



Common Barriers to Adoption_____	1
Landlord/Homeowners Association (HOA) Verification for Pet Ownership_____	2
Homeowner’s Insurance Check for Restrictions_____	3
Interested Adopter in an Apartment Wants a Vocal Dog_____	4
Interested Adopter is Low Income/On Assistance Programs_____	5
Interested Adopter Cannot Afford the Adoption Fee_____	6
Homes with Small Children_____	7
College Students Adopting_____	8
Seniors Looking to Adopt Kittens or Puppies_____	9
Meets with a Resident Dog_____	10
All Animals in the Home Should be Altered_____	11
Proof of Vaccination for Animals At Home_____	12
Interested Adopter Previously Surrendered a Pet_____	13
Interested Adopter Has Negative Notes On their Record_____	14
Interested Adopter Previously Declawed a Cat_____	15
Adopter’s Current Dog Wears a Pinch Collar_____	16
Adopted Cats Are Allowed to Go Outside/Owner has an Indoor/Outdoor Cat_____	17
Multiple Visits With A Dog_____	18
Proof of Enclosure for Small Animals_____	19
Adopting Animals as a Gift_____	20

Common Barriers to Adoption

The MSPCA-Angell believes the human-animal bond is important to promote and preserve. We welcome all clients as potential adopters and employ a conversational adoption approach to make matches organically based on the client's and the animal's needs. We lead each new conversation with trust and take time to learn about an adopter's needs and preferences as we focus on matching them with an animal that we hope will be successful integrating into their current home and lifestyle.

Many things can change throughout an animal's life and focusing on a 'forever' outcome isn't the goal. Knowing there will be changes throughout an animal's lifespan, we focus on building trust with adopters who we believe will make good decisions for their adopted pet. With the trust that we have built, adopters know that we are a resource if they are faced with the decision to rehome or return the animal to our care.

While we work to promote and break down barriers to adoption, we should pause to proceed with an adoption if there is a concern with a match. This document is meant as a guide for when we feel stuck about how best to proceed and whether or not something warrants further exploration or a discussion that a good match currently does not exist.

Landlord/Homeowners Association (HOA) Verification for Pet Ownership

We encourage having a conversation with adopters surrounding restrictions on pet ownership during the matchmaking process. However, if someone tells us they are allowed to have pets where they live, we trust that information is correct.

- Staff should advise potential adopters to communicate with their landlords or HOA before adoption to verify that a pet is permitted.
- If a potential adopter confirms they have checked with their landlord or HOA, we trust they have and we do not need to further verify directly with the landlord or HOA or request their contact information. We also do not need to look up pet policies online.
- Renting is a temporary arrangement; adopters, therefore, have choices to make if the animal becomes unwelcome or if they are considering moving to a new rental. We prefer to focus on the match rather than a temporary housing arrangement.
- If someone makes it clear that their housing does not accept pets, that's an appropriate time to stop and not proceed with an adoption.
- If concerns come up during the matchmaking process, staff should touch base with the onsite lead for the next steps.

Homeowner's Insurance Check for Restrictions

We encourage having a conversation with adopters surrounding restrictions on homeowner's insurance during the matchmaking process. However, if someone tells us that it is not a personal barrier for them, we trust that the information is correct.

- Staff should advise and encourage potential adopters to look into their insurance policies regarding breed restrictions.
- Organizationally, we do not require proof of insurance coverage and are actively advocating for legislation that bans breed-specific insurance policies.

Interested Adopter in an Apartment Wants a Vocal Dog

This comes down to appropriate matchmaking and should not be seen as an immediate barrier. Even if we have a dog that is vocal and someone says they live in an apartment, we should take that knowledge and continue the conversation to see if it is an appropriate match.

- Not all apartments are created equal and there are many different styles and types (some have hundreds of units, some only have two or three). We should gather more information about the apartment building before assuming that a dog couldn't live in that setting.
- The behaviors we observe in the shelter often do not translate to the home environment.
- If someone is interested in adopting a vocal dog and we have no reason to believe that behavior will continue (i.e. no history of excessive barking), the adopter should be informed of the dog's in-shelter behavior and counseled on management for excessive or loud barking if the behavior continues in a home setting.
- If we have a history of a dog being very vocal in a home setting, a portion of adoption counseling should be focused on such to see how the adopter plans to manage that behavior to avoid conflicts with neighbors/housing management.

Interested Adopter is Low Income/On Assistance Programs

There are many different reasons why a potential adopter might be on assistance programs. We should be upfront about any expected future costs (i.e., highlighting any disclosures) so that a potential adopter can plan for those. Still, we should not be requesting information surrounding their financial situation. We believe that everyone should have access to the companionship of a pet, regardless of their income.

- Low-income adopters or those on Assistance Programs are permitted to adopt.

Interested Adopter Cannot Afford the Adoption Fee

There are many reasons that an adopter might not be able to afford an adoption fee and it does not mean that they will not be able to afford the care of their animal. While we rely on adoption fees to help offset the expenses of our operating budget, we recognize that the fee itself can be a barrier and don't want to get in the way of a good match. We should try to break down financial barriers if the match is otherwise sound.

- Adoption fees are flexible and can be fully or partially waived through The Pay it Forward Fund.
- The ability to pay an adoption fee should not be a barrier to adoption if it is otherwise a good match.

Homes with Small Children

When it comes to adopting dogs to homes with children, we should focus more on the match that is being presented vs on things like age and how a child is presenting in the shelter. We should acknowledge the risks that can exist with any dog entering a home with children and present options for families to have everyone meet in the shelter and to best set their home up for success.

- People with small children at home are permitted to adopt dogs, depending on the adoption recommendations and how the interactions go during a meet.
- We encourage children in the home to participate in the adoption process and meet dogs in the shelter, but it's not typically a requirement.
- There are times when it may be appropriate to ask for children to participate in the in-shelter meet, especially if a dog has a history of being concerned around children. An on-site lead can provide guidance if there are questions about whether or not this would be appropriate.
- We should be aware that a child's behavior in a stimulating environment like the shelter does not necessarily reflect what that child is like at home.
- Appropriate counseling and matchmaking help to ensure safe matches are made and everyone is set up for success.

College Students Adopting

While we should be asking what a college student's plan is for housing and care during their studies, we acknowledge that many circumstances can change for students. This primarily presents as a concern for international students; however, if a student has a plan for care, we can move forward.

- College students with pet-friendly housing are permitted to adopt.

Seniors Looking to Adopt Kittens or Puppies

There is often fear that seniors who adopt kittens or puppies will either be unable to keep up with their demanding needs or that they will be surrendered back to shelters if they go into assisted living or pass away. Good matchmaking will help to find an animal that is the right fit and proper counseling will prepare an older adopter for the activity level of a young animal. We have never seen a notable intake trend of animals being surrendered by senior owners who have died or been hospitalized; therefore, we do not believe management is necessary.

- Seniors are permitted to adopt kittens or puppies if they appear to be an appropriate match.
- Staff should match and counsel based on the fit and not the age of the person and the animal.
- We can reasonably assume seniors have or will consider contingency plans should their ability to care for the animal become a challenge.
- If there is a concern that comes up specific to the individual, touch base with a lead for the next steps.

Meets with a Resident Dog

The ultimate goal of the dog adoption program is to encourage strong matches. On some occasions, some dogs would benefit from a meeting conducted at the shelter. There are also other dogs (both in shelter and at home) that would succeed with a slow introduction by the adopter at their home. Shelter dog meets should be used as a tool for success vs a barrier to adoption.

- A visit between the adoptable dog and the resident dog should be offered to the adopter but not required unless outlined as a requirement in the behavior recommendation for the dog.
- If an adopter has a dog at home and they are struggling to outline how they might behave with another dog or there are questions about how the two dogs would do together based on behaviors that the potential adopter is describing, a meet can be encouraged.
- If a requirement is in the behavior recommendations, but an adopter cannot come in for a resident dog meet, touch base with the onsite lead for the next steps.
- Appropriate counseling and matchmaking help ensure that safe matches are made and everyone is set up for success, regardless of whether the dogs meet in the shelter or not.

All Animals in the Home Should be Altered

Historically, this has been a barrier for animal welfare organizations due to long-term overpopulation issues. Many organizations often conflate having unspayed/neutered animals at home with poor pet ownership without getting more information. While there are behavioral and medical benefits for spay/neuter, there can be many reasons why a person might choose not to have that service performed for their personal pet. At the MSPCA we believe that spay/neuter is a personal decision for the owner and their vet and should not be a reason for disqualification. This especially applies to cats and dogs as we do not send them home intact.

- The MSPCA spays/neuters adoptable cats, dogs, and rabbits and does not require personal animals at home to be altered prior to adoption.
- We can counsel on the benefits of spay/neuter and use that information as a matchmaking tool.
- For small animals that we do not alter, matches should be made to ensure that the species are the same sex.

Proof of Vaccination for Animals At Home

Proper counseling about regular veterinary care is a part of our adoption process. While it's important to notify adopters of the risks of certain diseases, we don't often require proof of vaccination unless it's specifically noted in an animal's record.

- Routine vet care and vaccinations are important. However, we acknowledge that it's easy to fall behind, given financial and scheduling constraints. We often hear how challenging it can be to get appointments at private veterinary hospitals and that the cost of annual vaccinations can be prohibitive. As a result, we think this area is good for discussion but not a reason not to move forward with adoption. Staff should feel comfortable providing resources for low-cost vaccination options if requested by the potential adopter.
- MSPCA adoptable animals go home up to date on their vaccinations.
- We should counsel on the importance of vaccinations, specifically in relation to the protection against parvovirus and kennel cough, and go over the risks and benefits of having resident pets protected with up-to-date vaccinations as well.
- In circumstances where an animal has previously tested positive or had a known exposure to the parvovirus, we may need to require resident pets to be vaccinated. Such a requirement will be clearly noted. If you have a concern about a case, please consult an onsite lead.

Interested Adopter Previously Surrendered a Pet

There are many reasons why someone may have surrendered a pet in the past. While some circumstances surrounding a pet surrender would lead us not to move forward with an adoption, it's not a cause for immediate denial.

- Surrendering a pet alone does not preclude an adoption.
- There are scenarios in which a client may have surrendered their pet(s) in the past that would need to be elevated to proceed with a future adoption. Some examples of that would be:
 - Law enforcement was involved in the surrender process.
 - A client surrendered a pet(s) for having too many of them and now is coming in to adopt more.
 - There is a note/do not adopt designation post-surrender in Chameleon (see next category item for more information on these scenarios).
 - A client surrendered an animal for a species-specific reason (often allergies) and is coming in to adopt an animal of that same species again.
- In those scenarios or others that cause hesitation, consult with shelter management.

Interested Adopter Has Negative Notes On their Record

Historically, staff were also more quick to add a 'Do Not Adopt' designation to files and those notes were not monitored as closely by management. While some of those delegations reign true, there are scenarios in which they no longer follow our philosophy.

- There are specific scenarios in which a previous surrender may have led to a 'Do Not Adopt' designation on their file. Consult with shelter management if this arises, as some of those designations were added at various times in our history but may not align with a current reason to deny an adoption.

Interested Adopter Previously Declawed a Cat

While the MSPCA is opposed to declawing and there is proposed legislation to make the practice illegal in Massachusetts, a previous history of declawing does not mean that an adopter will declaw their new cat. Instead, we encourage education surrounding the topic and if it is non-negotiable for the adopter, we can suggest resources where they might be able to find declawed cats.

- If an adopter previously declawed a cat and has not expressed interest in declawing their future cats, they are permitted to adopt.
- If the adopter expresses an interest in declawing, engage in a conversation about the concerns with declawing.
- If the person is receptive, we can trust that the majority of vets will also support client education on this as well. It is rare to find a veterinarian, even in states where it has not been banned, that will still perform this procedure.
- While we no longer see many cats that are declawed in our shelter system, we can advise clients that they can search for declawed cats on Petfinder if they are adamant about owning a declawed cat.
- If a client is not receptive to counseling and is insistent on declawing, follow up with an onsite lead or management, as denial may be appropriate.

Adopter's Current Dog Wears a Pinch Collar

The MSPCA supports a force-free and rewards-based training approach and if a dog comes in with a pinch collar, it's a good educational opportunity. While we may not be able to change the mind of that particular adopter, we can counsel them on what is recommended for the dog they adopt from us.

- If an interested adopter has a dog that wears a pinch collar, this presents a good opportunity to educate on other training methods with the understanding that many people will continue with their preferred training style despite counseling.
- Matchmaking should be done with this training method in mind so that an appropriate dog is selected if those methods continue.
- If you are struggling with how to approach these conversations with adopters, ask for advice from a lead on how to approach them.
- If there are concerns the adopter will use the same training method with the dog they are looking to adopt, seek assistance from leadership for the next steps.

Adopted Cats Are Allowed to Go Outside/Owner has an Indoor/Outdoor Cat

Many cats can acclimate to indoor/outdoor lifestyles with a proper introduction and we support owners who choose to have their cats go outside. While there are added risks with having cats go outside, proper counseling and matchmaking should set up cats and potential adopters for success.

- Although indoor-only cat policies are well intended to protect cats from risks associated with being outside, they also limit the pool of adopters, force adopters into lying in order to adopt, and do not always meet the needs of the cat. We rely heavily on our working cat program to rehome cats that would otherwise be euthanized.
- We do not require that cats adopted from the MSPCA remain indoor-only cats. If an adopter expresses interest in having an indoor/outdoor cat, they should be guided towards cats that would do well with that lifestyle and counseled appropriately.

Multiple Visits With A Dog

The ultimate goal of the dog adoption program is to encourage strong matches. On some occasions, dogs and potential adopters would benefit from meeting more than once before adoption. Multiple meets should be used as a tool for success rather than a barrier to adoption.

- Some dogs and adopters may benefit from multiple visits. Dogs that note any requirement of multiple visits in their behavior recommendations should be approached with the flexibility and understanding that there are reasonable exceptions that can be made.
- There are times in which an adopter cannot come in for multiple meets despite it being noted in the recommendations. In that case, this should not be a barrier to adoption as long as it is an appropriate match. The behavior team should be consulted to guide these scenarios.

Proof of Enclosure for Small Animals

Many pet store enclosures are too small for long-term housing for smalls. While we should provide counseling and support on appropriate housing, a photo is not required to proceed with an adoption.

- Staff should ask and advise on what setup the potential adopter has ready or plans to purchase for the small animal.
- Organizationally, we do not require a photo of the enclosure.
- If it's hard to decipher what setup they have based on a description, a picture can be requested to advise on potential changes to the planned living space setup.
- If an adopter doesn't have the setup ready in their home, a temporary setup can be provided when available. If no temporary enclosure is available, staff should talk about successful and safe confinement in the home until the enclosure arrives to determine whether or not the animal can leave the same day.
- If you feel uncomfortable with the housing situation for a small animal, touch base with the onsite lead for the next steps.

Adopting Animals as a Gift

Studies show that animals given as gifts are just as likely to stay in the home as other methods of acquisition for pets. Given this knowledge, we are comfortable proceeding with matchmaking as long as the conversation surrounding the gifting seems to align with the new owner and animal's needs.

- Individual circumstances regarding making a match with the intended adopter should be considered. Some examples of this could be families that live together that are surprising a family member, parents surprising their children, or an adult adopting for their parent who has expressed interest in owning the particular species and age of animal they are looking to adopt.
- If the person who adopts is not going to be the owner, we should advise that they are responsible for switching ownership over (i.e., microchip registration, pet insurance, etc).
- If there are concerns about the match, please seek a lead for further discussion.