



ADOPTION GUIDELINES

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

Open adoptions address this reality by doing away with rigid policies and adoption applications and instead focusing on conversations designed to help anyone walking into a shelter feel respected, and anyone walking out to be more educated, and hopefully, with a pet to love.

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 adoption process begins the moment a visitor arrives and is greeted by an adoption counselor. By asking what type of animal 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 animals in the home, etc - all before applicant even considers completing an application. This allows staff to steer the visitor to certain animal who may be a match for the visitor. Conversely, if the adopter is focused on an animal 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 animal and would then be disappointed after falling in love with the animal.

The application 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 an animal, 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



Policy

those concerns to an adopter. If we are judging someone to be an unfit adopter, we believe that a 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 as long as he or she has been spayed or neutered. 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 TLHS, which is not such a bad thing and provides us valuable information of how the pet does in a home environment.)

TLHS does not discriminate against breeds or create unnecessary hurdles to adoptions for our adopters or pets. We believe all breeds are equally deserving of a safe home with families that love them. We will match an animal with the person or family that is best for the animal. TLHS has breed specific legislation (BSL) and information available for adopters or members of the community who would like to learn more. Example: A dog that will chase cats will not be able to live in a home with cats.

TLHS will not allow an adopter to leave with an animal if the adopter or person picking up intends to take the animal home in extreme weather in the bed of a truck or trailer or in the back of a truck loose/tethered.

All cats/kittens going home with an adopter must leave in a cat/pet carrier. If the adopter does not have one at the time of adoption, he/she will need to purchase one prior to pickup or may purchase a cardboard pet carrier provided by TLHS staff for a fee of \$5.00. TLHS will not allow an adopter to leave with a cat/kitten if the adopter or person picking up intends to walk out the door with the animal in their arms, in a blanket, or on a leash/collar. These are unacceptable means of transporting a cat/kitten safely to its new home.

TLHS will not adopt animals as "gifts." The person who will be owning the animal must be willing to complete the adoption process in person. If a person has a friend/family member who has expressed interest in adopting an animal from TLHS, we advise that a gift certificate is purchased from a TLHS staff member to cover a portion of the adoption fee. Our certificate purchases are considered a donation to TLHS and are not refundable. Please note that adoption prices do vary and that the amount in which you purchase a gift certificate does not guarantee that the whole adoption fee has been covered or that presenting a gift certificate guarantees an adoption approval.

TLHS can assist an adopter in arranging transport through a transport service for animals adopted to individuals outside the state of Mississippi. However, in these special circumstances, the adopter must be willing to comply with all other adoption policy guidelines. The adopter will be responsible for securing payment and receiving arrangements through the transport service prior to release of the animal from TLHS. Please note that any animal crossing state lines must be able to pass a health certificate



Policy

examination by a TLHS veterinarian the day of transport. TLHS may not be able to hold an animal due to need for space.

Pets can be placed on a "hold" by a potential adopter. Holds on a pet require a \$25 non-refundable donation to TLHS and can be placed over the phone. The hold is only good until the end of the next day of business. Should the person that placed the hold not return or secure the adoption arrangements by the end of the next business day, the animal is made immediately available. Holds are allowed just once per person.

If an adopter is interested in adopting a TLHS dog/puppy, we advise that he/she bring current dogs to our facility for a meet and greet. Not all pets get along and we want all parties involved to have a good experience upon arriving at home. Please note that the adopter's current pet will not be able to have contact with any of our animals or enter the building unless it is current on vaccinations through a veterinarian (distemper/parvo, kennel cough, and rabies). TLHS stands by this policy to ensure the best biosecurity for animals in our care as possible but also to not expose the adopter's pet to any contagions that it may not be protected against. A veterinary clinic or humane society facility is like a human daycare and there are viruses and bacteria that could make an unprotected animal very ill. We want the best for the adopter's pet(s) as well as ours. ***Please note that meet and greets are not required but recommended. The pet owner must sign a "Meet and Greet Waiver" prior to the meet and greet session with the adoption counselor.**

TLHS will not adopt a dog/puppy to any home that will tether (place on a rope, chain, cable, etc.) the animal at any time for any reason. In cases where the animal needs to be kept confined to a yard, TLHS prefers animals to be let out to potty to be in a fenced in backyard or on a leash held by the person caring for the animal at that time vs being left on a cable tie or tether. TLHS will not allow a dog/puppy to go home to be placed on a tether to potty or stay for any other reason.

TLHS may perform post adoption follow-ups via mail, email, or phone to ensure that the adopted pet is adjusting well to the adopter's home.

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:

- 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.

<http://www.maddiesfund.org/free-pet-adoptions-study-results>

- Black cats at Halloween? No problem! There is no evidence that adopting black cats around Halloween poses any greater risk to the pets than adopting them at any other time of the year.

<http://blogs.bestfriends.org/index.php/2011/10/27/myth-buster-adopting-black-cats-at-halloween/>



Policy

- 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. While TLHS does have more adoptions around the holidays, it would seem reasonable that returns may increase as well.

<https://millioncatchallenge.org/resources/removing-barriers-to-adoption>

For an explanation of adoption denials, including when we would deny an adoption, please see the below.

Adoption Denial Guidelines

Denials are rare at TLHS. When going over the questionnaire, please always try to come from a place of education and matchmaking rather than interrogating. Remember to re-educate and steer potential adopters toward a more appropriate animal when possible. If someone is visiting us wanting to adopt a shelter pet, it's a reasonable assumption that they are coming from a good place. They may need education on how to care for the pet properly, or which pet is a good match, but our position should always be to educate them, assist them, and help them find a pet who is a good fit. Most people really are good. Assume that they are until they prove otherwise. That said, not everyone is a suitable adopter. No one wants you to send animals home with folks who are a physical threat to the animal's health and wellbeing.

When denying an adopter becomes necessary for one or more of the reasons below, make sure to stay as polite and professional as possible even if you feel uncomfortable. Instead of outrightly denying, your best bet will be to put up a string of roadblocks and hurdles that they must overleap before getting to the adoption. These roadblocks should only be used in a situation where you honestly believe the **animal will be at a physical risk** if they are adopted out to this individual:

- Ask for a vet reference
- Call their apartment complex to confirm they are able to have the animal
- Ask for all members of the household to come in and meet the animal before adoption
- Ask for all dogs in the home to come in for a dog/dog meet and greet before adoption
- Ask them to come in for multiple training sessions with a staff member before adoption
- Require a home visit before adoption
- Require proof of vaccinations for their resident animals
- Require proof of residence
- Require three references that you can call before adoption

Potential adopters who are denied should not walk away feeling that they have been judged, discriminated against, condescended to, etc.

If the applicant becomes violent or threatening, ask them to leave and/or call 911. All notes regarding volatile situations with adopters or groups of people should be documented in the person's ShelterLuv profile.

Reasons to Deny an Adopter:



Policy

- Plans to have animal live solely outdoors (if that option is not suitable for the animal ex. Barn cat, working dog, adult dog [6+months] can all live outside)
- Plans to declaw **or will not abandon declawing** as a possible option in the future
- Has previously had an animal die in their care due to suspect situations (poisoned, died of untreated heartworm, was lost/stolen under avoidable circumstances) - in cases where these concerns were by accident/fluke or the owner is now aware and willing to keep a dog on prevention for heartworms, exceptions can be made on a case by case basis
- Plans to use the animal solely as a guard animal
- Changes story of living circumstances, history, etc.
- Intends to give FeLV+ cat loose outdoor access.
- Verbally abusive to counselors/staff/volunteers
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Plans to dock tail, crop ears, etc. and will not sway from the intent on doing so - reminder, the adoption contract specifically states that the owner cannot do so.
- Has been a part of a cruelty case, animal fighting, other suspicious activity based in animal cruelty in the future
- Is homeless and cannot provide proof of residence if asked
- Is under the age of 18
- Refuses to give heartworm preventative for life
- Currently owns more than 10 dogs and cats combined