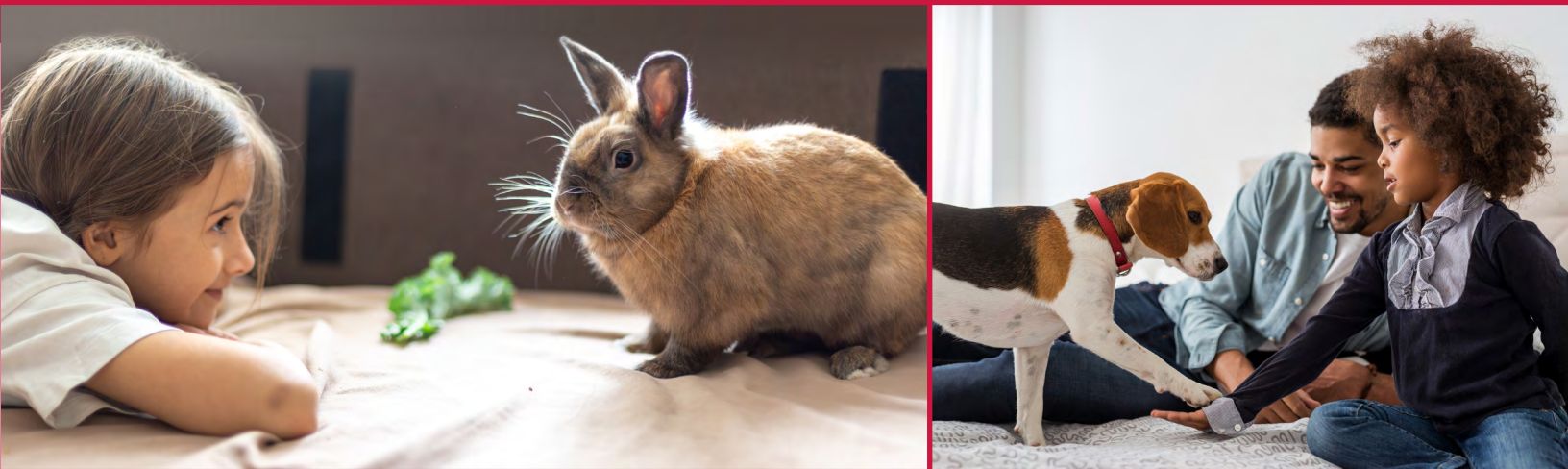




Behavior Resource Guidebook

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center

Curated by the Honoring the Bond Program with help from the Behavioral Medicine Service



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

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Introduction

Welcome to Behavior Resource Guidebook!

My name is Marissa and I am the Honoring the Bond Program Coordinator and social worker at The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center. Along with the Behavioral Medicine service, their behavior modification consultant and specialist, Rebecca King, CDBC, and other professionals in the field, we created this guidebook for you.

Our hope is that you find something here that can help in your journey with your companion animal and bring some peace and comfort to your household. For any feedback or additional resource requests, please utilize the contact information below.

Warmly,

Marissa Metzger, LISW & Rebecca King, CDBC
cvm-osuвет.honoringthebond@osu.edu
614-247-8607

To find more companion animal behavior resources, please visit the Ohio State Behavioral Medicine service web page at go.osu.edu/vetbehavior. To learn more about the Honoring the Bond program at Ohio State, please visit our web page at go.osu.edu/HTB.

What is Caregiver Burden?

What is Important to Know About Caregiver Burden?

Caregiver burden is the strain and/or load carried by a person who cares for pets who are chronically ill, have behavioral limitations, are disabled, and/or elderly. Caregiver burden is directly related and connected to the well-being of both the pet and the human, with many different attributes that impact well-being. It is important to remember that caregiver burden does not need to be visible to others to be a valid experience, and sharing what you are going through can make the difference between feeling supported and feeling isolated. Being open about your experience can be a tool in acknowledging the strain and practicing vulnerability in service of your well-being and the well-being of your pet.

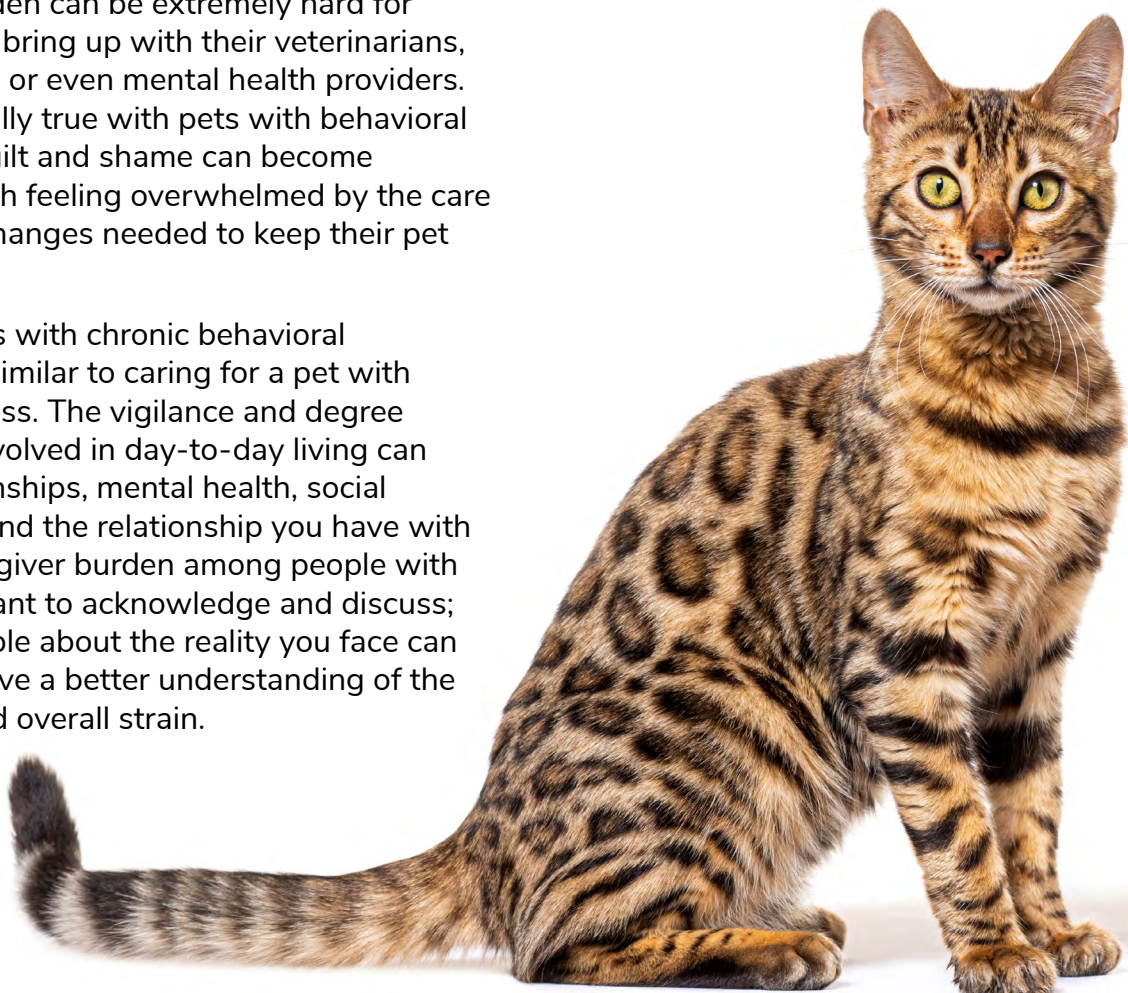
Caregiver burden can be extremely hard for pet parents to bring up with their veterinarians, family, friends, or even mental health providers. This is especially true with pets with behavioral challenges. Guilt and shame can become associated with feeling overwhelmed by the care and lifestyle changes needed to keep their pet safe.

Caring for pets with chronic behavioral challenges is similar to caring for a pet with a physical illness. The vigilance and degree of planning involved in day-to-day living can impact relationships, mental health, social connectivity, and the relationship you have with your pet. Caregiver burden among people with pets is important to acknowledge and discuss; being vulnerable about the reality you face can help others have a better understanding of the challenges and overall strain.

To better assess caregiver burden, there is an abbreviated Caregiver Burden Questionnaire (Zarit Burden Interview) specifically curated for people with pets. You can find the questionnaire, along with many other pet caregiver burden resources, at:

insightfulanimals.com/pet-caregiver-burden

Please consider utilizing the caregiver journal prompts on page 3 as a place to start unloading some of the weight that you may be carrying. Please keep in mind that this space and the time that you set aside to journal and care for yourself is for you. Often when we quiet the noise going on in our lives, it can be an opportunity for thoughts to flood in, so please be gentle with yourself and take breaks when needed.



Caregiver Tools

Caregiver Journal Prompts

Consider asking yourself the following questions and journal your response:

- What went well today? How do I feel about how the last week has gone? What were the moments where things went well?
- When was the last time I asked for help with something? Who are the people in my life that I could ask for help? What does it feel like when I ask for help? What prevents me from asking for help?
- What can I change about my schedule or routine that would allow for more time to spend on things that fulfill and/or comfort me?
- What are some things I can do to practice bringing calm and contentment into this day? What are some ways I can help myself become more in tune with my emotions?
- What can I do to help myself be more present and grounded? What are some things I have done before that have helped me feel more present and grounded?



Additional Ways to Reflect and Manage Challenging Feelings

Positive Affirmations

Positive affirmations are a simple practice to integrate into your daily life and can help to improve mood and confidence. Some examples of affirmations are:

- I am a kind and helpful person.
- I am confident and knowledgeable.
- I love myself and will honor and respect my needs today.
- I can do hard things and understand my boundaries.

Reframing Your Thoughts

Practice reframing your thoughts. It can be helpful to acknowledge your thoughts and allow yourself to fully feel them. If you better understand your own thoughts and feelings, it can help you find ways to begin to reframe them.

Example:

“I’m worried that I will not be able to sustain caring for my pet’s needs and my own for very much longer.”

A possible reframe for this thought could look something like this:

“It can be hard work to take care of myself and my pet.”

[This is how you can acknowledge and validate your experiences.]

“I can take small actions each day to begin to incorporate more rest and relaxation into our lives.”

[This is how you can begin to understand ways to help with expanding your perspective.]

Behavior Quality of Life Scale

Quality of life (QOL) can mean different things to different people and there are a myriad of values that we can attribute to QOL for our pets. When looking at QOL through the lens of owning a pet with behavioral concerns, it can be important to assess, across different values, how your pet's life, your own life and the community is impacted by your animal's behavioral needs. The three charts in this document can be used once, or over time to be utilized as a comparison tool. The charts have been adapted and modified from the chart in our resource ["How Do I Know When it's Time?"](#).

Utilizing these charts can help you visualize the well-being and welfare of your pet, yourself/family, and the greater community. Adding up the totals of the different categories together will give you a number between 22 and 110. Lower numbers indicate a likelihood of lower QOL for your pet, family and/or community, whereas a higher number indicates a likelihood of higher QOL. While totals can be helpful, it is worth noting that totals are not comparable between situations. It is not advised to compare totals between different pets and families.

Reminder: This QOL scale is an observational tool, not a diagnostic tool.

Animal Quality of Life Scale

Date _____

Poor Quality of Life

Good Quality of Life



My pet(s)...	Strongly Agree (All the time) (Severe)	Agree (Most of the time) (Significant)	Neutral (Sometimes) (Mild)	Disagree (Occasionally) (Slight)	Strongly Disagree (Never) (None)
...does not like socializing with all household members.	1	2	3	4	5
...cannot eat and/or drink safely due to fear or aggression.	1	2	3	4	5
...is no longer able to enjoy top 5 favorite activities due to behavioral concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
...is no longer able to be safely medicated.	1	2	3	4	5
...aggression/anxiety impacts their emotional and physical health on a daily basis.	1	2	3	4	5
...is unable to be groomed or bathed.	1	2	3	4	5
...is unable to be boarded.	1	2	3	4	5
...is unable to have a pet sitter.	1	2	3	4	5
...well-being/stress level is significantly impacted when boarded or watched by a pet sitter.	1	2	3	4	5
...is unable to be safely transported.	1	2	3	4	5
...degree of environmental management needed to keep them safe impacts their emotional/physical welfare.	1	2	3	4	5
...is unable to receive care for any condition requiring repeat visits or hospitalizations.	1	2	3	4	5

Total _____

Owner Quality of Life Scale

Poor Quality of Life

Good Quality of Life

Date _____

I am (My household is)...	Strongly Agree (All the time) (Severe)	Agree (Most of the time) (Significant)	Neutral (Sometimes) (Mild)	Disagree (Occasionally) (Slight)	Strongly Disagree (Never) (None)
...unable to go on trips / cannot use a pet sitter or boarding.	1	2	3	4	5
...unable to participate in activities with family and friends.	1	2	3	4	5
...unable to follow through on personal medical recommendations (i.e. surgeries, hospitalizations, etc.) - no other person able to safely manage care.	1	2	3	4	5
...unable to receive care for any condition requiring repeat visits or hospitalizations.	1	2	3	4	5
...noticing the degree of environmental management needed to keep my pet safe detracts from the emotional/physical welfare of myself and household members.	1	2	3	4	5
...needing increased psychological interventions to manage stress. (Interventions can include wellness apps, meditation or mindfulness practices, or counseling support.)	1	2	3	4	5
...unable to guarantee safety of emergency personnel in the case of an emergency.	1	2	3	4	5
...being negatively impacted financially due to management of my pet's needs.	1	2	3	4	5

Total _____

Community Quality of Life Scale

Poor Quality of Life

Good Quality of Life

Date _____

My pet(s)...	Strongly Agree (All the time) (Severe)	Agree (Most of the time) (Significant)	Neutral (Sometimes) (Mild)	Disagree (Occasionally) (Slight)	Strongly Disagree (Never) (None)
...is a risk to other people or animals if there is a management failure.	1	2	3	4	5
...is no longer recommended for rehoming.	1	2	3	4	5
...is unable to receive legally required vaccinations and/or vet care.	1	2	3	4	5

Total _____

Considerations for a Challenging Day

Considerations for Respite

If you are able, separate yourself from your pet, even for an hour.

- Keeping in mind your available resources and the safety of your pet, boarding your pet or hiring a pet sitter to provide a short respite could be helpful.

Reflect back on what has worked well for you in the past.

- How have you taken care of yourself on challenging days in ways that truly benefit you?
- What can you do to help yourself decompress?
- What can you do for your body to help shake off some of the tension? (See page 10 for a few examples.)

Utilize your support systems.

- There are some challenging days that you can tolerate and some that you cannot. That is okay. Every day is different and every day our bodies and minds will feel different and have different tolerance thresholds to stress and challenges.
- Allow yourself to lean on those around you who you know can support you, and give yourself permission to acknowledge some days you can't "do it all." You are still a good pet parent even when you need to ask for help and support.

Give yourself permission to lean on what provides you comfort.

- It is likely that you are in a heightened emotional and physical state and it is okay to need to lean on things that you know can help soothe and relax you. Listen to your body to decide what is best for you in the moment.

Questions to Ask Yourself (with examples)

Would something warm or cold be soothing right now?

- A cold/hot shower/bath, a warm drink, an iced drink, an ice pack on the back of my neck, a heating pad on my shoulders...

What would feel good to my body right now?

- A few minutes outside to reconnect with my breath and with nature, changing into more comfortable clothing, washing my face, applying some hand lotion and massaging my hands...

Have I eaten enough today?

- Is there something I can nourish myself with that would also provide me additional comfort?

Where in my home do I feel most relaxed and at peace?

- Can I give myself permission to rest in that space for a few minutes?



Communication and Connection Considerations: Support Systems

Communicating with Your Support System

Communication and connection are pillars of human and animal relationships. Communication with friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and our pets is what helps build the bridge between beings. Connection starts with communication, and people who have pets with behavioral needs can benefit from being connected to others.

Isolation can hinder a pet parent's ability to cope with the stress, anxiety and fears that can exist (often chronically) when owning a pet with behavioral needs.

When, where, why, and how we spend our time and energy with others is our choice. When feeling overwhelmed with our current reality, it can be helpful to remind ourselves that we control how much of our personal energy is spent communicating and connecting with others. We can be mindful of what connections benefit us versus those that drain us.

If you live with others in your household and are managing a pet with behavioral needs, communication is key to keeping everyone safe, informed and comfortable. Making your needs and your pet's needs known upfront, and as they change over time, helps to prevent guessing or assuming.

Communicating with Your Pet's Support System

People with pets have the ability to utilize veterinary professionals, behaviorists, and trainers to better help them understand their pet's behavioral needs and well-being, and to better understand their connection and communication with them, too.

While it might seem scary to talk to veterinary and pet professionals, communicating with them about your needs, concerns, worries, and any complicating factors helps them to best serve you and your pet to the best of their ability. It can help them understand your goals, capabilities and expectations so that they can help you better manage what is and isn't possible for your pet.

Emergency Considerations

Life can be unpredictable and when living with an animal who has behavioral needs, it may be beneficial to establish a plan for your pet in the event of an unexpected emergency, holiday or other major life event.

Some things to consider:

- How will you keep your pet and your guests safe if you have company? This may be especially important during holidays.
- Do you have a pet sitter or other trusted individual that is able to enter your home to care for your pet if you need to leave for an extend amount of time?
- Do you know someone who is able to safely give your pet their necessary medications on your behalf?
- Is there a boarding facility that you trust to house your pet if needed? It may be helpful to preemptively establish a relationship with a trusted boarding facility or have a day of "test boarding" before it is needed, so your pet is already familiar with the environment.
- Prepare a "go-bag" with essentials for your pet in the event that you need to suddenly evacuate your home.

Communication and Connection Considerations: Boundaries and Asking for What You Need

What to say when....

...people ask how they can help or offer to do a specific task for you:

“Thank you for offering to pick up groceries for me this week. I already was able to do that this week but would really appreciate your help with dropping my car off to be serviced this weekend. Are you able to help me with that?”

- Normalize asking for help when you need it. Just because someone offered to help with something and you do not need help with that exact thing, doesn't mean you are ungrateful for turning down their offer. You are allowed to let that person know what would actually be helpful to you, especially when they might not have asked you what it is you need in the first place.

“I am so grateful you offered to help with this, it will really help me out.”

- You will notice this statement does not have any additional excuses or qualifications. You do not always need to justify *WHY* you need help with something. It can feel uncomfortable at first to just state your needs plainly, but it can help others to know exactly what they can do to positively impact your life.

“Thank you for offering to help. Honestly, I am so exhausted from making decisions all the time that I could not even tell you what I need right now.”

- When you are already dealing with decision fatigue and a heavy mental load managing your pet, it can be overwhelming to think of ways for someone to help you. It is okay to say that! This might inspire the person to get creative and pick something on their own.

What to say when....

...people offer unsolicited advice or suggestions

“I hear what you are saying and I am working with experts to address my pet's behavior.”

- No need to get into arguments about what they suggested, just keep it short and to the point to help move the conversation along.

“I am doing all that I can to help improve my pet's life and telling me to use a shock collar/rehome/euthanize my pet is not an option at this time.”

- Every choice you make is with your pet's best interest in mind, even if it is rehoming or euthanasia. These are all personal decisions you can discuss with your pet's team of experts.



Communication and Connection: Journal Prompts

Journaling About Communication

Consider asking yourself the following questions and journal your response:

- How many times have you walked away from a conversation not really feeling like you were present? What did that feel like? What do you wish you could do differently next time?
- What can you do to help keep yourself grounded and mindful before, during and after hard conversations?
- What does it feel like to share vulnerable information with other people (friends, family, strangers, etc.)? What can I do to help support myself during these vulnerable moments in the future?
- What conversations have I had in the past that have felt really successful? What went well? What can I use from that experience to help future conversations be successful?

Gentle Reminders About Journaling and Reflecting

Journaling doesn't have to be perfect to be worth it. If you wait for something to be perfect (perfect timing, perfect circumstances, perfect environment) you might be overlooking opportunities to use your time and energy to care for yourself.

You can journal and reflect in more ways than just pen and paper. Some examples include:

- Voice recordings
- Painting, coloring, drawing
- Writing in a blog
- Writing down a sentence or two on a day in a calendar or planner
- Taking notes in your phone
- Utilizing index cards, sticky notes, postcards or other non-journal mediums
- Using collages, sticker books, or scrapbooks

Journaling does not need to be complex, time consuming or look like what others do. Finding out what feels best for you and allows you to reflect and express yourself in a sustainable and supportive way is what matters most.



Coping Skills Toolkit

The following coping skills are simple, minute or two practices that can be incorporated into your day. The goal of these practices is to remind you that taking care of yourself in small ways still counts. This can be incredibly impactful over time, so even on your busiest, most challenging days, you still have ways to honor what your body and mind need.

Please remember, utilize only what serves you and your body best.

Breathing Practices

A breathing practice can be useful in regulating our nervous system and allowing us to reconnect with our bodies and our environment in a less stressful way. Breathing practices can be a simple addition to an already established self-care routine and can be a good place to start if you are trying to focus on small changes to make throughout your day.

Some examples of breathing practices to try:

- Inhale to the count of 4, exhale to the count of 8
- Two quick inhales through the nose followed by a long exhale
- Box breathing:
 - inhale to the count of 4
 - hold your breath for the count of 4
 - exhale to the count of 4
 - hold (do not inhale yet) to the count of 4
 - then back to inhaling to the count of 4, and so on

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

PMR has been shown to reduce cortisol levels (a hormone released when we are stressed) and improve physiological and psychological well-being and our relaxation states. PMR involves actively contracting (squeezing) muscles to create tension, and then progressively releasing (relaxing) those muscles.

Please note: this practice should never hurt or be uncomfortable.

The more you practice this, the quicker your relaxation response should kick in. You do not have to wait until you feel tense, stressed or

anxious to begin practicing PMR. It can actually be very beneficial to start practicing it when you are feeling calm so that it will be easier to do when you are feeling tense/stressed/anxious.

When practicing this, focus on one set of muscle groups at a time. For example, take a deep breath and squeeze the muscles in your hand for 5 seconds as if making a fist. Then quickly release the muscles that were tense with your exhale. Notice the tension flowing out of the muscle and the difference between the tense state and the relaxed state of your muscles. You can try this with other muscle groups as well.

Grounding Exercises

Grounding is the practice of self-soothing and finding emotional balance during difficult times. Everyone can ground themselves in different ways, but some common examples include:

- **Take a walk outside either alone or with a companion.**
Moving your body can help to distract and recenter your mind.
- **Pay attention to your senses: what do you see, hear, smell, taste or feel?**
Focusing on your physical sensations and environment can help to reduce anxiety and stress by bringing your mind to the present.
- **Practice gratitude.**
What are some things in your life that you appreciate? When we are overwhelmed, it may be difficult to focus on the good things that bring joy and meaning to our lives, and being intentional about recognizing these things may help bring balance when things are stressful.

Rehoming Considerations

Considerations When Rehoming Your Pet

Making the choice to rehome your pet is a hard one. It can be an overwhelming decision to make, and paired with the journey it likely took to reach this point, it can feel like there are a lot of moving pieces.

Please feel free to use the following tips as you consider rehoming your pet:

- Utilize your support systems that you trust (family, friends, coworkers, support groups, therapists, etc.)
- Make sure you are getting enough sleep, food and water
- If you are working with a veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist, talk to them about what they feel is the best plan for your pet
- Utilize your coping skills toolkit (see page 10)
- If you have other pets at home, ensure they are getting attention and exercise
- If feasible, consider utilizing boarding services for self care, and to give the household time to consider if rehoming, euthanasia or continued management is best



Rehoming Considerations and Resources

Rehoming Considerations

- Attempt to avoid Craigslist or other online forums, and proceed with caution with local community Facebook groups.
- Be sure to disclose any medical conditions, behavioral needs and living accommodations your pet might need in their new home.
- Consider writing up a biography for your pet including all of their quirks and important observations (for example: Fluffy does not like to eat out of metal bowls because they are noisy. Fluffy does well for car rides if he is crated.)

It is worth noting that in Ohio, animal owners can be held liable for any injuries their pet causes that extend past the duration of the ownership of the pet, especially if there is prior knowledge of issues or concerns.

Please consider the legal liability in your state.

Rehoming Options

Potential places to consider rehoming your pet:

- The original breeder, if applicable
- Trusted family or friends
- Reputable rescue organizations, or the rescue it was adopted from
- Local shelters with connections to foster homes, or the shelter it was rescued from
- Reputable online pet rehoming and adoption platforms

Do your best to conduct an interview with any potential adopters.

Rehoming Resources

Disclaimer: In order to best support people with pets, we compiled the following list of resources, which is not exhaustive. We are unable to endorse specific resources and have no control over the competency or services provided. This list was updated in October 2024.

Below is a list of some of the online platforms that assist in matching your pet with potential adopters through profile pages, detailed surveys and meet and greets that can help keep pets out of shelters.

- howimetmydog.com/
- rehome.adoptapet.com/list-a-pet/step-1
- home-home.org/

Considerations Once a Safe Home has Been Selected

- Inform your veterinarian and complete any transfer of ownership forms
- If your pet is microchipped, update contact information
- If you have pet insurance, notify your insurance provider
- Ensure the dog license and registration are up to date if your pet will be staying in the same county

When Rehoming is No Longer an Option - Euthanasia to End Suffering

- vmc.vet.osu.edu/services/behavioral-medicine#bond
- vmc.vet.osu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/behavioral_euthanasia_printable_2014%20%281%29.pdf

Training Resources

Finding safe, effective and ethical trainers can be challenging and overwhelming. Not every trainer is a good fit with every family, and that is okay. Working with credentialed, positive-reinforcement-based trainers who are skilled in behavior modification is most effective. While we cannot provide you any specific recommendations, below is a list of websites with searchable databases where you can find, by location, trainers near you that uphold ethical and responsible practices.

This list is in no particular order and was updated in October 2024.

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants

iaabc.org/certs/members

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers

apps.apdt.com/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?webcode=TrainerSearch

Karen Pryor Academy

karenpryoracademy.com/find-a-trainer/#!/directory/map

Additional Support Group Resources

Disclaimer: In order to best support people with pets, we compiled the following non-exhaustive list of resources. We are unable to endorse specific resources and have no control over the competency or services provided. This list is in no particular order and was updated in October 2024.

Insight Animal Behavior Services

insightfulanimals.com/human-support-services

- Offers 1:1 low-cost support sessions; \$30 for 30 minutes with the option to add an additional 15 minutes for \$15. Via Zoom video conferencing or over the phone.
- Free 90 minute monthly virtual support group “Living with and Loving Pets with Behavioral Challenges” facilitated by Valerie Bogie, a Behavior Consultant and the Administrative Manager for Insight Animal Behavior Services

Canine Companion Consulting

caninecompanionconsulting.com/dog-training-support-group

- Offers occasional (as requested) online support groups for pet parents who are working through their pets’ behavior and/or medical issues
- Groups are run by Beth, a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) and certified dog behavior consultant (CDBC) who can be reached at **970-556-8726** or info@fococanine.com

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Valerie Bogie - Insight. (n.d.). Insight. insightfulanimals.com/valerie-bogie

