



Information Overview

Adoption Program Philosophy

At Austin Pets Alive!, we believe that open, progressive adoption policies save lives. Our goal is to match pets to homes which are good fits while providing exemplary customer service that creates community support and turns visitors into animal advocates and lifelong adopters.

Our goal is to have an open, honest conversation with potential adopters that is both more encompassing than relying on an adoption application alone, but also less confrontational and judgmental to the potential adopter. Open also means we, the organization, are open and honest with the adopter about our process and the pets within our care.

The application process begins the moment a visitor arrives and is greeted by an adoption counselor. By asking what type of pet the visitor may be interested in, information is obtained as to the applicant and the environment, experience level of the adopter, history of pet ownership, other pets in the home, etc - all before applicant even considers completing an application. This allows staff to steer the visitor to certain pets who may be a match for the visitor. Conversely, if the adopter is focused on a pet we believe would be a poor match, we strive to disclose why this may be a poor match *before* the adopter has spent a long time with the pet and would then be disappointed after falling in love.

The application (questionnaire) itself is a launching pad for conversation only. It is not an end-all where a wrong answer disqualifies an applicant. Questions on the application are restricted to only areas we deem very valuable. We will not ask applicants what their job title is, their salary, or make lists of every pet he or she has ever owned. Our areas of concern lie in the home being a good fit for the individual animal and the adopter's ability and desire to provide a safe, loving home. To that end, we only ask questions which address these major areas.

Our philosophy from the arrival of a visitor is that the visitor is a good person who came to an animal shelter today to do the right thing: adopt a shelter pet or support the organization. When the adoption process starts, we come from a place of "yes". This means we believe that when you apply to adopt, we start from the position that the visitor is going home with that pet today unless the adopter presents a reason otherwise that cannot be overcome.

Even if the adopter presents a potential barrier to adoption, we will come from a place of education versus denial or judgement. Not everyone has all the experience and knowledge we do from working in animal rescue our entire lives. So we try to educate versus assume the worst in a person if a concern occurs. When discussing a concern, we also believe in being honest - while sensitive and professional - when expressing those concerns to an adopter. If we are judging someone to be an unfit adopter, we believe that person has the right to respond and maybe even change our minds!

We do not perform home checks for routine adoptions as data and common sense have long since dictated that these are not only ineffective and resource intensive, but are a barrier to adoptions.

We perform same-day adoptions, meaning the day you adopt a pet, the pet will go home with you. Again, waiting periods have proven to do nothing more than be a barrier to adoption.

We do not contact landlords to ensure pet deposits have been paid or that you are allowed to have pets. In this case, the adopter is the one taking all the risk while there is no risk to the pet. (In the worst case, the pet is returned to APA!, which is not a such a bad thing.)

Data Driven Policies

These policies on open and progressive adoption policies are not just anecdotal; multiple studies exist that dispel long held myths surrounding adoptions:

- National Best Practice, Humane Society of the US: Adopter's Welcome Manual. Animalsheltering.org
- Do free adoptions increase the risk of poor care and abandonment? Results from a recent study conducted by researchers at Maddie's® Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida say no. Weiss, E., Gramann, S. (2009). A Comparison of Attachment Levels of Adopters of Cats: Fee Based Adoptions Versus Free Adoptions. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 12:360-70. Wilson, J., Levy, J., Scott, H.M., Zeidman, S. (2011). Adoption Fee Amount and Other Factors Associated with Pet Adoption Success. UF Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program.
- Do Policy Based Adoptions Increase the Care a Pet Receives? An Exploration of a Shift to Conversation Based Adoptions at One Shelter. Weiss, E. , Gramann, S. , Dolan, E. , Scotto, J. and Slater, M. (2014). *Open Journal of Animal Sciences*, 4, 313-322. doi:
- Should Dogs and Cats be Given as Gifts? Weiss et al. 2013. *Animals* 3, 995-1001.
- Shelter adoption lore once held that pets acquired around holidays were more likely to be returned after the glow of the holidays passed. This myth has been solidly debunked. <https://millioncatchallenge.org/resources/removing-barriers-to-adoption>



3 Guides to Decision Making: Jacksonville Humane Society

1. Will it produce goodwill with the individual and with the community?
2. Is it in the best interest of the animal's health and well-being?
3. Is it in support of our mission and goals for a no kill community?