

Rehoming Small Dogs

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Thinking about rehoming your Toy dog?

Are you giving up your pet because of behavior problems?

- We often inadvertently cause problems. While we want to draw out the best in our small dogs, we sometimes interact with them in ways that bring out the worst.

If the problems could be resolved, would you keep the dog?

- Behavior problems can be solved. It takes expert advice, applied with patience and persistence, but the vast majority of dogs are not lost causes.

Have you and your veterinarian ruled out medical causes?

- A wide variety of ailments, from bladder infection to chronic pain to dental problems and many others, can cause a dog's behavior to change. Often, treatment clears up both the medical and the behavioral condition.
- For strictly behavioral problems, medication prescribed by a knowledgeable veterinarian or board-certified Veterinary Behaviorist might be an option. You will still need a behavior modification program, though.

Have you talked to a dog trainer?

- A dog trainer may help, but it takes considerable discernment to select the right one for your Toy dog.
- Are they behavior consultants too, or primarily trainers?
- Do they have expertise in modifying problem behavior?
- Do they have experience with and an affinity for Toy dogs?
- Toy and small dogs view the world from a very different vantage point. It's critical to understand that to a small dog the entire world is gigantic. Are they familiar with Toy dog issues and understand their needs?
- Do they understand that Toy dogs who bite can often be rehabilitated, sometimes with ease?

Do you know about Certified Dog Behavior Consultants (CDBC)?

- Dog Behavior Consultants are uniquely qualified clinicians with expertise in evaluating, managing and modifying a wide range of challenging canine behaviors. They build and strengthen relationships between the human and canine members of a household. They help humans minimize stress in training their dog and create an atmosphere where all members of the household together learn positive techniques for dog training and behavior modification.
- To find a qualified CDBC, see [IAABC's Consultant Locator](#)

In sum, have you really exhausted all the possibilities?

A decision to rehome might be the best thing for your dog.

It's an opportunity to start over.

Bad habits don't necessarily carry over to new homes.

The family dynamics in the dog's new home might be different, helping the dog make a better adjustment with a new owner.

However. . .

Most of us would agree, rehoming is not a decision to be made lightly.

Should this particular dog be rehomed?

- With an occasional Toy, it's best not to pass problems along.
- If the dog has a history of biting, some shelters or breed rescue groups may not agree to take the dog. But they can be wrong. Many small dogs who have bitten can be rehabilitated.

Little dogs aren't right for everyone. And putting a dog in the wrong home could cause undue suffering for the dog.

How do you find the right home?

Advertise and screen applicants

- There are usually many homes available for small dogs. But are you prepared to do everything necessary to protect your dog from harm?
- Are you willing to do a home visit?
- Will you ask for references?
- Do you have a handle on your dog's needs, so you know what you are looking for in a new owner?
- Do you trust your observations of interactions between the dog and potential adopter?
- If your dog bonds intensely to her owners and draws her sense of security from them, would you place her with an owner who will be gone for long stretches?
- Would you place her with someone who is not protective and caretaking?
- Will the dog's needs be met in the new situation as well or better than in your own home?

Breed rescue groups

- If you don't think you can handle screening, or cannot rehome the dog yourself because of your situation, you might want to consider breed rescue.
- Many Toy dog rescue groups are excellent. They are quite good about getting purebreds out of shelters, fostering them and rehoming them. They know how to evaluate small dogs. But we encourage you to do some research and ask some of the following questions before turning a dog over to anyone.
- How long have they been doing rescue work?
- What screening is there for adoptive homes?
- What do they do with a small dog who is frightened and growls and snaps at humans?
- What will they do if your dog is afraid of the other dogs?
- Do they have foster homes?
- How will they decide who fosters your dog?

- Can they give you an idea of how long the dog will be in foster care before he goes to his forever home?
- What are dogs fed while in rescue?
- If yours is a mixed breed, ask: do they take in mixed breed dogs?
- What steps do they take to modify behavior problems?

Shelters

- Please, do what you can to spare your small dog the experience of a shelter.
- Most little dogs know how small they are and feel vulnerable. Nowhere can this be more obvious than in the shelter environment.
- Small dogs are typically accustomed to being pampered and loved. Suddenly, they're abandoned.
- Small dogs lose body heat more rapidly than larger dogs. A cold dog run in a shelter, with its cement floor, is a difficult change for any dog, let alone a small one.
- The barking is also frightening, especially when it seems to echo in the room.
- Toy dogs may feel abandoned and terrified. It's very easy to intimidate these little dogs. Yet many of them are quite trusting of humans.
- Dogs who seem reactive will often change once they're in a more normal environment. The full-of-himself attitude is often a defense mechanism for a small dog.
- Some of these breeds are quite soft and appear to have their feelings hurt very easily. It's far too easy to ruin one of these little dogs in a shelter if he is handled by someone who doesn't understand small dog issues and isn't willing to learn.
- It's important to get dogs out of the shelter environment as quickly as possible. Fortunately, small dogs are in demand and move out of shelters quite quickly.

Special considerations for Toy dogs in breed rescue and shelters

Temperament testing is valuable.

- It helps identify potential problems. But temperament testing for small dogs may not yield reliable results.
- Dogs who show aggression because they are frightened and mistrustful might be better companions than temperament testing may indicate, especially if they are capable of bonding with humans.

History-taking is important.

- Has the dog had the emotional experience of being unloved, not wanted, unprotected? This can be devastating to a Toy dog.
- Was the dog properly socialized before the age of 12 weeks? It is sometimes possible to make up for inadequate socialization.

Foster homes are invaluable.

- But they can be overwhelming for dogs. There are usually other dogs, and the small dog who has not learned how to compete for resources or survive amid activity may not adapt well in foster care.
- However, foster care provides many small dogs with a great opportunity to practice better behaviors.

What a Toy dog needs

Emotional issues

- Emotional issues can arise if the need to feel safe and protected by humans is not met.
- Issues may vary by breed and individual dog.
- Small dogs seek protection because of their size.
- Different dogs have different needs for bonding. For some, the bonding is intense.

Socialization

- It's important to properly socialize, but not overwhelm, the small dog, starting before the age of 12 weeks

Health care

- Administering eye or ear medication to a Toy or small dog can become an issue if the dog perceives a large (to the dog) hand moving rapidly toward her as something intimidating.
- Small dogs are predisposed to a collapsing trachea. If the dog doesn't already have this condition, it can be triggered by pressure applied to that area, which can make a collar a potential health risk. You can do considerable damage by using the wrong tools. We recommend harnesses for most small dogs.
- Italian Greyhounds, because of their unique body structure, need either a harness made specifically for the dog, or a Martingale collar. The needle-nose muzzle of an Italian Greyhound can easily slip through any other kind of collar, and the average harness will not fit them properly.

Diet

- It's important that the small dog eat a complete and balanced diet, that kibble pieces not be too large for the dog to chew, and that fat consumption is carefully watched—especially in Yorkshire Terriers, who have a predisposition to pancreatitis.
- Small dog owners tend to make food an issue, creating a picky dog.

Treats

- Treats should not be large, but small and low-fat, and figured into the dog's total food consumption for the day.
- When the dog wants the owner's attention, tossing the dog a cookie in place of valuable bonding time sends the wrong message and will create weight problems. For example, a 1-pound weight gain in a 4-pound dog is a gain of 25% of the dog's body weight.

Typical behavior problems: identification, management and modification

House training

- The predominant reason small dogs are turned in to shelters is problems with housetraining.
- Most people do not seriously train their little dogs. And little dogs do have special requirements when it comes to house training.
- It often takes a full year before Toy dogs are reliably house trained.

Grooming issues

- Too many people buy a coated dog and then don't keep up with the grooming. The dog's coat then becomes matted.

- It's painful to remove the mats. It's often better to clip the dog's coat down and begin again with short, positive grooming sessions, moving very slowly.

Resource guarding

- Small dogs often have food issues. They're too often fussed over and hand-fed.
- Do not interrupt a dog who is eating or take his dish away. This old saw for testing behavior is unnecessary; it proves nothing about the small dog's long-term ability to adapt. There are other ways to discover if the dog is a resource guarder.
- Teaching a simple game of "trade you!" can resolve many resource guarding issues.

Growling, snapping

- As noted above, this behavior can generally be modified.

Working with Toy dogs and other small breeds requires patience. One is always walking a fine line. The dog needs to know that he has four feet and can use them, but still needs to be close to humans. The Toy dog who draws her sense of security from humans needs extra measures of protection. Small dogs can't be babied, but they do need special consideration.

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