



Animal Welfare League  
of Frederick County

## “I have to get rid of my pet.”

No rescue person wants to hear those words. But we do, all too often. And, we wish we could help. However, most independent rescue groups aren't equipped to take in owner give ups. We rescue animals on death row in area shelters or those abandoned along the roadside. We rescue the cruelty cases and the old and infirmed. We rescue the kittens born in a shed to a feral mom. So, if you have a companion animal you feel you can no longer care for, please try some of the following steps to either keep the animal in your home or find a home for your companion on your own.

**If you adopted your companion from a rescue group**, contact them first. If your animal is a purebred, find breed rescue groups in your area who may be able to take in your animal.

**If you want to give up your animal for any of the following reasons, please know there are solutions that can help you maintain your companion in your home for his or her full life span.**

- **Allergies** - Allergic reactions can be controlled through medication and/or diet. Visit your doctor before you decide to give up your companion. Also, you can bathe your animal in distilled water (no need for sudsing, just pour the water over the animal and work through his or her coat). Distilled water removes the allergens from your companion animal.
- **Undesirable Behavior** - In most cases, the problems are quite solvable if you are patient and consistent in your treatment of the situation. If you have a dog, take him or her to obedience class. Just like an unruly child, an unruly dog needs guidance, positive discipline, and consistency. Make sure you have created an environment in which your animal has few chances to misbehave; for example, remove shoes from the floor if your animal likes to chew on them. Do not blame the animal for your behavior lapses.
- **Cat Scratching** - If your cat is scratching furniture, provide him or her with appropriate surfaces (cardboard, sisal or carpeted cat scratching boards, trees) and treat them with catnip. Trim your cat's claws on a regular basis. Cover furniture with throws to protect them. Use double-faced tape on edges of things kitty climbs on or scratches. Use furniture corner covers which can be bought at pet stores.
- **House Soiling** - If you leave your dog alone for long periods of time, he or she will have to relieve his or her bladder. However, most dogs will not soil their “home” if their home is small enough. Invest in a crate of an appropriate size for your dog so that he or she can keep clean and you can come home to a dog ready to go outside to potty. Crates have been proven over and over to be effective.



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- **Cat Not Using Litter Box** - If your cat isn't using the litter box, you might ask yourself these questions: How often do I clean out the box? Is the box in a high traffic area? Do I have enough litter boxes for the number of cats in the house (have one more box than the total number of cats). Have I changed brands of litter? All of these might cause litter box accidents. If there have been no household changes to trigger this behavior, a trip to the vet is in order. Your cat may have feline lower urinary tract disease (cystitis) and needs treatment immediately. Do not delay; your cat could die if he or she has this disease and is not treated. Never smack an animal for making a mistake. Never push his or her nose in the mess.
- **Aggressive Behavior** – While you may need obedience training and professional assistance to help you handle this issue, you might start by asking yourself some basic questions, such as: Does someone in your home rough-house with the animal, play tug-of-war, or yell at the animal? Is there loud boisterous yelling going on in your home between the humans? If children are in the household, are they poking, teasing, or tormenting the animal? Maybe your animal's behavior is a reflection of the behaviors of your household. If so, you need to change those behaviors immediately. Then, you must spend quality time playing with your animal in a gentle manner.
- **Moving** - If you are planning a move, make sure you take enough time to investigate ways to transport your animal, whether the move is across town or across the country. Your companion animal is part of your family and not a disposable entity that can be left behind with a few empty cardboard boxes. And, just a note, if you do in fact abandon your animal when you move, you can, depending on the jurisdiction, be charged with animal cruelty.

If none of the above helps, here are some suggestions to help you find a new home for your companion. But remember, for the same reason you are getting rid of your companion, others may do the same to him or her in the future. You must carefully screen any new home if you want to be as responsible toward your companion as you can at this time in his or her life.

- Make sure all vet work has been done on the animal to make him or her more adoptable. Neuter or spay your animal and make sure he or she is up-to-date on shots.
- Take photos of your animal and create an attractive flyer that includes the name, breed, age, sex, vet work, best qualities, type of home best suited to the animal, and any other items of interest about him or her. Post these flyers where you think responsible people will look—animal hospitals/vets, pet stores, community centers, bulletin boards, adult education facilities, your workplace.
- Screen callers. Try to find someone who truly cares. Make them understand the time commitment involved in caring for your companion. Look for someone who wants an



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animal to be part of his or her family as a household companion rather than a guard dog or a gift for a third party.

- Find out the person's experience with companion animals. Have they had any in the past, what happened to them? Do they have animals now? Get the phone number of their vet and check to see if they are taking good medical care of their animal. Give them an idea of how much it costs to feed the animal and give the animal routine medical care (heartworm pills, for example).
- Will the animal have access to the out of doors when no one is home? Is this a safe arrangement? Where will the animal be during the day, the evening, when no one is home, sleeping?
- If they are renters, ask to see their lease or speak with their landlord to find out if animals are allowed and if there are any restrictions on the numbers and sizes of the animals they may have.
- Make sure all members of the household have met the animal. Do they all want this animal in their home? If not, forego this family. If children reside in the home, what are their ages, how well behaved are they around your animal? Will they be responsible for any of the care of the animal? If so, what and are they capable of such care?
- Once you have decided to release your animal to an adopter, you may want to have them fill out a contract stating their intentions to keep the animal and what they should do if they can no longer be responsible. Charge an adoption fee even if nominal as a way to seal the contract. Never offer your animal "free to good home." People who answer these ads may not be the upstanding individuals they portray themselves to be. Once they have your animal they may sell him or her to a research laboratory, a dog fighting ring, or some other dangerous place.
- Finally, take the time to deliver the animal to the new home. Don't hand over your animal until you are completely satisfied. If you feel uncomfortable, do not leave your animal.

If you resort to giving your animal up to a shelter where there is the chance your animal may be euthanized, put your name down on the adoption waiting list to give your animal an extra chance so at least you'll be called before he or she is euthanized. While some animals are lucky enough to be adopted from shelters, don't delude yourself; most animals in most shelters are killed within days because there are too few adopters for the thousands of worthy animals hoping for a good home.