While not every dog likes snuggles, they do tend to love being with their person 24/7.

# You should adopt a cat if:

---

## 1

**You're a homebody.**

Cats don't require daily walks like dogs do; they're generally able to get enough exercise on their own.

---

## 2

**You live in a small space.**

Cats generally need less space than dogs, so if you don't have a yard, that's no problem.

---

## 3

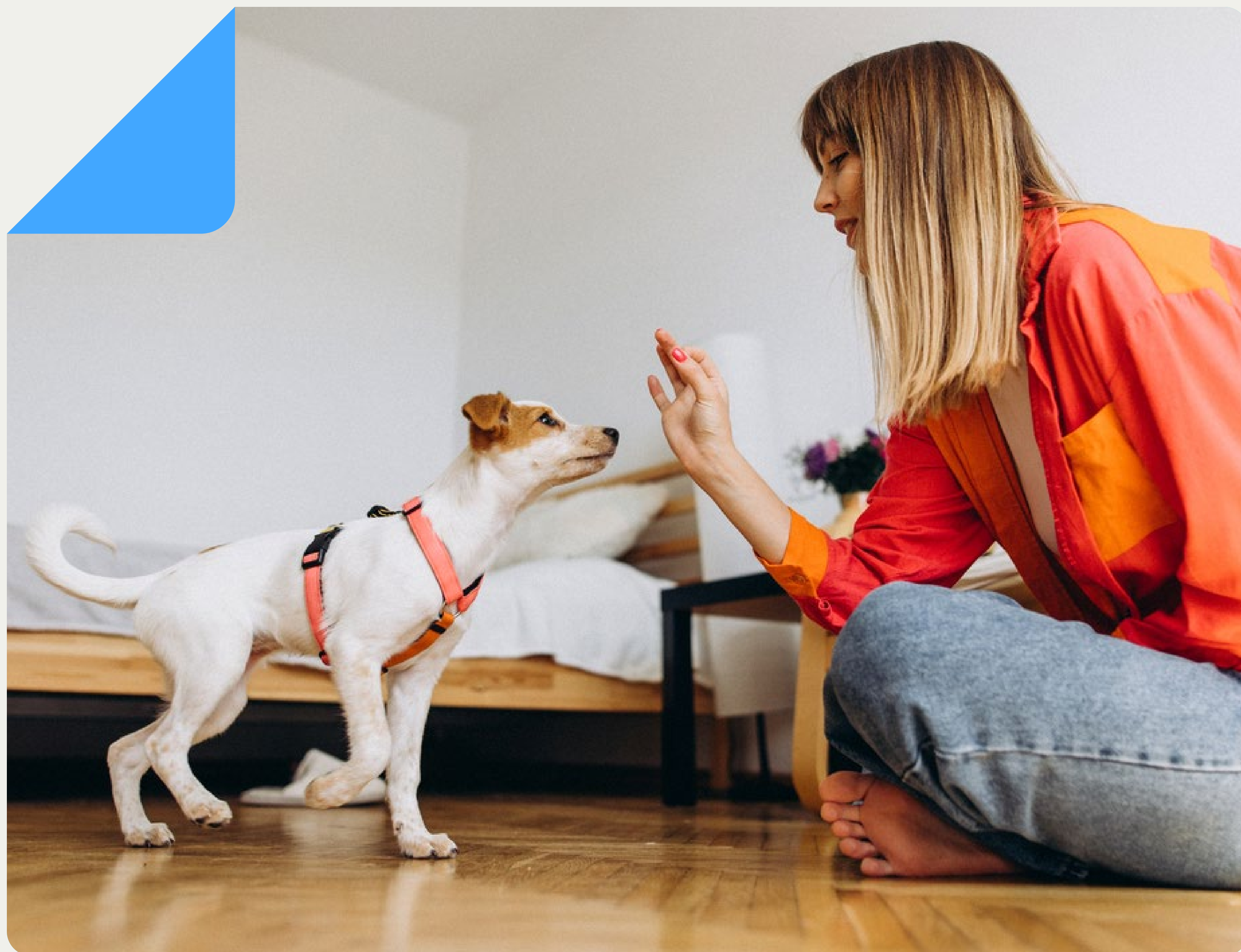
**You're looking for a low-maintenance pet.**

As long as you give your cat plenty of toys and **scratching posts** to keep them entertained, as well as food, water, and a clean **litter box**, they are likely to be perfectly content and grateful for your companionship.





# How to perfect your intro to your new pet



Adopting a new pet can be incredibly exciting, and it can be tempting to pull your new pet into a big hug the first time you meet them. Even socialized pets might not be ready for such affection from an unfamiliar person right away. Here's what to do when meeting a rescue pet for the first time.

## Be calm yet confident.

Let the pet approach you instead of approaching them first. Then, get down on their level, reach out a hand, and invite them to sniff. Avoid staring—especially with cats who pay close attention to your movements—or any sudden movements or loud noises.

## Respect their space.

Be patient and gentle in your first interactions with them. Don't try to pet or touch them unless they invite it. If the pet seems fearful or aggressive, end the interaction and back away. Never pick up the animal without permission.

## Read their body language.

Pets express their feelings through their body language. Positive **signs in cats** include purring, slow tail waves, and a lowered head, while rapid head movements, hiding, and flattened ears indicate they're frightened. If a dog is cowering or is frozen, has raised hackles, and is bearing their teeth, back away; if their ears are perked forward, their body is wiggling, or they invite a belly rub, they likely **want more attention**.

## Offer treats.

Treats are a good way to encourage a new pet to develop positive associations with being around you. It may also help coax a more timid pet to approach you. If the pet seems especially frightened, leave a treat or two on the ground so they can investigate without making contact with you.

**Fun Fact:** 75% of pet parents celebrate their dog's birthday or "Gotcha Day."





# Adoption checklist

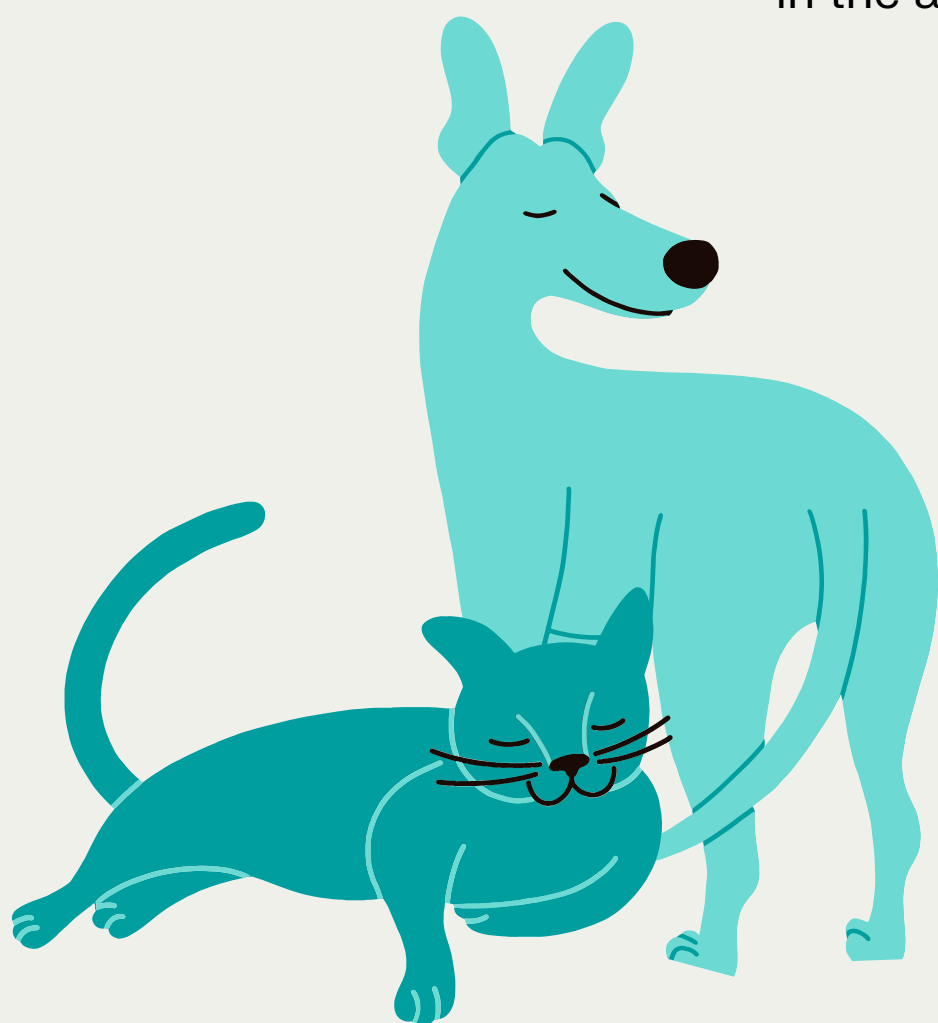
It's easy to miss important information during the adoption process, especially if you've fallen for a particular pet.

We recommend having these questions on hand and running through them with the shelter staff before finalizing an adoption to ensure you make the best decision for you and your future family member.

**For any pet  
you're interested  
in adopting, ask  
the shelter staff:**

- ☐ How did the pet end up here?
- ☐ How old is the pet?
- ☐ What's the pet's medical history?
- ☐ What do you feed this pet?
- ☐ How much grooming does this pet need?
- ☐ How much exercise does this pet need?
- ☐ Is this pet good with other animals and/or kids?
- ☐ How is this pet doing with potty training?
- ☐ How would you describe their personality?
- ☐ What exactly is included in the adoption fee?

**Notes:**



**Adopt a Pet**

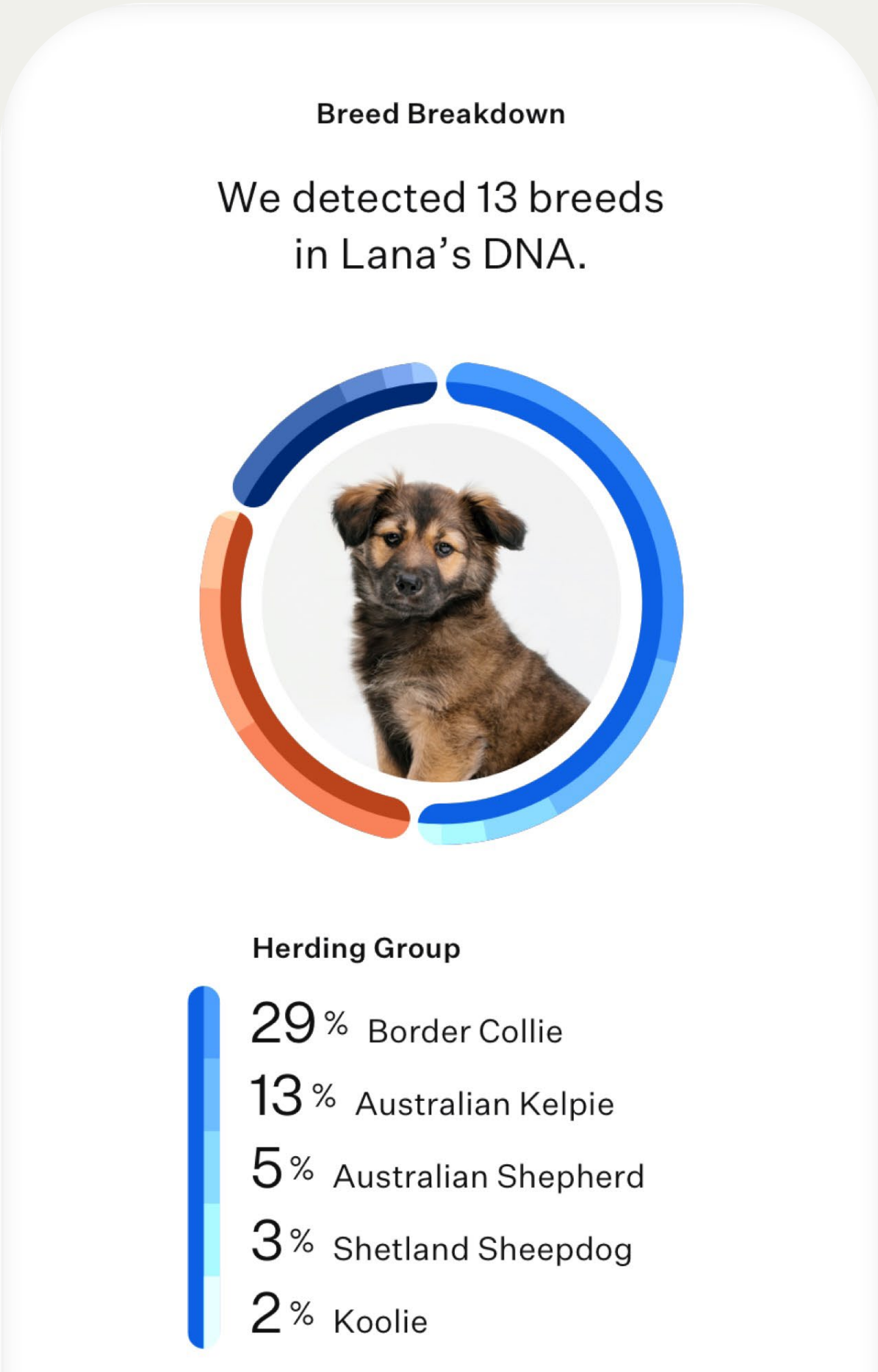
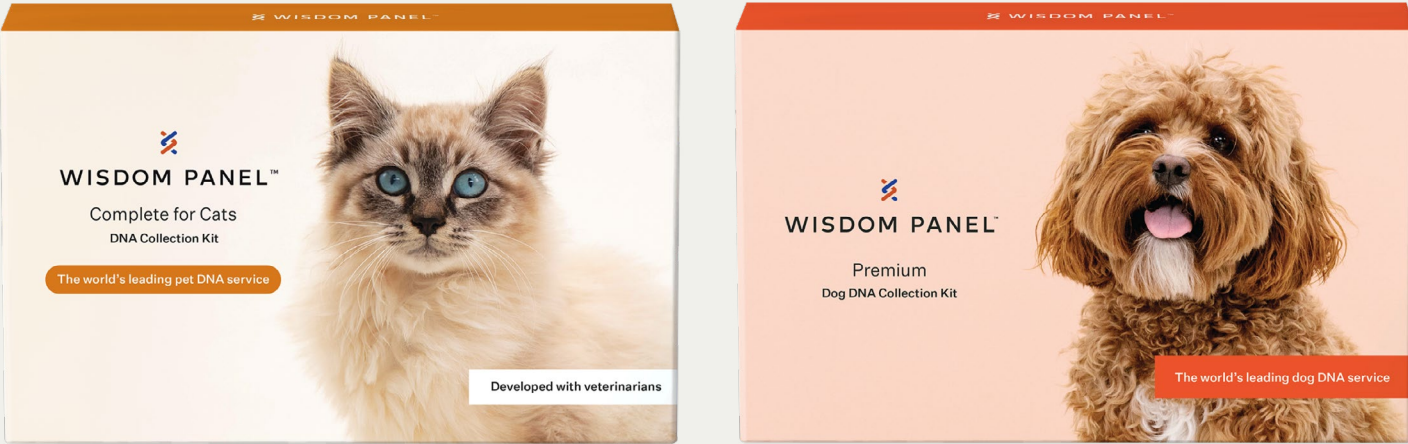


# Deals & Offers

 WISDOM PANEL™

25% off a Wisdom Panel™ Premium DNA test.

AAPWISDOM







50% off one pet food product.

AAPROYALCANIN



Healthy habits start here.

35% off your first order.\*

AAPGREENIES





Get 3 free months of The Kin app

The Kin is one app, for pet parent answers. (Usually \$4.99/month) With your subscription, you can:

- Get peace of mind and chat with vets 24/7
- Store and share your pet's vaccine records
- Never miss a booster, with vaccine reminders
- Get personalized advice, curated by experts

Claim Your Free Subscription



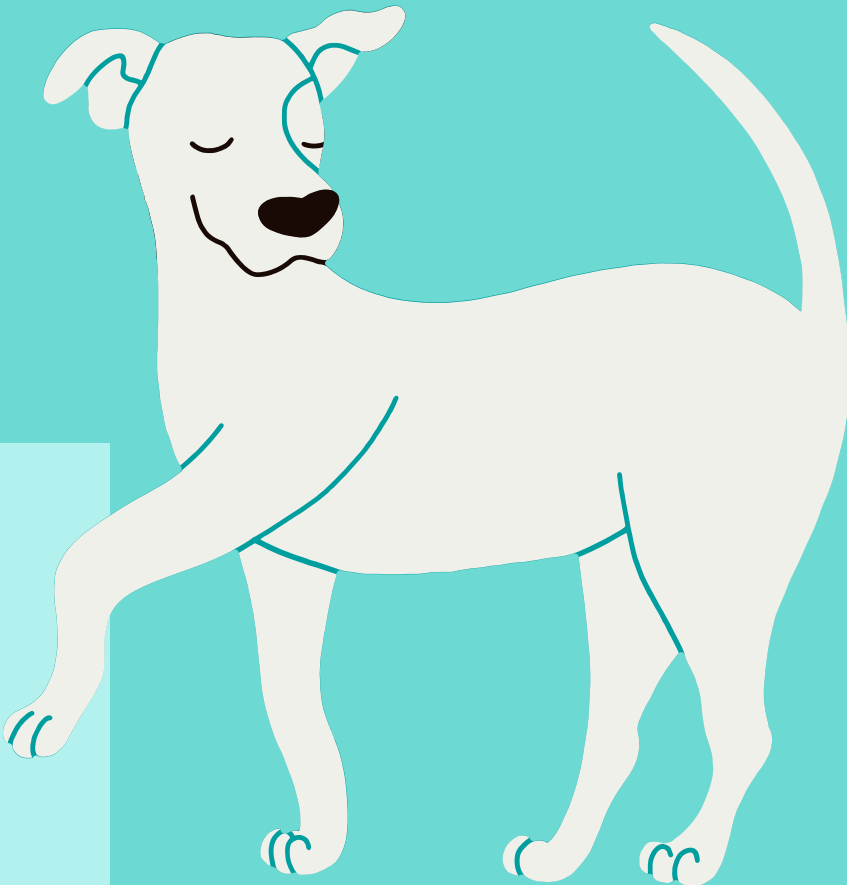
Join The Wildest for free anytime

The Wildest is a free site that helps you navigate the wild world of pet parenthood so you can:


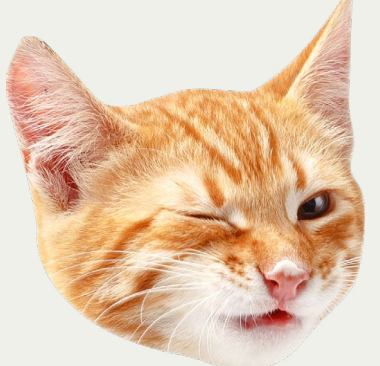


- Stress less with vet answers within 48 hours
- Ace everyday pet parenting with expert advice
- Stay on top of pet news, trends, and products
- Navigate every stage with tools and training

Join For Free

**Fun fact:** You're not imagining it—dogs really do smile when they're happy.





Give every pet a chance. The shyest, quietest shelter pets can be the  life of the party and/or  the snuggliest buddies in their forever homes. Those with  missing limbs, who are  advanced in years, have as much love to give as anyone else.

So keep an open mind...you never know which pet might change your life for the better.



**“There is nothing like bonding with a pet you have adopted. It’s like they understand that you have given them a second chance and will love you for it.”**

Dr. Gary Weitzman  
President and CEO of the  
San Diego Humane Society

