

# **Dogs Friends Foster Carer Information Pack**

*Supporting you on your fostering journey*

## **Introduction**

First and foremost - thank you very much for stepping up as a foster carer. It is thanks to our wonderful volunteers that Dogs Friends is able to continue helping dogs in need.

This pack has been put together to help you with the basics, and to assist in your fostering journey - however, remember our friendly volunteers are only ever a phone call away and are always happy to offer support and assistance.



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## Foster Carer Requirements

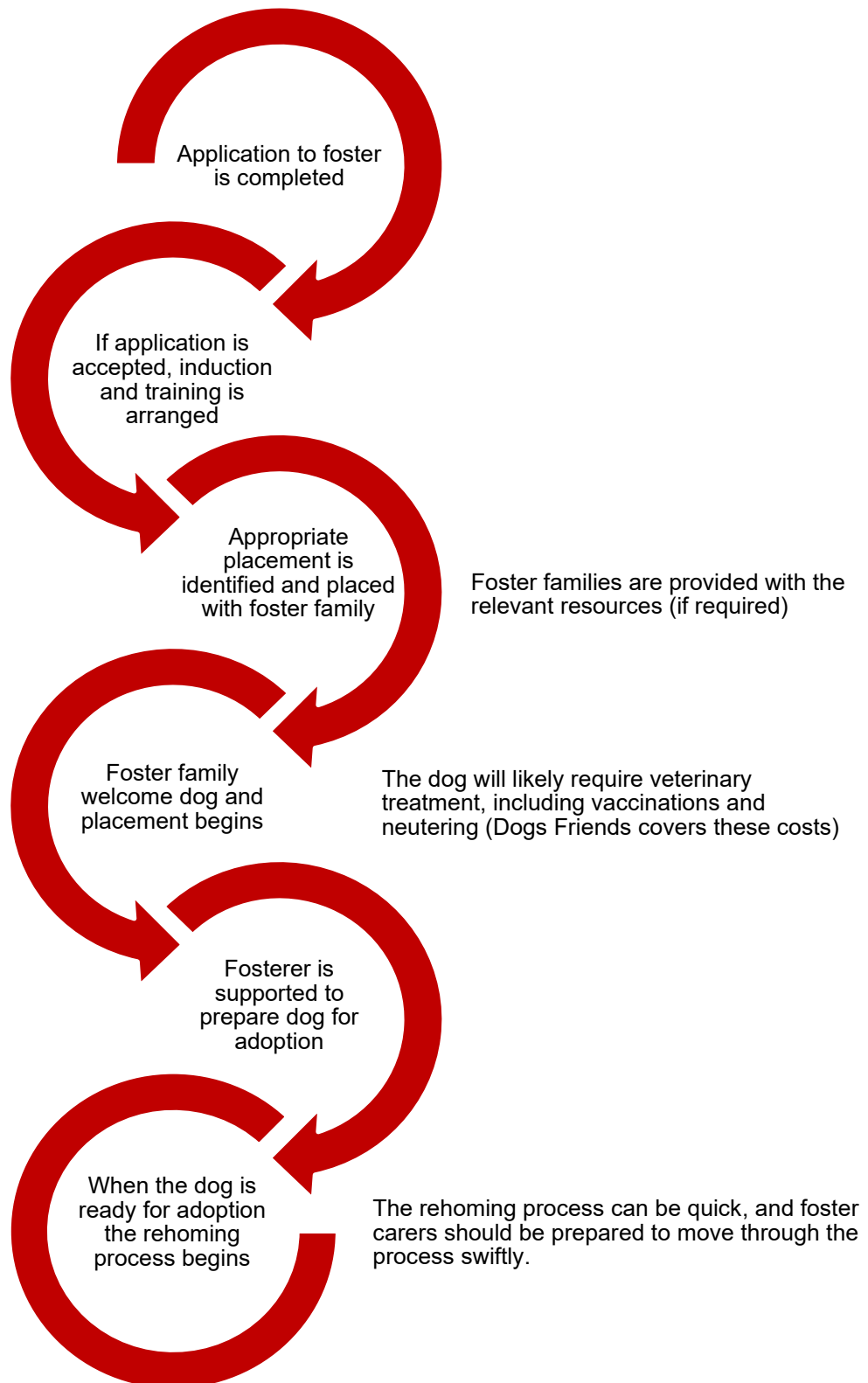
We are always in need of good local foster carers so that as few dogs as possible have to be in kennels. Fostering helps dogs to settle into a home environment and allows their character to shine through, helping us to find them the right homes.

We're looking for foster carers who:

- ✓ Can take dogs at short notice
- ✓ Are ready to start straight away if necessary
- ✓ Can drive and have access to their own vehicle.
- ✓ Live in the areas surrounding our kennels, which is between Cheddar and Wells. You must be able to travel to our vets in Weston-Super-Mare, Cheddar, Wells, Woolavington and/or Blackford.

## The Fostering Process

Fostering may seem like a daunting process to start with but remember we are here to support you every step of the way. Understanding the fostering process is key, and the below provides a brief overview of what you might experience.



## **The Practicalities of Matching and Arranging to Bring Your Dog Home**

We always consider the setup of the foster home, the characteristics of resident dogs, the family structure and other important elements when identifying the best match for a dog in need of a placement. It is not the case that you are told what dog you will be fostering, it's a conversation, and you wouldn't be asked to take a dog you are not comfortable with. We do ask our foster carers to be as open-minded as possible and understand that we often have very minimal information on the dogs coming into our care, so we may not be able to answer all the questions you have.

Things can typically move quite quickly, and we don't often have much notice of dogs needing placements, so usually we need foster carers to commit fairly quickly and sometimes take a dog at short notice. It's also exceptionally important that you only agree to take on a dog if you are fully committed. Pulling out of a placement at the last minute can result in extremely stressful situations and leave a dog with nowhere to go.

Some foster dogs don't find a home as quickly as others, so they may need to be in foster care for extended periods of time.

## **What to Expect**

Fostering is a wonderful thing and makes a huge difference in the life of a dog in need. It's not always easy, but it can be extremely rewarding to watch your foster dog flourish.

It is important to remember that many dogs who come into rescue have experienced significant instability, or in some cases neglect or abuse. A period of decompression is essential to assist your foster dog in settling into your home - this takes patience, consistency and understanding, however over time a rescue dog can truly come on leaps and bounds!

## Welcoming Your Foster Dog

Each dog will come with their own needs and personalities. It is key to provide a suitable environment for your dog to feel safe.

### Things to do

- Maintain a calm household and allow your dog to find a space where they feel comfortable, try not to tip-toe too much around them, as they do need to become familiar with the sights and sounds of a typical home environment. Bear in mind that many of the dogs wouldn't have ever seen or heard the television, washing machine, etc.!
- Ensure your dog has a bed space away from people and other pets where they won't be disturbed. Many dogs are simply exhausted when they first arrive and will sleep a lot, but others may be unsettled and need more attention.
- Maintain a consistent routine of feeding, playtime, sleeping and other activities. Seek support from Dogs Friends volunteers - we are here to help!

### Things not to do

- Do not expect your dog to be completely relaxed, calm or happy. They are likely to feel unsettled and may appear to be shy or frightened.
- Do not take your dog out for walks or trips straight away. This may overstimulate them or frighten and overwhelm them, keep new things to a minimum.
- Do not invite visitors to the house to meet your new dog until they are settled, meeting many new people in an unfamiliar environment may make your dog nervous.

## Your responsibilities

- Provide a stable foster placement that meets the needs of the dog, including feeding, walking, training and grooming (which you will be supported with where appropriate).
- Monitoring the health of the dog and attending vet appointments (paid for by Dogs Friends) as required - this may include vaccinations, neutering and other health-related appointments.
- Prepare the dog for adoption - this includes informal assessment of personality and behaviour, keeping Dogs Friends informed of progress. Please ask if you need support.
- Taking an active role in the adoption process - this may include assessing applications, talking to applicants and facilitating visits.

## Supplies

If you need supplies for your foster dog, then please ask for them - we can provide supplies for all our dogs. Supplies need to be collected from Weston-Super-Mare (BS23 4LU) or the kennels (BA5 1HW). We are not able to drop supplies at your home address unless in exceptional circumstances.

Please note that, since we rely almost entirely on donations, we are unable to guarantee specific brands or types of food and equipment.

## Walking and Security

When your dog first arrives, avoid immediate walks to allow time for them to settle in (usually at least a few days).

Instead encourage exercise and playtime in the garden. It may be that your foster dog is not used to going for a walk or being on a lead - therefore, you may need to work towards walking. If you have a particularly nervous dog, you should begin familiarising them with lead walking in the safety of your garden and reinforce the positive experience by rewarding nice walking with praise or a treat.

**It is completely normal for puppy farm dogs to not start going for walks whilst they are in foster care.**

Another key aspect of walking is security and minimising escape risks. Your dog must be walked wearing a harness and ideally, an additional slip lead if they're particularly nervous.

Your foster dog should only be walked on a lead, unless in a totally secure area of your sole use (such as a hired secure field). You should not walk your foster on a neck collar only (you must use a harness), and you should not use extendable or retractable leads for safety reasons. Your dog should also be wearing an ID tag (provided) at all times. Under no circumstances should the dog be left alone in a car, tied up in public (i.e. outside of a shop) or in the sole care of children.

Walking check list:

- ✓ Wearing a harness (not to be walked on neck collars)
- ✓ Have their ID tag on
- ✓ Have had time to settle into their foster home
- ✓ On lead at all times unless in a secure area of sole use
- ✓ You will not need to leave them unattended (i.e. in car or outside a shop) for any reason

## Feeding

You will be provided with a supply of food and should ensure that your foster dog is fed at suitable intervals, away from people or other pets. Your dog should not be disturbed while eating.

Your dog should have access to water in the home at all times. It is expected that dogs may experience upset stomachs when they first arrive due to stress and a change in diet - there is normally no cause for alarm, but this should be closely monitored.

**Please don't change the food your dog is eating without talking to your supporter first - this is so we can ensure the dogs are being fed a suitable diet.**

## House training

It is unlikely that foster dogs will have house training; it should be expected that they will have accidents in the home, particularly in the initial few weeks.

To support their house training, take your foster dog outside regularly and reward them when they toilet outdoors.

## Sleeping

Your dog may take some time to settle into the usual pattern of sleeping at night, however, maintaining consistency and routine will help this. Please ensure your dog has a quiet bed space to go to and avoid touching them whilst they are asleep. It is completely normal for dogs to struggle to settle at night, and they may need you to be nearby for reassurance - in the initial settling-in period, this may mean sleeping downstairs with the dog or having them sleep in your room.

## Grooming

It is likely that your foster dog will need to be bathed whilst they are in your care, however it is important not to over-wash them and to only use dog shampoo. If the dog has more complex grooming needs or severe matting, we may arrange for them to go to a professional groomer.

## Behaviour

Your foster dog will likely come on leaps and bounds with simple patience, consistency, and positive reinforcement. Remember, if your dog is exhibiting undesirable behaviours, shouting at them or frightening them is not effective and may cause them to regress. If you do find yourself needing more in depth support, please notify your Dogs Friends supporter so we can take appropriate action and offer additional support - if you're not sure, it's always best to ask!

**We only support the use of positive-reinforcement-based training.**

### **Veterinary care**

Your dog will likely need a vet trip whilst they are with you - usually for routine care such as vaccinations or neutering. You will need to take your foster dog to these appointments as and when required so it is important that you are able to safely transport your foster dog to our vets.

**Neutering procedures and operations:** You will likely need to take your foster dog to be neutered at Axe Valley. This is a routine procedure but extra care must be taken to support the dog's recovery. When your dog is having any sort of surgery you must not feed them after 12 am the night before (this is extremely important) and you should also be sure to follow the aftercare provided by the vets, which usually includes two follow-up appointments.

All veterinary care is invoiced directly to the rescue and will not cost you anything. Our Veterinary services are usually provided by Axe Valley Vets (surgery depending on location), who's details can be found [on their website](#). They have sites in:

- Blackford
- Wells
- Cheddar
- Weston-super-Mare
- Woolavington

**The emergency number for Axe Valley is 01934 712229.** In an absolute emergency you should not delay getting to the vets (if life threatening, then go to your local vet). You **MUST** notify Dogs Friends if you are accessing emergency veterinary services.

### **Managing bitches in season**

Many bitches come into rescue unneutered and will need to be neutered whilst in foster care (they may be adopted on a neutering contract if this isn't possible). If your dog comes into season whilst in your care, please alert us so we can support you.

This link explains more about seasons:

<https://www.we-love-pets.co.uk/we-love-pets-news/caring-bitch-season>

### **Alternative care**

You should not leave your foster dog in the care of anyone else beyond your household members without prior approval from Dogs Friends. We must be aware of the whereabouts of our dogs at any time.

## **Missing dogs**

In the extremely unlikely event that your foster dog goes missing, Dogs Friends must be notified immediately by phone call, regardless of the time of day or night. This is because the first hours are critical, and the chance of a dog being found safe drastically reduces as time goes on.

## **Logistics**

You will need to collect your foster dog from the kennels (Shamrock Stables, Lynch Lane, Westbury Sub Mendip, BA5 1HW). If for any reason you are unable to keep your foster dog, you will be required to transport them to their new placement, which may be the kennels or another foster home.

## **Public information and Social media**

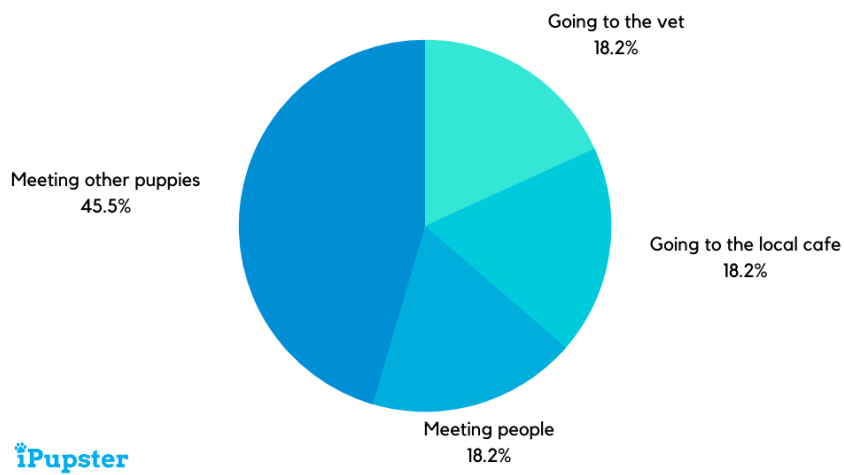
Often the dogs we take in are coming from very sensitive situations, and we need to be cautious of the information we share. Information shared with our foster carers is done in confidence, and we ask all foster carers not to share information with friends/family or on social media unless approval has been provided by Dogs Friends. Equally, content should not be created or shared on social media without permission from Dogs Friends first.

If you are approached by someone who is interested in adopting one of your foster dogs please always direct them to the formal adoption channels.

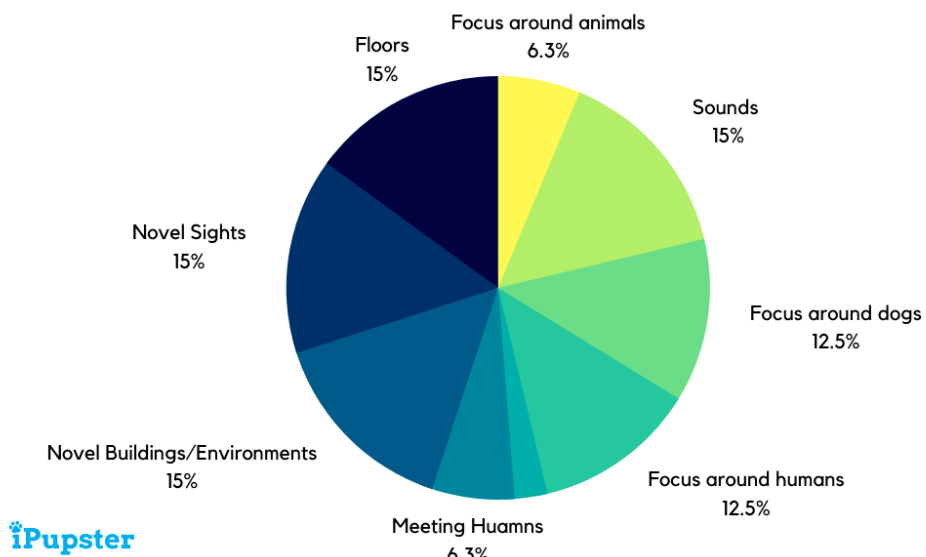
## Socialising your foster dog

The term 'socialising' is used a lot when raising dogs - but what is it? Socialisation is the process of introducing your dog to any and all new experiences, not just people and other pets. This usually occurs when your dog is a puppy (primarily 3-16 weeks), during a time when they are learning about the world and open to new experiences however many rescue dogs will have missed out on key socialisation.

### WHAT MOST PEOPLE THINK SOCIALIZATION IS



### WHAT SOCIALIZATION SHOULD BE



## Socialisation do's

- **Learn your dog's body language, and listen to it!**

Learn to recognise when your dog is happy, anxious, nervous - a happy dog may have relaxed ears and mouth, a high wagging tail and relaxed stance or posture, whereas an anxious or nervous dog may show flattened ears, tucked tail, licking of lips, shaking or growling. Learning to recognise these signs will help identify when your dog is fearful and ensure you respond accordingly - in this situation it is best to retreat where possible and bring your dog back to a level of comfort.

- **Graduate from smaller to bigger challenges in manageable steps**

It is essential with rescue dogs not to do too much too soon, especially as we are often unaware of their previous experiences and as such you could come across an unexpected response to a trigger. For example, the first time you introduce your dog to a stranger you could walk by at a distance (dog on a lead), if this goes well you could walk by in closer proximity and so on until you come into closer contact. Whilst doing this you can form a positive association with seeing strangers by praising your dog or offering a treat. Desensitisation is key and you may need to repeat the first step many times if you have a dog that is fearful.

- **Small, manageable interactions**

Whilst your dog may seem very confident in some situations, it's important to err on the side of caution. For example, if you foster a dog who loves to play with other dogs it can be tempting to go to 'puppy parties' or dog parks straight away - please don't do this! It's best to build up gradually, for example find a dog walking buddy who has a well socialised and calm dog first.

## Socialisation don'ts

- **Do not force an anxious dog to approach something they are scared of**

If a dog is pushed into 'fight or flight' mode, no learning or training is happening and your dog will likely exhibit a panic response. Build up gradually - if you have to physically force your dog towards people, dogs etc then they are not ready!

- **Do not set your dog up to fail**

If you know your dog will not cope with certain environments or situations - don't put them in it. Doing this could run the risk of overwhelming the dog and undo the progress they have made.

# A Dog's Emotional Cup

Every dog has a cup that needs to be filled—with social connection, security, access to reinforcers, and enrichment.

Some dogs seem to have a full cup most of the time, either because of a genetic pre-disposition, or because they have learned good ways to get a refill.

Most things that dogs do are completely normal—including the annoying stuff, like DIGGING up the garden, CHASING cats, or BARKING at the mailman. But all dogs show signs of stress when their cups get near empty.



## Signs your dog may be coping with an empty cup

- \* hoarding resources, over-protective
- \* over-reacting, or shutting down when exposed to new things
- \* restlessness
- \* slow to recover from exciting events
- \* changes in appetite
- \* escalating behaviors to get something or to get away from something
- \* increased grumpiness, or flare-ups
- \* intense social appeasement

## What refills a dog's cup:

- ♥ Doing Dog Things: SNIFFING, CHEWING, FORAGING, BARKING, DIGGING, PLAYING
- ♥ Being included in the family (dogs/humans)
- ♥ Freedom to move
- ♥ Freedom to make choices
- ♥ Ability to control outcomes and get reinforcers
- ♥ Unconditional love and attention
- ♥ Good health: nourishing food, no parasites, etc.
- ♥ Having a safe, quiet place to rest
- ♥ Predictable routines and interactions
- ♥ Getting to do things a dog loves to do

Words by Sarah Owings

Art by Lili Chin

## What empties a dog's cup:

- ♣ Social isolation
- ♣ Long periods of confinement with no enrichment
- ♣ Poor nutrition, untreated illness, or pain
- ♣ Denied access to reinforcers
- ♣ Scary or unpredictable reactions from important humans
- ♣ Over-stimulation (over-exercised) or not enough
- ♣ Set up to fail, and then punished for it
- ♣ No preparation for challenging situations
- ♣ Unclear training: not knowing how to get reinforcement
- ♣ No one responding when expressing a need
- ♣ Too much "impulse control" (i.e. no sniffing, no eating, no exploring, no barking, no doing Dog Things ) for too much of the day

Inspired by THE EMOTIONAL CUP by Upbility

## Contacts

When you take on a foster dog, you will be allocated a fostering supporter - this volunteer should be your first point of contact. Please be mindful of the fact that our volunteers are very busy and may have other commitments, so not always be able to respond to you immediately, particularly during evenings and weekends.

The numbers below can be used in emergencies.

- **Rosemary Peacock (Chairwoman)** - 07977808645
- **Caroline (Fostering Coordinator)** - 07711085854

You can also contact us via email at [info@dogsfriends.me.uk](mailto:info@dogsfriends.me.uk).

## The Adoption Process

Whilst Dogs Friends will make the final decision as to the adoptive home, we encourage all of our fosterers to be actively involved in the rehoming process, and you will be fully supported through this process. Your main responsibilities as a foster carer are outlined below.

### Adoption profile

You will need to provide information and pictures to allow our volunteers to create an adoption profile for the dog you are fostering. This information includes a description of personality, needs, likes, dislikes, and training needs/behavioural challenges. We will provide an online form for you to complete, allowing you to submit all of the required information.

### Speaking to applicants

Your fostering coordinator will pass suitable applicants over to you (following an initial sift), and you will need to contact them to talk in detail about your foster dog. If this goes well, then you can invite them to come and meet the dog. We are completely honest and transparent when discussing the dog's character and needs, and it is important that adopters are fully briefed.

### Meet and greet

This is an informal meeting that usually takes place at the foster carer's home, or another suitable location. All members of the applicant's household (including resident dogs) **must** attend the meet and greet, and this is an opportunity for everyone to get to know each other.

Your fostering supporter can give you advice and guidance on the meet and greet process. You must update them on how your meet and greet went following the meeting.

### **Handover**

You need to give your Dogs Friends Foster Lead at least 3 days' notice for handover. This allows them to set up insurance and ensure guardianship agreements are drafted prior to handover.

You will need to supply a verbal and brief written handover to applicants at the point of adoption, which includes an outline of your foster dog's current routine. This may also include things like their current diet, sleeping arrangements and training progress.

**You must not hand over the dog without prior approval from Dogs Friends to check if payment and paperwork has been received - we must be aware of when this is happening and we absolutely must not release dogs without having insurance set up.**

Adopters should have the following when collecting the dog:

- ID Tag
- Collar
- Lead
- Harness
- Safe mode of transport (i.e. crate, seatbelt etc.)

### **Dogs Friends responsibilities**

Dogs Friends will oversee the adoption process and also support you with your responsibilities. We will also carry out all 'process' steps including:

- Sifting applications and contacting unsuccessful applicants
- Carrying out home checks and vet reference checks
- Completing all paperwork, including the adoption pack and guardianship agreements
- Arranging microchip and insurance setups for new guardians

## **FAQ's (From Adopters perspective)**

Whilst Dogs Friends carry out the 'formal' parts of the process, applicants often ask questions relating to the process or procedures at the meet and greet. It is absolutely fine to defer those questions to us, but there are some FAQ's listed below which may crop up:

### **How long does it take for the adoption process to finalise?**

This entirely depends on how much familiarisation the dogs need, availability of home checkers, lead times on vet references and readiness of adoptive families.

The whole process should be conducted swiftly where possible, to maintain momentum. We usually aim for one week from meet and greet to handover.

### **What about outstanding veterinary treatment?**

If the dog is partway through a course of treatment for an acute health issue, then Dogs Friends will continue to provide this treatment via Axe Valley Vets, and sometimes this may continue post-adoption. If the dog has a long-term health issue, this is always disclosed and will become the responsibility of adopters.

### **What happens about vaccinations and neutering?**

Vaccinations are usually completed by the time a dog moves to their adoptive home, however if they are partway through a course then they will be provided by Dogs Friends via Axe Valley vets.

If the dog has been released on a neutering agreement, then neutering will be provided by Dogs Friends via Axe Valley (except for puppies). Provided this is carried out by Axe Valley, then Dogs Friends will cover the cost, if you choose to have this carried out by your own vet, then this will be at your own cost, but must still be carried out within the agreed timeframe.

### **What does the dog come with?**

You will usually need to have things like collars, harnesses and leads ready for when the dog comes to you, however, we may sometimes be able to lend the existing items on the basis that these are returned to Dogs Friends soon after adoption to use for other dogs in need.

### **What paperwork will I need to sign?**

You will need to sign a guardianship agreement, which contains all information about the dog being adopted, including medical history and behavioural details.

### **Is the dog microchipped?**

Unless there is a medical reason to delay, all Dogs Friends dogs are microchipped as this is a legal requirement. The microchip will change over to the adopters 4-6 weeks post adoption following the follow-up call.

### **Does the dog come with insurance?**

All Dogs Friends dogs come with 5 weeks of free Agria insurance. The adoption pack contains guidance on setting up your own insurance, but Dogs Friends is not able to recommend specific insurance providers.

### **Is there any post adoption support?**

Dogs Friends offer ongoing support with adoptive dogs. If you have any post adoption queries these must be sent to [info@dogsfriends.me.uk](mailto:info@dogsfriends.me.uk).

### **How much is the adoption fee?**

The adoption fee is listed on each dog's profile and must be paid via bank transfer prior to the dog moving to their adoptive home.

### **Can we have more visits after the meet and greet?**

Applicants are expected to commit to adoption after the first visit (if everyone is in agreement that it is the right match) but familiarisation visits are welcome if the foster carer is able to facilitate this. In the case of dogs who have more complex needs, familiarisation visits are recommended.

## **Application form**

[Apply now](#) - Please ensure all details in the form are correct before submitting.