

GUIDELINES FOR PLACING YOUR COMPANION GERMAN SHEPHERD

Not all people like animals, or are kind to them.

There are many unpleasant uses to which animals are put. Animals can be and are:

- Used as “bait” to train fighting dogs to kill
- Used as food for snakes, or people
- Sold to labs for experimentation
- Sacrificed or tortured for occult purposes
- Abandoned in the country where they die of starvation, disease, predation from other animals and gunshot wounds from ranchers protecting their property
- Injured or killed by unsupervised children or other pets
- Maimed or killed by cars
- Irresponsibly dumped at the pound to be euthanized.

The only way to protect your German Shepherd from such an end is to ensure his/her future by carefully screening the new home. The decisions you make on your German Shepherd's behalf not only will determine whether he/she will have a happy home, but will, in fact determine whether the animal will live or die. One can always find someone to take an animal—finding a “good” home is a great deal harder. There are people who are in the business of acquiring animals for research and others who acquire large dogs who are then cruelly trained for sale as guard, attack or fighting dogs. These individuals often pretend to seek animals as family companions and bring children or senior citizens with them to gain your confidence. **DON'T THINK IT CAN'T HAPPEN TO YOU.** Always ask for identification. Legitimate callers will not object when you tell them why.

Your CAREFUL screening of prospects will provide the information you need to select a good home and ensure that the animal you place will still be cared for next year and even ten years from now. Don't be afraid to ask questions, to make stipulations or to say “no”. This pamphlet is designed to give you the tools necessary to evaluate a potential home and to make the best possible choice for your German Shepherd. The responsibility of your German Shepherd's future begins and ends with you.

YOUR FIRST STEP IN PLACING YOUR DOG IS TO CONTACT THE BREEDER YOU OBTAINED THE DOG FROM. THE BREEDER SHOULD EITHER TAKE THE DOG BACK OR ASSIST YOU, IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE, IN PLACING HIM. MANY BREEDERS HAVE PEOPLE WAITING FOR DOGS FROM THEIR BLOODLINES AND HAVE THE NETWORK IN PLACE TO READILY REHOME THE DOG.

1. MAKING YOUR PET ADOPTABLE.

- A. Take your German Shepherd to the veterinarian for a complete check up. A thoroughly vetted animal is a much more attractive adoption prospect.
 1. Tell your vet about any behavior problems the pet may have so that physical causes can be ruled out. Some behavior problems are caused by easily treatable health conditions. For example, house soiling can be caused by worms, diabetes, or urinary tract infection, to name a few.
 2. Bring all vaccinations up to date. Have the dog tested for heartworm if he is not already on year round preventative medication then start him on preventative medication.
 3. Have a stool sample checked for worms.

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4. If your dog is not spayed or neutered, **DO IT NOW!** It is much easier to adopt out a spayed/neutered pet. The major health benefits to spaying/neutering dogs are well documented. The risk of breast and ovarian cancer in females and prostate and testicular problems in males can be greatly reduced if not eliminated.
5. Spaying/neutering guarantees your dog will not end up with an unethical breeder/puppy mill. It is the best way to increase the odds that your dog will find a loving pet home where he will be treated as a best friend and family member.

Note: if money is a problem, talk to your vet. He/she may be willing to reduce the fees if you explain the situation. Or contact your local animal shelter for information about low cost spay/neuter programs.

- B. Groom your dog. No one wants to adopt a dog that is flea infested, smelly and unkempt.
 1. Get rid of any mats and tangles and give him a bath (in that order). Clean his ears, clip his toenails. If you cannot do this yourself, then take the dog to a groomer.
- C. Get rid of his rusty old choke chain, collar or rope. Put on a nice new buckle collar. If he needs a choke chain make sure it's the right size and put on properly. Have a nice leash on hand for him to go to his new home. Your dog has to make a nice impression on prospective adopters and that is easy when he is clean, groomed and well dressed.
- D. Correct behavioral problems. You cannot expect a new owner to readily accept an adult dog that isn't housebroken or trained. Be honest with someone inquiring about your dog. If you are trying to place an animal because it has behavior problems, do not expect the new owners to want to keep the pet anymore than you did. If you try to place such an animal into a new home, the chances are very great that it will either be returned, or its new owners will get rid of it. They may not be as careful as you about what they do with the animal if they decide not to keep it. If your dog has a behavioral problem that makes it unadoptable you have three options:
 - i. Keep it until you have corrected the problem and then adopt it out. Obtain professional help, if necessary. For information, contact your vet, local breed rescue, local German Shepherd Regional Club, local obedience classes, private trainers, animal behaviorist.
 - ii. Keep the animal permanently yourself
 - iii. Have the dog euthanized. If the problem is serious it is unfair to the new owners, very dangerous to the animal (who knows where it will wind up if no one loves it) and potentially dangerous to people and other pets to place it in another home. If you do not honestly believe that a new owner will be able to love the pet because it is so unpleasant to live with, the kindest, safest course of action to protect your dog from abuse is to humanely put it to sleep.
- E. Train the dog as much as possible. A nicely behaved pet will command the best home. If you are willing to take the time you can make an average pet into a real prize by obedience training it, or even by teaching it a few tricks.
- F. Be willing to accept the dog back into your home if the new home doesn't work out. Your dog has no chance to be happy in a home that doesn't truly want him. Although inconvenient for you this is the only way to protect your dog from being given away to a stranger—the new home may not be as careful as you about placing the dog should they decide not to keep it.

2. PLACING AN AD IN THE NEWSPAPER

- A. The trick to a good ad is writing one that will generate inquiries (while not misrepresenting the dog) and, at the same time, do some preliminary screening for you. You need a concise description of your dog, his needs, your requirements and your telephone number.

1. Include the following:

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Breed | 6. Selling points (characteristics) |
| 2. Color | 7. Pre-qualify homes (requirements) |
| 3. Sex | 8. Your first name |
| 4. Neutered or spayed | 9. Your telephone number |
| 5. Indication of age | |

HINT: if your dog is under one and a half state his age in months—he will be perceived as a young dog. If he is between one and a half and three, describe him as a young adult. If he is over three, describe him as an adult. There is a distinct advantage to adopting an older dog, and you may find it necessary to educate prospective owners.

2. Emphasize your dogs “selling points”. Keep physical descriptions brief and concentrate on personality traits and other advantages. Is he friendly, housebroken, obedience trained, loves kids and cats, rides well in cars? Don’t keep it secret, but don’t exaggerate either; knowing his name does not make a dog obedience trained.
3. By now you have decided on what kind of a home you are trying to obtain—target that audience. Pre-qualify homes by stating definite requirements in a positive manner:
- No cats
 - Fine with older kids, or fine with kids over 10
 - Quiet, mature family pet
 - Ideal for senior

Always state, “references required”. This lets people know that you are a concerned pet owner who wants to do right by his dog and the people can be prepared to answer a barrage of questions.

4. NEVER include the phrase “free to a good home”, even if it is true. In fact, don’t put any price at all. While it is true that “free” will generate a lot of calls, the quality of the callers is generally poor. Not stating a price gives you a lot of latitude. You can easily tell the wrong caller that the dog is \$1,000, and just as easily give the dog “free” to the perfect family on a fixed income, if you want to.

We recommend asking for a minimal adoption fee to help cover the expenses you’ve incurred for advertising, vet care and to give you an indication of the type of home you’ve found. Someone not willing to pay a small amount for a fully vetted, cared for dog may also cut corners financially in the future with regards to veterinary care or nutrition.

5. Include your telephone number. Instruct the person taking the ad to abbreviate as much as possible. Your ad should read something like this:

GERM. SHEP. Young adult, blk/tan, male, neutered. Friendly, housebroken. No cats. Fenced yd, Ref. Required. 123-4567

3. OTHER ADVERTISING

A. FLYER

Develop a flyer containing a picture of the dog (action shots are more interesting) and more detailed information. Copy these and post them at work and in veterinarian's offices, groomers, pet supply stores, supermarkets, obedience training classes, any other community bulletin boards. Follow up with phone calls and personal visits which include the dog, when possible and reasonable.

B. WORD OF MOUTH

Inform all your friends, co-workers, relatives, front desk staff of veterinarian's about the availability of the dog. Give everyone a flyer.

C. FREE PUBLICATIONS

Research local publications which may permit free advertising.

D. PHONE REFERRAL—RESCUE

List the animal as available with your local German Shepherd and All Breed Rescue Organizations to obtain phone referrals from them.

4. SCREENING APPLICANTS

A. Talking to prospective adopters can be frustrating and time consuming. Refer to the attached "Adoption Questionnaire" for examples of questions you might want to ask callers. Make copies and fill in the information as you speak to the callers. People usually talk easily about dogs and this information helps you pick out the right family.

1. Get the caller's name and number first in case you are disconnected.
2. Ask whether or not there are children and their ages. If the dog is not good with children, be up front with the caller. Almost without exception, young dogs (under 2) are a bad choice for a family with young children. The dog simply does not have the maturity to deal non-violently with the kind of play kids engage in. A large dog or a puppy that will become a large dog can easily injure a child in play and a small dog or young puppy can easily be hurt by a child. An adult dog whose disposition and behavior with children is proven as the best choice for a family with small kids. Don't waste your time or theirs.
3. Find out if they currently have other pets. If your dog is not good with cats, for example, forget it. Does your dog get along with dogs of the same sex? Neutering will not change aggressive tendencies so don't think that now that he is neutered he will get along with other males. Remember—you want this adoption to be permanent. So ask the right questions and make sure that your desire to place the dog does not cloud your good judgment.
 - a. Ask why they want a German Shepherd. Look for someone who wants a HOUSEHOLD COMPANION. Beware of people seeking a dog for guarding or breeding purposes. Guard dogs are often discarded when their usefulness is over, and the last thing you want to do is contribute to the overpopulation problem by allowing breeding. If someone wants the dog as a gift for a relative or friend insist that the person who will spend the next decade with the dog be involved in the selection.

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- b. If the family has no pets, or no dogs currently, find out if they have ever had any and what happened to them. The answer will give you an indication of the type of future your dog will face. People who have never had animals before should be advised of the considerable expense and responsibility involved in caring for them, including exercise, feed bills and veterinary needs.
- c. Stay away from anyone who has had a significant number of pets in a short period of time—it will be unlikely that your dog would last there long either. Someone who has had several animals who were either stolen, killed by cars, lost or given away is undoubtedly a poor prospect.
- d. How long ago did they have pets? Could a first time owner or someone who hasn't had a pet in a long time be able to handle your dog?
- e. Are they prepared to educate or re-educate your dog?
- f. If they have had a pet within the last year get the name of the animal and the vet they used. Call for a reference.
- g. Does the family own the home they live in? Are they renting? If so, does their lease allow pets? Get the name of the landlord or condo association and make sure that an animal is allowed.
- h. Do they have a fenced yard? How tall and what kind? People without an enclosed yard can allow the dog to run loose, which is illegal and dangerous, or chain the dog up which is a frustrating, desolate existence. Tell them you will want to see the yard. Get their address and check it out. Make sure the address actually exists and that the neighborhood seems suitable.
- i. Where will they keep the dog? Be wary of people who talk about having the dog live in the garage, on the back porch, in the yard or in the basement. They are probably not interested in making the animal a household companion. Dogs being a pack animal require a tremendous amount of human interaction. Unless the family spends ten hours a day in the backyard an intention to keep the dog outside at all times is an indication that the dog will be isolated and alone most of its lifetime.
- j. How much time do they have to spend with a dog? People in situations where the dog will be unsupervised for more than a few hours a day should not adopt a young animal (one under several months of age) and are very likely to experience behavior problems that arise from boredom and lack of timely discipline. People with young children are unlikely to have time to spend with a dog. Many parents seek a pet thinking that the pet and the children will entertain each other. They find that young children quickly lose interest in the pet; the pet has a great need for the mature interaction that only adults can give it and the pet not only doesn't make less work for them but actually makes more.
- k. Who will have primary responsibility for the dog? Will the adults in the family be responsible for the daily care of the pet? Its fine for children to participate in the care of the animal, but the ultimate responsibility must always rest with an adult.

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- l. If they move or travel, what will happen? Caring for an animal is a 10-15 year commitment. Remind prospects they may have to board animals during vacations and must plan for their needs if contemplating a move.
 - m. Get two personal references. Even someone who does not now nor has ever owned a pet should know two people who can vouch for what kind of human being they are.
 - n. Will they let you do a home interview?
4. Questions for the vet
 - a. Explain that John and Jane Doe have asked to adopt your dog and you want to make sure the dog will get a good home. Most vets are happy to cooperate.
 - b. Ask whether their pets get regular vaccinations and annual stool checks.
 - c. Is their dog on year round heartworm preventative?
 - d. Were the pets spayed or neutered?
 - e. If the answers are positive, you can be reasonably sure that the same will be done for your pet.
6. Questions for personal references
 - a. How long have they known the Does?
 - b. Do they have any pets now?
 - c. Have they had any pets in the past that you know of?
 - d. Are their pets well cared for?
 - e. Is their yard fenced in? (This will tell you just how well they know each other. If you get a different answer than what you expect, you'll have to do some further investigating)
 - f. If they were placing one of their own pets, would they give it to the Does?
7. If the preliminary screening and reference calls are positive, call the family and make an appointment for them to see your dog. Let them know you will not make any final decision until all applicants have been screened. The dog will be friendliest to strangers when it's in a familiar environment so it's best to do this in your own home. Encourage them to come when all family members can be present—it's a family decision, and it gives you a chance to meet all the people who will be handling your pet and make sure it's a unanimous decision to get the pet in the first place.
8. At the interview, watch how they act with your dog. Do they seem to approach the animal in an experienced way? Are they sensitive to the animal's reaction to them? Do they supervise children and teach them to be gentle and patient? Do the kids seem like they respect the pet?

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9. If you and your dog like them, and they like you and your dog, set up a time to visit their home with the dog. Do not allow them to take the dog without first seeing their home. This is the only way you can verify who they say they are. If it appears that something may not work out or something gives you a bad feeling, take the dog back with you.
10. If the adopting family already has a dog you will want the dogs to meet on neutral territory, like a park. Most dogs will resent a strange dog on their territory, and your dog's first impression of other dogs is hard to change. Your best chance of successful relations between the dogs is ALWAYS on neutral ground.
11. If everything seems positive and you decide to place the dog with them, deliver the dog and remind them of the following:
 - a. Even a housebroken dog will have an accident or two within the first few days. Suggest using a crate as a housebreaking tool. Rehoming is very stressful on the dog and a period of adjustment and even mourning will occur.
 - b. The average dog takes one to three days to settle in. Some may take longer. Suggest the new owners keep the dog's schedule as close as possible to its usual one for the first few days. Dogs need a period of adjustment just like humans do when we are relocated.
 - c. Don't force the dog into anything like a bath or obedience exercises until it has had time to settle in a bit.
12. Make sure the family understands the nature of the commitment they are making to your dog. Tell the new family that you want to keep in touch to make sure that everything is working out okay and will call in a few days if they have not called you. Tell them to call if there are any questions or problems. Remind them the dog is to be returned to you if it doesn't work out.
13. Provide the following:
 - a. Written list of any medications and feeding instructions (include some of his food in the adoption package)
 - b. Write down the dog's schedule; when it normally eats exercises and goes out, etc.
 - c. Send a favorite toy or blanket with the dog to make him feel more secure in his new surroundings
 - d. Be sure the dog is wearing an ID tag with your number and the number of the new owner. Advise the new owner not to leave the dog unattended; a sense of belonging takes time to develop.
 - e. Give the new family copies of all records, i.e.: vaccinations, certificates, pedigrees, etc. Wait until the trial period is completed to sign over the AKC registration if applicable and to give them the originals.
 - f. List the names and numbers of training classes/trainers and your local breed rescue and encourage the new owners to call rescue for general help and advice.

- g. Have the family sign an informal adoption agreement which includes a waiver of liability. (You should do this to protect yourself even if the dog has never bitten anyone or destroyed any property. You have no crystal ball to enable you to predict what the dog might do in the future.) NOTE: a waiver of liability will not protect you if you have misrepresented the dog. If you think your dog may injure anyone, you should not be placing him in a new home.

5. WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO FIND THAT "GOOD HOME"

- A. Don't rush into a placement because you are pressured by time. Consult with rescue organizations to determine other options.

DO NOT:

Sell or give your dog to a pet shop. Persons operating pet stores are concerned with running a profit-making business and often have little or no concern about what happens to the animals after they leave the store. Animals are sold to people buying on impulse and to people who are unfit to care for an animal.

Abandon your dog in the country or on the streets where they face a slow death by disease, exposure, starvation, being crushed under the wheels of a car or the painful living death of negligence or cruelty.

- B. If your German Shepherd friend is old please consider that it takes extra time to place an elderly or ill pet. Remember, an animal that has given you the best he had to offer over the years deserves nothing less than the extra effort it takes to find a good home. Several programs are available. The Thulani Program offers a final home for German Shepherds with a limited life expectancy. There are also senior dog rescue groups, Senior Dogs for Senior Citizens, Stay At Home Rescue and senior dog sanctuaries.