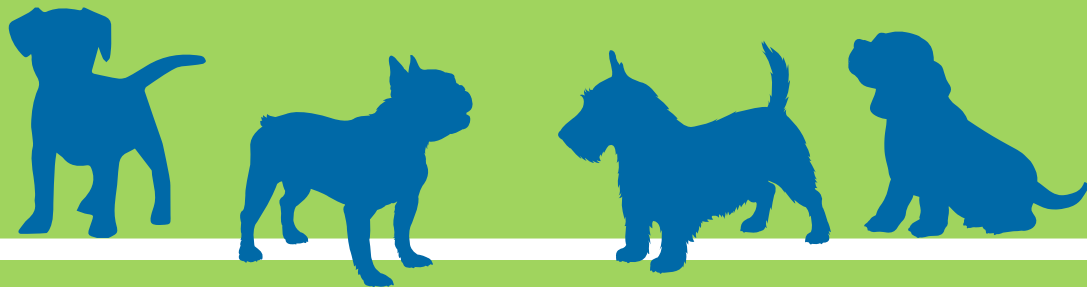




# Buying and Caring for a Puppy



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Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
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The purpose of this document is to act as a reference document on the subject matter of 'buying and caring for a puppy'.

The contents are laid out as follows:

- Introduction (including animal welfare in Northern Ireland);
- Part 1: decisions to make  
(from deciding whether to buy a puppy, to helping your new dog settle-in)  
(e.g. research tips, finding the right breed for you, understanding dog behaviour);
- Part 2: responsibilities of dog owners (e.g. licensing, control, and welfare); and
- Further information.



# Introduction

Deciding whether to get a puppy or dog is a big decision. It is advisable, before purchasing a puppy, to give it proper thought and to carry out some research.

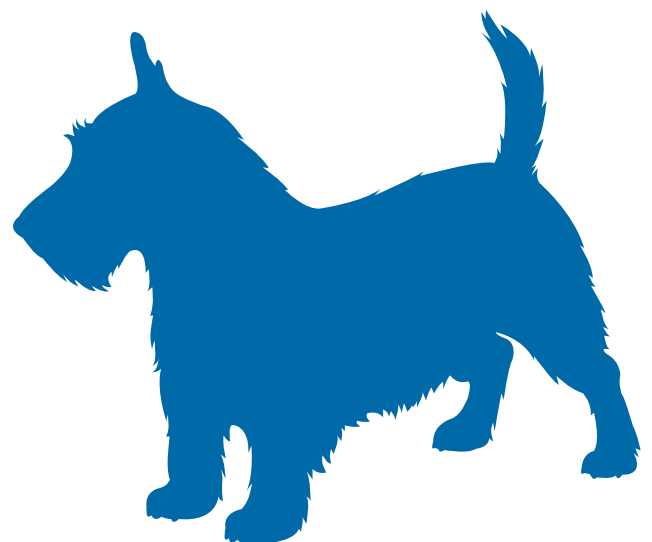
Anyone who decides to get a dog becomes responsible for that animal and will need to know about the legal requirements of owning a dog.

**Part 1** (Decisions to make) of this reference document (pages 4 to 8) sets out information on:

- the importance of research, before deciding to buy a puppy/dog;
- finding the right dog breed;
- deciding where to get your new puppy/dog;
- finding a healthy, happy dog;
- collecting your new dog and bringing it home;
- helping your new dog settle-in to its new home; and
- understanding dog behaviour.

**Part 2** (Responsibilities of dog owners) of this reference document (pages 9 to 11) sets out responsibilities that dog owners have, regarding:

- licensing the dog;
- keeping the dog under proper control; and
- meeting the welfare needs of the dog.



# Part 1 - Decisions to make

*(from deciding whether to buy a puppy, to helping your new dog settle-in)*

## **The importance of research, before deciding to buy a puppy/dog**

A responsible owner will first think long and hard about buying a puppy/dog. A rash decision may cause distress and suffering to the animal, and could cost the owner a lot more than anticipated. A puppy will soon become an adult dog that could live for about 13 years or longer.

It is advisable to do some research before buying a dog. Some things to consider are listed below.

### *Lifestyle*

- does your lifestyle, such as how you spend your days and evenings, mean that you can offer a dog the things it needs?
- can you make time to spend with your dog?

### *Environment*

- is your environment safe for a dog?
- do you have a safe and secure place for your dog to stay?
- will a dog enjoy staying in your environment?

### *Exercise, training, play*

- do you know how much exercise, training and play a growing puppy, or dog, needs?
- can you make sure a puppy/dog gets enough exercise, training, and play?

### *Doggy behaviour*

- do you know how different breeds behave?
- do you know how a puppy might behave when it grows into an adult?
- do you know if any breeds are really friendly?
- do you know if any breeds are very shy?
- do you know if any breeds are aggressive?
- do you know if any breeds won't like to be near other breeds, or other animals?
- do you know what a particular behaviour means? i.e. when a dog behaves in a certain way, are you confident that you know what it needs?



## Finding the right dog breed for you

There are hundreds of different breeds of dogs. Each breed has its own characteristics, and knowing about these will help choose the dog that is right for you. It is important to remember however, that all dogs are individuals and there is no guarantee that a particular dog will demonstrate characteristics specific to its breed.

### *Examples of dog breed characteristics to consider:*

- Adapts to living in a flat or apartment  
some breeds are quiet and calm, while others are high-energy.
- Affectionate with family  
some breeds are independent and aloof, while others bond closely with the family.
- Child-friendly  
some breeds are gentle with children, and cope well with lots of hugs. Other breeds are quite snappy and aren't child (or family) friendly.
- Dog-friendly  
some breeds may try to attack or dominate other breeds, while others prefer to play.
- Energy levels  
some breeds have lots of energy and need lots of exercise and mental stimulation. Other breeds will prefer to doze for most of the day.
- Exercise needs  
some breeds will be happy with a slow stroll, while others prefer vigorous exercise.
- Prey drive  
some breeds have an inborn desire to chase and sometimes kill other animals. Anything speeding by, for example cats, squirrels and even cars, can trigger that instinct.

### *Other characteristics to explore and consider:*

- amount of shedding/casting of its hair;
- drooling potential;
- easy to groom;
- easy to train;
- friendly towards strangers;
- general health;
- good for novice owners;
- intelligence;
- intensity;
- potential for mouthiness;
- potential for playfulness;
- potential for weight gain;
- sensitivity level;
- size;
- tendency to bark or howl;
- tolerates being alone;
- tolerates cold weather;
- tolerates hot weather; and
- wanderlust potential.

## Deciding where to get your new puppy/dog

Once you have decided that you are able to offer a dog the time, money and commitment that it needs, consideration should be given to where to get the dog.

### *Re-homing an unwanted puppy*

There are hundreds of stray and unwanted dogs, available for rehoming, kept in District Council dog pounds, and rehoming charities/organisations.

### *Buying a new puppy*

Puppies are available for sale from breeders or private sales. Some breeders/sellers advertise on the internet.

It is advisable to buy your puppy/dog from a responsible breeder, or seller. These people will have made sure that the puppy has had the best start in life. This is important, because how puppies have been bred and raised can have a lifelong effect.

Irresponsible breeders, or sellers, also offer puppies for sale. These people may not have looked after the puppies properly, and may only be interested in making as much money as possible. This could mean that you end up buying a puppy that is very sick, or a puppy that has been traumatised.

### *Finding a responsible breeder, or seller.*

The following advice will help make sure you are buying a puppy from a responsible breeder:

- Only buy a puppy aged at least 8 weeks old, and make sure you see it with its mother.
- Make sure the breeder/seller can give you an official pedigree detailing the ancestry of the puppy's father and mother.
- Make sure the breeder/seller can give you important details about the specific health requirements of your puppy, such as which vaccinations it has been given and which ones it is yet to have.
- Make sure the breeder/seller can give you as much information as possible about the puppy.
- If the puppy does not originate from the place of purchase, ask where it came from and try to obtain its previous history. Purchasing from an illegal breeder may mean that your new puppy was illegally imported into Northern Ireland.
- Make sure the breeder has prepared the puppy for the world around it. This is called 'socialisation' and could include activities like gently handling the puppy; introducing it to noise and varieties of human contact; and mixing it with other puppies.



## *Buying a puppy that was born outside of Northern Ireland, or Great Britain.*

If you are buying a puppy that was born outside of Northern Ireland, or Great Britain, it must:

- be at least 15 weeks old;
- have been microchipped;
- have been vaccinated against rabies;
- have been treated for tapeworm (unless the dog came directly from Finland, Republic of Ireland, Malta or Norway); and
- have a pet passport or a veterinary certificate confirming that the dog was vaccinated against rabies at the right age and according to the manufacturers data sheet, and that it has been treated for tapeworm.

## **Finding a healthy, happy dog**

When you have decided which breed is right for you, and decided where to get your dog, you will be ready to choose your particular dog.

To make sure that you choose a dog that is healthy and happy:

- eyes should be clear and bright, with no sign of dirt or redness;
- ears should be clean, with no smell;
- nose should be cold and slightly wet;
- mouth should be clean, with white teeth and pink gums;
- breathing should be quiet, not laboured;
- ribs should not be visible;
- fur should be shiny and soft, with no fleas;
- skin should be clean and dry, with no signs of soreness;
- bottom should be clean and dry; and
- legs should be strong and sturdy, with no limping or difficulty walking.

## **Collecting your new puppy/dog and bringing it home**

When you have chosen your new dog, you will need to take it home. For its journey to its new home, it will need a comfortable dog carrier and a cosy blanket. For a longer journey, it will also need water and food, and rest stops.

## Helping your new puppy/dog settle-in to its new home

When you have taken your new dog to its new home, make it as relaxed as possible:

- settle your new dog into its new environment;
- try to minimise exposure to loud noises;
- don't let children or adults handle the dog too much if it's nervous;
- if the dog shows signs of distress sit quietly and comfort it;
- ensure you follow advice the breeder/seller gives you regarding 'socialisation' – preparing the puppy for the world around them.

## Understanding dog behaviour

Your dog's body language can help you to understand how it is feeling.

### *Three dogs that could be happy*

- Dog has a relaxed body posture, smooth hair, mouth open and relaxed, ears in natural position, wagging tail, eyes normal shape.
- Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, eyes normal shape, ears in natural position, may be barking excitedly.
- Dog's weight is distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, tail wagging, face is interested and alert, relaxed and mouth open.

### *Three dogs that could be worried*

- Dog is standing but body posture and head position is low. Tail is tucked under, ears are back and dog is yawning.
- Dog is lying down and avoiding eye contact or turning head away from you and lip licking, and ears are back.
- Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears are back, tail tucked away, not making eye contact, yawning, raising a front paw.

### *Three dogs that could be angry or very unhappy*

- Dog is standing with a stiffened body posture, weight forward, ears are up, hair raised, eyes looking at you, pupils dark & enlarged, tail is up and stiff, wrinkled nose.
- Dog is lying down cowering, ears flat, teeth showing, tail down between legs.
- Dog is standing with body down and weight towards the back, head is tilted upwards, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth exposed, eyes staring, ears back and down, snarling.





## Part 2 - Responsibilities of dog owners

In Northern Ireland, there are various pieces of legislation that make provision for animals in general, and dogs in particular. A responsible dog owner will need to know about these, in order to be aware of his rights and responsibilities, and in order to protect himself and the dog.

A person who owns a dog has certain responsibilities regarding:

- licensing the dog;
- keeping the dog under proper control; and
- meeting the welfare needs of the dog.

### *Licensing and microchipping*

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for licensing of dogs. A person must have a licence to keep a dog. Licences are issued by District Councils. Before an owner applies for a licence, the dog must be microchipped. All dogs must be microchipped at eight weeks old.

### *Control*

This 1983 Order also makes provision for controlling a dog in public. For example, a responsible dog owner will not allow his dog to stray, and will also keep it under control where livestock is present.

### *Welfare*

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires a person who owns, or is responsible for a dog, even on a temporary basis, to care for it properly and take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare needs are met.

## What does the law say?

### *Licensing and microchipping*

It is against the law to own an unlicensed dog. There are some exceptions to this: two examples of dogs that do not need a licence are an assistance dog used by a disabled person; or a police dog.

A dog licence is valid for one year. A District Council will not issue a dog licence for a dog that is not microchipped.

A dog licence costs £12.50, and there are reduced fees for some dog owners. An example of a person who pays a reduced fee is a person aged over 65 years.

## *Control*

It is against the law to allow your dog to be unaccompanied and on land that you do not own, without permission of the person who owns that land.

It is against the law to allow your dog to be on any land where livestock are present and have a right to be there, unless your dog is under control.

It is against the law to allow your dog to attack or cause serious injury to a person, or to livestock. It is also against the law to allow your dog to behave in a way that makes a person worried that it might attack them.

## *Welfare*

It is against the law to:

- carry out an act that causes a dog to suffer unnecessarily; and
- fail to act and therefore cause a dog to suffer unnecessarily.

It is against the law to fail to ensure that the needs of an animal are met. These needs are:

- its need for a suitable environment;
- its need for a suitable diet;
- its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

## *Help with knowing how to care for animals*

DAERA has produced Codes of Practice to provide practical guidance on caring for particular animals. One of these is the “Dogs Code of Practice” and it provides information on how to meet the needs that are specific to dogs. The Code sets out minimum standards of care, and people are encouraged to exceed these minimum standards.

The Code can be accessed at the link listed below:

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-non-farmed-animals](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-non-farmed-animals)



## What happens if a person breaks the law?

### *Licensing*

Anyone who keeps a dog without a licence could have to pay a fine of up to £1,000.

### *Control*

Anyone who fails to keep proper control of his dog could have to pay a fine of up to £1,000. Failing to keep proper control of a dog includes things like allowing the dog to stray, or allowing the dog to worry livestock.

A District Council Dog Warden may seize a stray dog and take it to a Dog Pound. The dog will have to stay there until it has been re-claimed by its owner, or sold.

### *Welfare*

A District Council Animal Welfare Officer will investigate any complaint and then decide on action to take. Actions can include: giving advice on how to look after a dog; issuing warnings; and issuing legally binding Improvement Notices, for example, on how to take better care of your dog. In very serious cases, they can also take the dog into their possession.

The District Council can also decide to prosecute a person who has broken the law. This can lead to that person who broke the law being sentenced to:

- up to 12 months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £20,000 (summary conviction for causing unnecessary suffering);
- up to 5 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine (indictable conviction for causing unnecessary suffering); and
- up to 6 months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000 (summary conviction for failing to meet the needs of animals).



# Further information

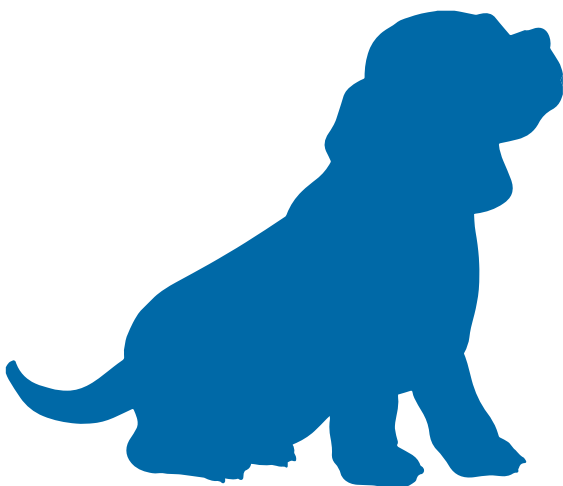
Other useful information is available at the following locations.

## The DAERA website

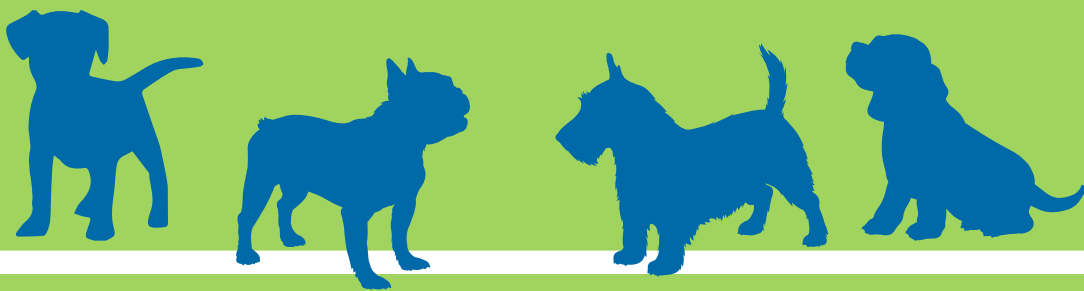
- Animal Welfare:  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare)
- Animal Welfare Quick Guide:  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/animal-welfare-enforcement-stat-quick-guide-final.PDF](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/animal-welfare-enforcement-stat-quick-guide-final.PDF)
- Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs (minimum standards of care):  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/dogs-code-of-practice.pdf](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/dogs-code-of-practice.pdf)

## NI Direct website

- Information on buying a dog, and responsible dog ownership:  
[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/buying-dog-and-responsible-dog-ownership](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/buying-dog-and-responsible-dog-ownership)
- Animal Welfare:  
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/animal-welfare>
- List of local Councils in Northern Ireland:  
(each Council will have further information on dogs)  
[www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland)



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