



Pit Bull Rescue Central

Where Education Meets Rescue

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Pit Bull Information Packet for Shelters and Rescues

If your organization is new to the breed and find yourself with a rescued pit bull, this packet will provide you with some basic information. One important thing to understand is that the pit bull is not a breed of dog, it's a term typically used to group 3 breeds of dog, the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT), American Staffordshire Terrier (AST) and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier (STAFFIE). The AST and the APBT are essentially the same and it's very difficult to tell them apart.

PBRC is an online organization dedicated to educating people about the bully breeds and assisting rescues, shelters and owners in safely re-homing pit bull dogs. We strongly encourage you to visit our website: www.pbrc.net for further information and to email us at mail@pbrc.net with any questions.

We offer a free listing service for bully breeds on our website that we hope you will take advantage of with your foster dog. Our service is unique as we will process the applications received for your foster dog and send you the application as well as our comments about the application based on our breed experience. There are items on an application that need to be considered that might be missed by a person new to the breed. Please visit: <http://www.pbrc.net/submission.html> to learn more about listing your pit bull and pit mixes with PBRC.

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Email: mail@pbrc.net

Website: www.pbrc.net

Basic Breed Overview

Pit bulls are wonderful, loving animals that deserve the chance to have a good life.

Pit bulls have superior physical and mental characteristics that make them excellent partners for responsible, active, and caring owners. These same outstanding qualities can, however, make them a little difficult to handle for people who don't have a lot of experience with dog ownership or for those who don't understand the breed well. Luckily, pit bulls are intelligent, very responsive to training, and, above all, eager to please. Therefore, pit bulls should be enrolled in obedience classes as soon as they are up-to-date on their shots. (Pit bulls are more susceptible to parvovirus, so it is important that they receive all their vaccinations before coming into contact with other dogs or entering areas of high canine traffic.) A well-behaved pit bull is the best ambassador for the breed. As we've already noted, this is the easiest way to fight breed prejudice and misconception.

Pit bulls are quite resilient and can do well in an urban environment, provided they have enough exercise and other positive outlets for their energy. Many pit bulls are easygoing couch potatoes, but like all terriers, they can also be somewhat rambunctious until they mature. Maturity can come relatively late with this breed (two to three years old in some cases). Pit bulls remain playful throughout their lifespan (nine to fifteen years) and have a great sense of humor. True clowns at heart, these dogs will make you laugh like no other.

Pit bulls are energetic, agile, and strong. They are also very resourceful and driven. Determination is one of their most notable traits (see the FAQ). They put their heart and soul into whatever they set out to do: whether it is escaping an inadequately fenced yard to explore the neighborhood, destroying your new couch when left home alone, or climbing into your lap to shower you with kisses!

As Stahlkuppe (1995) writes, "The American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT), or the AmStaff, is certainly not the right pet for everyone. Being a powerful dog, it will require sufficient and adequate control. Some prospective elderly owners or children will not be able to supply that control..."

An insecure person who wants only an aggressive dog to bolster some personal human inadequacy should never become an owner of one of these dogs. An uncaring or negligent person should not buy an AmStaff or an APBT (or any other dog for that matter)."

Pit Bulls and People

Perhaps the most important characteristic of pit bulls is their amazing love of people. Many people are surprised by the loving personality of these dogs the first time they meet one. Pit bulls are remarkably affectionate and truly enjoy human attention. They are wonderful cuddlers and love nothing more than a belly rub. In fact, most pit bulls think they are lap dogs!

As Dunbar (1999) writes, "Today, a properly bred pit bull is so exuberantly happy upon meeting her owner's friends (or even friendly strangers) that new owners sometimes worry that their dog is too sweet and fun-loving to protect their home and family... A multi-talented companion, the well-trained pit bull is suited for a variety of exciting activities. He excels at obedience, agility and weight-pulling competitions, events which showcase intelligence, trainability and strength. In addition, the pit bull's pleasant nature makes him an ideal candidate for therapy work with people."

Traits like human aggression, severe shyness, and instability are not typically found in the APBT breed, nor are they acceptable. Dogs with these traits are not good representatives of the breed and should not be placed into adoptive homes.

Those who wish to label these breeds as “dangerous” are often quick to insist that the dogfighting aspect of their history somehow means that they are inclined to “fight” humans. This is simply wrong. A central fact of pit bulls’ history is that their lineage actually makes them less inclined to be aggressive toward humans. For over 160 years, they have been systematically

bred away from human aggressiveness. As Malcolm Gladwell (author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*) explains in an article published in *The New Yorker* in 2006:

Pit bulls were not bred to fight humans. On the contrary: a dog that went after spectators, or its handler, or the trainer, or any of the other people involved in making a dogfighting dog a good dogfighter was usually put down. (The rule in the pit-bull world was “Man-eaters die.”)

So while human aggressive pit bulls were actively culled from bloodlines, traits such as gentleness, temperamental stability, and the desire to be handled by humans were emphasized. These qualities are the foundation of the “pit bull” breeds. It explains why footage of pit bulls being rescued from horrific circumstances usually features skinny, scarred-up dogs with wagging tails and happy tongues joyfully greeting law enforcement officers. “A pit bull is dangerous to people,” Gladwell concludes, “not to the extent that it expresses its essential pit bullness but to the extent that it deviates from it.”

What is “essential pit bullness”? It’s difficult to express the personality of any breed in words, but for pit bulls it comes down to a certain *joie-de-vivre* and a magnetic attraction to humans. First, pit bulls have a constant desire to be close to humans, even if that means lying by your feet as you use the computer; they are not overly independent dogs and want nothing more than to be active members of your “family.” Second, pit bulls are outgoing, eager to meet new people, and generally trusting of strangers. Finally, this innate desire for human contact and outgoing nature adds up to the ultimate “people dog”: pit bulls are truly in their element when snuggling on the couch, hopping in the bed on a cold morning, getting rubbed on the belly or scratched behind the ears, showing off a trick, going for a car ride with their family, or playing a fun game.

Contrary to myths propagated by the media, human aggression occurs in all dog breeds. Canines can exhibit many kinds of aggression: human-, dog-, territory-, and food-aggression, to name a few. These are independent behaviors. For example, feral dogs can be good with other dogs but highly aggressive toward humans. By the same token, a dog with dog aggression isn’t by default also human aggressive. In fact, pit bulls test better than average in temperament evaluations.

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To date, every shred of empirical evidence we have suggests that pit bulls are the same as, if not better than, other breeds when it comes to human interaction. Each year, the American Temperament Testing Society holds evaluations across the country for dog breeds and gives a passing score for the entire breed based on the percentage of passed over failed within total number of the particular breed tested. As of 2008, pit bull breeds achieved a combined passing score of 85.5 percent. To put these figures into context, the combined passing rate of all breeds was 81.6 percent. The Collie, an icon of obedience, passed at a rate of 79.4 percent, and the beloved Golden Retriever scored at 84.2 percent. As you can see, by these measures, the pit bull breeds make fabulous family pets!

Pit bull type dogs are wonderful, loving, and very loyal companions; however, it is important to understand the breed’s nature, to provide a structured environment, and to establish a positive leadership role. In order to do so, pit bull owners must understand the original purpose of the breed, respect its limits, and help it fulfill its tremendous potential. This is sound advice for dog owners of any breed.

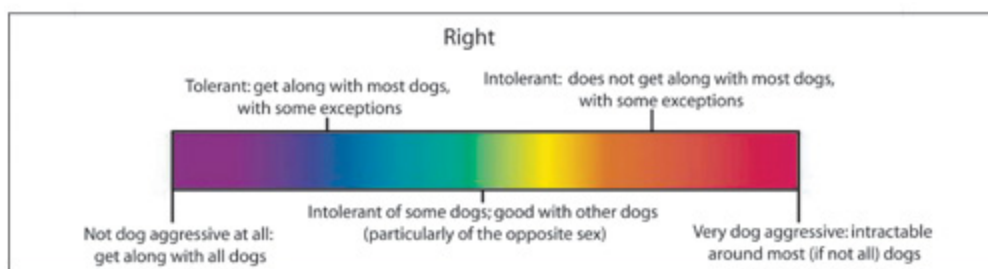
Pit Bulls and Other Dogs

Never trust a dog not to fight. That means any dog!

Dogs may fight over hierarchic status, food, toys, or rawhides. External stimulus or excitement can also trigger a fight. Remember that any canine can fight, regardless of breed. If you frequent a dog park, you've surely seen a fight occur among a pack of dogs for reasons not discernible to humans. Owners should separate their dogs if they cannot closely supervise them

Dog aggression (that is, aggression shown by dogs towards other dogs) is a complicated matter. Like most things in life, it is not a black-and-white issue. We should not think of dog aggression as a binary (dog aggressive/not dog aggressive) but as a spectrum: dogs can exhibit zero dog aggression, dog aggression only in some situations, a high level of dog aggression, or dog aggression that falls somewhere in between these points.

The graphic below provides a helpful visualization of this concept:



Given their historical circumstances, pit-bull-type dogs can be less tolerant of dogs than other breeds. Pit bull owners must understand that their dogs may not get along with all other dogs. There are several levels of dog tolerance. Many dogs are great with other dogs and enjoy the company of fellow canines. Some dogs do well only with dogs of the opposite sex. Some are fine with dogs they were raised with but intolerant of new dogs. Some dogs are tolerant of other dogs except for in limited circumstances, such as when greeting a new person. Some enjoy the company of other dogs, while others cannot accept any other dogs. All of this should suggest that dogs are individuals and should be treated as such. Owners need to understand their particular dog's acceptance level of other dogs and manage their dog appropriately when around other animals. A dog's tolerance level can change during its lifetime, and owners need to be aware of these changes so they can properly manage their dogs while in the company of other dogs. Some dogs become less tolerant as they mature from puppyhood to adult, while others become more accepting as they mature into the senior years. Some can become more tolerant with socialization and training. Regardless of breed, there are many dogs that do not like other dogs, and all dog owners need to be responsible. This means following the basic rules of dog ownership: keeping your dog on leash at all times, not letting your charge unfamiliar dogs, and supervising your valued companion at all times (i.e., not leaving your dog in the backyard without supervision).

For pit bull owners, the stakes are always higher. While they may not instigate a fight, they won't back down from a challenge. Inevitably, no matter who "started it," no matter what the circumstances, the pit bull will always be blamed. Each incident in which a pit bull gets blamed jeopardizes our right to own these great dogs. Keep your dog out of trouble!

That said, many pit bulls get along great with other pets and may live happily with other dogs without incident. We simply cannot assume that this is true for all of them. We also cannot take for granted that pit bulls who get along with other pets today will do so tomorrow. The same goes for all other breeds, and none of this should suggest that, in the language of popular myth, pit bulls are more likely to "snap" or "turn." It only means that their attitude toward other dogs may change as they mature. Pit bull owners must show common sense by ensuring that they don't set their dogs up to fail by putting them in inappropriate situations. It is every dog owner's responsibility to ensure that they are managing their dog's needs and looking out for their dog's safety at all times.

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Please remember that, as we note throughout the site, animal aggression and human aggression are two entirely distinct behaviors and should never be confused. Pit bulls are, by nature, very good with people. They are, in fact, one of the most loving, loyal, friendly, and dedicated companions one can have.

Selecting Dogs For Adoption

As with all breeds, PBRC recommends that shelters and rescues temperament evaluate pit bulls prior to placing dogs for adoption. There are many different temperament evaluation tools and protocols available, and many animal welfare organizations and private training facilities conduct training for shelter staff to learn how to perform temperament evaluations. At a minimum, dogs should be tested for social behavior; resource guarding; toy, play, and prey drive; and compatibility with other animals. Dogs that demonstrate aggression towards humans, or *significant* aggression towards other animals should not be placed for adoption. Dogs with known bite histories should not be placed for adoption. Dogs with extreme shyness, aloof behavior, or overly independent dogs should not be placed for adoption. An American Pit Bull Terrier of correct temperament should be very people oriented, friendly even with strangers, and very tolerant of physical handling.

Owners who are surrendering their pit bulls for adoption should seek assistance for a temperament evaluation or a referral by contacting their local shelter or dog trainer, or go to the APDT website: www.apdt.com, to find a trainer or canine specialist.

Puppies should not be placed for adoption until they are a minimum of eight weeks of age. If the mother dog is at the shelter, puppies should be kept with the mother until eight weeks of age, as she will teach them important social skills. Avoid placing a mother with a puppy in the same home and avoid placing littermates in the same home. As puppies mature, the potential for rivalry between a mother and puppy or a puppy and its littermate is much greater than if two dogs who are not related are placed in the same home.

When placing a pit bull up for adoption, rescues and shelters should label them accurately, i.e., if it is felt that the dog is an American Pit Bull Terrier, it should be noted as such on the adoption card or web page. If the dog appears to be a mix, it should be labeled as a pit mix, and if it is known what it is mixed with, that too should be listed. Avoid calling a pit bull something other than what it is (for example, Boxer mix) in an effort to increase adoptions. Doing so is deceiving to adopters, and may be the reason for an adoption return in the future when the adopter is suddenly made aware by his or her veterinarian, local Animal Control, insurance carrier, or landlord that the dog is a pit bull.

Spay and Neuter

It is imperative that shelter and rescue organizations spay and neuter dogs before placing them in adoptive homes. Spaying and neutering has many health and behavioral benefits to the animal. And equally important, spaying and neutering will help reduce further pet overpopulation. PBRC has a financial aid page for caretakers who require assistance to spay/neuter dogs prior to placement. <http://www.pbrc.net/speuter.html>

PBRC supports pediatric, or juvenile, spaying and neutering of puppies.

Housing Pit Bulls In A Shelter Environment

Adult dogs should be kenneled individually, even if they arrived at the shelter together. Many adult dogs, of any breed, can engage in problematic behaviors when housed in too small of a space such as a kennel. Problematic behaviors can include guarding resources from each other, or redirected aggression when an outside stimulus agitates them.

Some adult dogs can be matched with a play buddy for supervised playtime outside of the kennel, given proper dog-dog introductions. If the dogs can play appropriately and under supervision in a fenced area, providing playtime can be a great stress reducer. Some adult dogs may enjoy taking leash walks with other dogs. Parallel leash walking is a great way to introduce dogs, and also to socialize them without the pressure of a direct interaction. See PBRC's web page on dog-dog introductions: <http://www.pbrc.net/dogintros.html>

Pit bulls are generally athletic dogs. They are also intelligent and playful. A kennel situation can be difficult for an athletic, bright, and playful dog if he or she is not given appropriate outlets to exercise both body and mind. Some ways that shelters can decrease boredom or stress from kenneling are provided here:

- Kennel breaks including daily walks, play time in a fenced area, biking on a K-9 Cruiser, car rides to a local park, etc.
- Supervised play time with an appropriately matched dog
- Obedience and trick training with volunteers
- Durable, interactive toys, including toys that are "stuffable" such as the Kong, Waggle, Buster Cube, treat Ball, etc. Consider feeding all or a portion of the dog's meals in such toys.
- Provision of chew items such as rawhides, bully sticks, sterilized bones, or Nylabones. Chewing relieves stress and also promotes dental health.

Note: High value items such as food, toys stuffed with food, and chew items should be given to dogs while kenneled separately to prevent resource guarding and possible conflicts between dogs.

Making Adoption Matches

Potential adopters should complete an application that includes personal contact information, residency information, and additional information about pet ownership. For example, questions seeking input on the applicant's previous pet ownership history, veterinary reference, and training and care of the adopted animal, should also be included. PBRC recommends that caretakers of pit bulls carefully counsel their adopters by thoroughly interviewing them. Observe the applicant's handling of the dog while you adoption counsel him or her. Some questions to ask yourself while observing the applicant are:

- Am I comfortable with the way this person handles the dog?
- Has the applicant been receptive to information I am providing about this dog?
- Does the applicant ask questions, and seek information about the dog, about training needs, health care, etc.?
- Do all the household members seem comfortable with this dog?
- Does the dog seem comfortable with all household members?

Rescue and shelter personnel should also discuss some of the other issues that owners of pit bulls face such as breed specific legislation and making sure that their insurance carrier has no breed restrictions. The shelter or rescue staff should verify that the adopter's current town of residence does not have breed specific legislation; do not rely on the adopter to know about BSL. A city's animal ordinances can be verified by calling the local Animal Control or City Hall.

For more information on screening potential adopters, please see our webpage:

<http://www.pbrc.net/adoption/screening.html>

Knowledgeable shelter and rescue workers will be able to address questions about breed information, multi dog management, and training, both pre- and post- adoption. Reference checks and home checks are recommended. Here is additional information on conducting a home visit: <http://www.pbrc.net/homevisit.html>. All family or household members should be required to meet the dog prior to adoption. Adopters should be given as much information about the dog's personality, current skills, training and exercise needs, as well as a medical history. Rescues and shelters should provide an adoption contract that includes expectations of the adopter as well as the organization's return policy. Reputable rescues and shelters should be willing to take the dog back at any time. A sample adoption contract can be found here: <http://www.pbrc.net/misc/contract.html>.

If the potential adopter already has a dog, a dog-to-dog introduction should be done prior to adoption. Please see PBRC's web page on Dog-Dog Introductions <http://www.pbrc.net/dogintros.html>. It may be necessary to do multiple introductions over time to acclimate the dogs. While some dogs prefer to be the only pet, many can be placed successfully with a compatible – and altered – dog of the opposite sex. Multiple dog households involving pit bulls require experienced owners who will be able to commit time to all of the dogs, and be committed to training and multi dog management, including separation of the animals when not supervised.

If you are conducting an out-of-state adoption, please be aware that PBRC may be able to send a volunteer to the applicant's place of residence for a homecheck before the adoption is approved. Make sure to ask us if we can help. If we don't have a volunteer in the region of the applicant, you should contact a local rescue organization and ask them if they can send someone that is experienced in dog placement to meet the applicant for you and do a home visit. Make sure the local shelter sends someone who understands pit bulls and has the knowledge to determine if this is a good home for a pit bull. You should correspond several times with the applicant. Don't be afraid to ask as many questions as you want. If the applicant is serious, he or she will be more than happy to answer you. Make it a priority to contact the applicant's references and ask them a lot of questions. Veterinarians are good references, and are usually very cooperative.

Before sending a dog out-of-state, we suggest consulting with local authorities for potential breed-specific legislation. Pit bulls are restricted and banned in many cities and counties. Please note that these dogs are the target of breed-specific legislation in many municipalities and states across the nation, and already has several breed specific restrictions against it.

Taking Time to Do It Right

Placing pit bulls in responsible, loving homes takes time. It may take months to find the right home for an individual dog. PBRC encourages shelters and rescues to take their time and thoroughly screen applicants and do the necessary checks. By taking time to do it right, you will ensure that the match is a good one for both the dog and the adopter and also avoid an unsuccessful placement and a possible return adoption. In addition, hastily placing pit bulls may result in putting dogs in situations of further abuse or neglect. Beware of applicants who are unwilling to follow your adoption protocol or who want to rush the process; a good adopter will understand why you are being thorough in your process.

- Some adoption red flags:
- Adopter prefers an intact dog
- Adopter's current dog is intact
- Adopter has had multiple pit bulls in the past but never for any lengthy period of time
- Adopter has given away previous dog or previous dog was 'lost' or 'stolen'
- Adopter is unwilling to allow a home check
- Adopter cannot provide any veterinary reference though he or she has owned dogs previously

HOME VISIT GUIDE

This guide is designed to facilitate discussions with potential adopters. If possible, bring a Pit Bull with you during the home visit and request that all family members be present. Try to ask open-ended questions. Not all questions will apply to each family and some of these questions may have already been answered on the adoption application and during phone interviews. Make it clear to the applicant that you will not be leaving the dog with them at the end of the home visit. It is in everyone's best interest for both parties to think about whether the adoption is a good match after the home visit

PET EXPERIENCE AND HISTORY

1. What breeds have they had in the past?
2. What happened to their previous dogs?
3. Were there any negative feelings towards previous dogs?
4. What training methods were used with past or existing dogs?
5. How did they handle behavior problems?
6. Are they willing to attend professional obedience training classes with their new dog?
7. Have they ever crate-trained? If not, do they understand the purpose?
8. Do they need education on crate training or positive training methods?

PET RESPONSIBILITY

1. Will they ever leave the dog outside when they are gone? If yes, educate of the very real threat of dogs being stolen from yards.
2. Are fence gates locked and secured or could a dog easily be stolen from this yard, if unattended?
3. Do they know it could take months of regular obedience training before a dog obeys its new owners, even if it already seemed to know basic commands in its foster or previous home?

THE HOME/SAFETY

1. Are they on or very close to a busy street?
2. If there is no yard, how will they give the dog enough exercise?
3. If there is a yard but no fence, how will they provide a safe alternative?
4. Are there any electrical, phone or computer wires which might need to be secured or hidden?
5. Do all exterior doors close and latch securely so a dog can't easily push through?
6. If the home has a pool or is near water, educate about safety.

CHILDREN

1. Are the children afraid of dogs?
2. Are they interested in getting a new dog?
3. How do they treat existing dogs or other pets?
4. If children act inappropriately toward the existing dog(s) during the visit, how do the parents handle the situation?
5. Do the children and parents understand they must keep doors and gates securely latched, and always use caution whenever doors or gates are opened so the dog cannot push past?
6. Is there anything about the children's behavior that could be a concern in placing a dog there?
7. Do parents know that no matter how wonderful a dog is, it is never advisable to leave it unsupervised with children ?

EXISTING PETS

1. Do they look healthy and well-treated?
2. Are existing dogs on heartworm preventative? If not, why?
3. How have existing pets reacted to new dogs in the past?
4. Explain it may take many weeks or months for an existing cat and new dog to adapt to life together and the two should not be left alone unattended until the owner is absolutely sure their relationship is safe.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. Is there anyone in the home who does not seem to want a Pit Bull?
2. Specifically ask each spouse individually to tell you exactly how they feel about getting a Pit Bull. If either is hesitant, why?
3. Are there any family members with allergies to cats or dogs?
4. Do any family members or existing pets have physical limitations or conditions which should be considered in finding the right Pit Bull?
5. What are the family's expectations of a "rescue" dog?
6. How did they react to the dog you brought?
7. If they have requested a dog of a certain age, ask why.
8. If they want a specific gender, ask why.
9. Explain your adoption agreement and discuss the adoption fee, if applicable.
10. Explain that it will take time for the rescue dog to adjust to the new home environment, perhaps 2-3 weeks.
11. Would this applicant be a good volunteer or foster home in the future?

FIRST-TIME PIT BULL OWNERS

1. Assess the areas that might require education (feeding, obedience training, etc).
2. Suggest contacting local vet for obedience classes and enrolling as soon as possible.
3. Describe basic behavior to expect from Pit Bulls, particularly the trait for dog-aggression.

Adapted, with permission, from Central Indiana Lab Rescue & Adoption, Inc's home visit guide

SCREENING POTENTIAL HOMES

Step 1. Interviewing Callers.

"First come, first served" does not apply here. You are under no obligation to give your dog to the first person who says he wants him or her. You have every right to ask questions and choose the person you think will make the best new owner. Don't let anyone rush you or intimidate you.

To help you along, we've included a list of questions that rescuers ask potential applicants. Make copies of this list and fill in answers as you speak to people who contact you about your dog. Get out the list you made with your requirements for a new home and compare it to the answers the applicants give.

First of all, get your applicant's name, address and phone number. Deceitful people may call you from a phone booth or give you a fake address. Ask for information that you can verify. Does the applicant's family know about and approve of their plans to get a Pit Bull? If not, suggest they talk it over with their spouse and call you back. The same applies to people living with a companion or roommate. When one person adopts a dog without the full approval of the rest of the family, the adoption often fails.

Do they own or rent their home? If renting, does their landlord approve? You'd be surprised how many people haven't checked with their landlord before contacting you. If you have doubts, ask for the landlord's name and number, then call him yourself. Be cautious about renters - they're quicker to move than people who own their homes and movers often leave their pets behind. Remember, you're looking for a permanent home for your dog.

Does the caller have children? How many and how old are they? If your dog isn't good with kids, say so up front. How many children can make a difference depending on your dog's personality. A shy dog may not be able to cope with several children and their friends. Very young children may not be old enough to treat the dog properly. If the applicants don't have children, ask them if they're thinking of having any in the near future. Many people get rid of their dogs when they start a family.

Have they had dogs, especially Pit Bulls, before? If yes, how long did they keep them?

These are very important questions! How they treated the pets they've had in the past will tell you how they might treat your dog. The following answers should raise a red flag and make you suspicious:

"We gave him away when we moved." Unless they had to because of unavoidable problems, moving is a poor excuse for giving up a pet. Almost everyone can find a place that will allow dogs if they try hard enough. If they gave up their last dog that easily, there's a good chance they'll give yours up someday, too." "We gave him away because he had behavior problems." Most behavior problems such as poor housebreaking, chewing, barking, digging, running away result from a lack of training and attention. If the applicant wasn't willing to solve the problems he had with his last dog, he probably won't try very hard with your dog either.

Do they have pets now? What kinds? Obviously, if your dog isn't good with cats or other animals and your applicant has them, the adoption is not going to work. Be up front. It's better to turn people away now than have to take the dog back later. The gender of their other dogs is an important consideration too. For Pit Bulls, dog-to-dog aggression issues can arise in both male and female dogs. Pit Bulls often do not get along with other dogs of the same sex. Dog fights can be serious problems and one dog can hurt or even kill the other. We recommend that you don't place your Pit Bull in a home with a dog of the same sex or multiple dogs. If you place your dog in a home with a dog of the opposite sex, be absolutely sure that the potential adopter could break up a dog fight if one were to occur and advise that they never leave the dogs alone unsupervised.

Do they have a yard? Is it fenced? Your dog will need daily exercise. Without a yard, how will he get it? Can the applicant provide it with regular walks? If the yard isn't fenced, ask how he plans to keep the dog from leaving his property. Did the applicant's last dog wander off or get hit by a car? If so, how will he keep this from happening to his next dog? Does he understand that our adventurous Pit Bulls will wander off if left unsupervised? Does he know that keeping a Pit Bull tied up for extended periods can have a bad effect on the dog's temperament?

Where will the dog spend most of its time? Although most Pit Bulls don't mind spending time outside unless it's too hot or too cold, an entire life outdoors probably isn't what you have in mind for your dog. Dogs always kept outside are sometimes neglected, lonely and may develop behavior problems.

Why is the caller interested in a Pit Bull? What do they like about them? Find out what kind of dog "personality" they're looking for. Many people are attracted by the Pit Bull's beauty but don't know anything else about them. They might not have the slightest idea what a Pit Bull is all about and might not like its temperament and characteristics. If their expectations don't match your dog's disposition, the adoption is not going to work. Be honest about our breed's good and bad points. Is a Pit Bull really what they're looking for or would they do better with another breed?

References: Get the phone number of their vet (if they've had pets before) and three other personal references. Call those references! For a vet reference, explain that John Doe is interested in adopting your dog and you want to confirm care, annual vaccinations and heartworm preventative. Were they in good condition and happy? General reference questions include asking how long have they known the applicant. If they were placing a pet, would they feel comfortable giving it to this person? If the applicant has owned a pet before, call animal control in their town and inquire whether there have been any complaints about their dogs. If they have had to pay fines for "dog at large," do not adopt your dog to them.

Step 2: The In-Person Interview

Once you've chosen a family (or families) that you feel are good candidates, make an appointment for them to see the dog, and for you to see their home. Going to their house lets you see whether their home and yard are truly what they said they are and whether your dog will do well there. It also gives you an opportunity to call off the adoption and take the dog back home with you if things aren't as represented, if you think there'll be problems or if you just get a bad feeling about the whole thing.

If they already have a dog, make plans to introduce the dogs on "neutral" territory, like a park. Most dogs resent meeting a strange dog at home. They may be hostile toward the new dog or even start a fight. It is best to first introduce two dogs through a chainlink fence where they will be off leash and can't harm each other. In this situation, they can act naturally.

If the family has children, ask them to bring them to the interview. You need to see how the dog will react to them and how the children treat the dog. Some allowance should be made for kids' natural enthusiasm but if children are undisciplined, disrespectful to your dog and not kept in hand by their parents, your dog could be mistreated in its new home and someone could get bitten.

Do you like these people? Are you comfortable having them as guests in your home? Would they make good friends? If not, don't give them your dog. Trust your instincts. If something about them doesn't seem quite right, even if you can't explain what it is, don't take a chance on your dog's future. Wait for another family!

On a final note: Ask the potential adopters if you can visit with your dog on occasion. If they say "no", be very leery and reevaluate this person's potential for being a good owner.

Step 3. Saying Good-bye

After the interviews are over, give the new family a day or two to decide if they really want to adopt your dog. Make sure they have a chance to think over the commitment they're making. While they're deciding, get a package ready to send along with your dog. This package should include:

- Your dog's medical records and the name, address & phone number of your vet.
- Your name, address & phone (new address if you're moving)
- Your dog's toys and belongings (dog bed, blanket, etc.), a supply of dog food & special treats he loves
- An instruction sheet on feeding, special needs, etc.; some reading material about the Pit Bull breed.
- Collar and leash; ID and rabies tags

Set aside a special time for you and your dog to take a last walk together and say good-bye. We know you'll cry. Do it now, in private, so you're clear headed when he has to leave. He may be confused about being left with strangers and you won't want your emotions to upset him even more.

There are some things you need to explain to the new family before they take your dog home: The dog will go through an adjustment period as he gets to know his new people, learns new rules and mourns the loss of his old family. Most dogs adjust within a few days, but others may take longer. During this time, they should avoid forcing the dog to do anything stressful - taking a bath, obedience training classes, meeting too many strangers at once, etc. - until he's had a chance to settle in. Suggest that they take things easy at first and give the dog time to bond to them. The dog might not eat for the first day or two. Not to worry - he'll eat when he's ready. It is also common for dogs to have loose stool for a few days as they adjust to the changes in their lives. Some dogs temporarily forget their training. A well-housebroken dog may have an accident during the first day in his new home. This isn't unusual and rarely happens more than once.

Step 4. Paperwork

Have the new owner sign an adoption contract with a waiver of liability. We've included a sample contract you can use. Keep a copy for your records. A contract will help to protect the dog and the waiver of liability helps to protect you. You don't have a crystal ball to predict what your dog might do in the future. Remember - a waiver of liability will not protect you if you have lied or misrepresented the dog to his new owners.

Tell the family they should call you if the adoption doesn't work out. Let them know you want to keep in touch and will call them in a few days to see how things are going. Tell them to call you if they have questions or problems. Be willing to take the dog back home if things don't work out the way you both expected.

Adoption Contract

Adopter's Name: _____ Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____
Email: _____ ID: _____

It is accepted that on this _____ day of _____ the above named person(s) adopt from _____ a canine described as follows:

Breed: _____ Name: _____ Sex: _____
Color: _____ Age or DOB: _____ Tattoo: _____
If reg., AKC [] or UKC [] # _____ for the fee of \$ _____ under the following terms and conditions:

The dog is spayed or neutered and has current vaccinations.

I/We hereby agree to care for this dog humanely (including providing adequate food, water, shelter, love and attention). Said dog shall be maintained in an adequate enclosed area or on leash at all times. Dog **shall not** be allowed to roam at will. I/We agree to have dog vaccinated annually with necessary inoculations (DHLP-P) and vaccinated against Rabies, as local ordinances require. I/We agree to provide essential veterinary care, as needed. If said dog becomes lost or stolen, I/We agree to notify _____ immediately.

I/We also agree not to sell, trade or dispose of this dog. **If, at any time, I/We are unable or unwilling to care for this dog, I/We agree to contact and return said dog to _____.** The adoption fee will not be refunded after 10 days from adoption date. I/We also agree that _____ will keep _____ of the adoption fee, if dog is returned within the 10 day period. I/We further agree that said dog shall not be used for medical or any other experimental purposes or sold or given to a pet store, supplier or wholesaler.

I/We agree that said dog will not be used for any illegal purposes and will NEVER be fought in any way.
If this clause is broken, I/We understand that the dog will be immediately confiscated by _____ and all law enforcement agencies will be notified, as applicable.

I/We certify that we do not live in an area where "Pit Bulls" are banned.

I/We agree to notify _____ within 10 days of any change of address or phone # (and vice versa). It is also understood that _____ may examine and make inquiries about said dog at any time. If not satisfied with the condition of the dog or the conditions in which it is kept, said dog can or may be removed immediately and placed in a different home. Any veterinary services needed due to negligence or lack of care, will be the adopters responsibility and payable to _____

I/We understand that _____ makes no guarantees or warranties regarding the health or temperament of this dog. I/We promise and agree to be solely responsible for this animal, and to indemnify and hold harmless _____ from any and all claims of liability for the conduct of this animal on or after the date of this adoption. This Release of Liability and Indemnification shall apply to all known, unknown and unanticipated damages resulting from my/our adoption, ownership or control of such animal.

I/WE HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I/WE HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AND WILL KEEP THE DOG DESCRIBED HEREIN AS A FAMILY MEMBER. I/WE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS A BINDING CONTRACT ENFORCEABLE BY CIVIL LAW.

Date: _____

Recommendations for Dog Introductions

Introductions with other dogs can be a bit tricky with pit bulls. Some pit bulls simply will not get along with other dogs. Others may only get along with dogs of the opposite sex or may get along with a few, select dogs. There are some pit bulls who have poor greeting behavior but when carefully introduced, may end up doing fine with other dogs. And then there are pit bulls who are very dog-friendly. It is important to recognize what level of tolerance for other dogs that your pit bull has.

When considering introductions, remember that some pit bulls do not enjoy the company of other dogs and it may not be advisable in some situations to introduce dogs at all. Respect each dog's personality and do not push dogs to 'be friends.'

HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR PIT BULL TO ANOTHER DOG

Parallel leash-walking, on neutral territory with two handlers, is a great way to introduce dogs. Neutral territory means an area where neither dog has been or where neither dog resides. An unfamiliar, neutral territory is best to avoid territorial behavior in either dog. Both dogs should be wearing properly fitted collars and be on nylon or leather leashes. Prong collars, choke chains, and Flexi-leads should not be used when introducing pit bulls.

While taking a short walk, allow the dogs to curve around in a natural manner. (This is a strategy encouraged by trainer Turid Rugaas, author of "Calming Signals"). Both handlers should have a firm hold of their leashes, however, they should try to maintain a U-shaped bend in the lead. Taut, tight leashes may communicate tension to the dogs and should be avoided if possible. Avoid face-face, head-on introductions between dogs. Instead, walk parallel to each other, a few feet apart, and alternate which dog is ahead of the other. Also, do not allow a dog to greet another dog if he/she is dragging you towards the other dog or is misbehaving in any way (pulling, jumping, or lunging). Doing so will result in training the dog to misbehave to gain access to other dogs! The dog does not make the decision as to whom he will meet and when. You do!

If the dogs appear to be friendly to each other, allow brief sniffing with one dog perpendicular or "T-shaped" to the other, and then each dog should be called away by the handlers. If either dog stiffens, stands up on its toes, or shows any aggressive posturing, call the dogs away immediately and interrupt the interaction. It is important to interrupt before things go wrong so that you can preserve the possibility of a successful interaction at a later time. It might be necessary to take several walks, in different locations, over time. Multiple introductions in this manner give you a better read for how the dogs will do. Do not rush this process if the introductions seem 'iffy' in any way. Stop the introduction if either dog is showing signs of fear or aggression. Body language that indicates fear or aggression can include: raised hackles, stiff posturing, lip curling, growling, air snapping, tail tucked between legs, one dog avoiding the other or wanting to hide behind the handler, lunging, or freezing.

If the leash walking is successful, it may then be appropriate to go to a fenced area and have one dog on leash, and one off. One handler might work obedience with the leashed dog, while letting the other dog roam around, allowing them to get used to each other's presence and scent. Usually in this scenario, the resident dog is loose, and the new dog is leashed. This gives one dog the ability to safely check things out and move away as needed while you maintain control of the other dog. Make sure the yard or fenced area is free of items that may possibly trigger a fight such as high-value toys, bones, rawhides, etc.

When introducing dogs on leash, make sure that the leashes do not become tangled. Entangled leashes can increase tension and result in a conflict between dogs.

OFF-LEASH PLAY: KEEPING IT SAFE AND FUN!

If the dogs appear to be getting along and your leash walks have been successful, then you might try both dogs off leash. This should ONLY be done in a fenced, fully enclosed area. Always make sure that both dogs are wearing appropriately fitted collars and that there are two handlers present in case there is a conflict between dogs. Also keep in mind that pit bull play can be rough and that it is important to periodically interrupt the play before it escalates into a conflict. The handlers can interrupt the play simply by doing some recalls and then releasing the dogs to go play again. What a great opportunity to practice an important obedience skill - the recall - amid distraction!

We recommended having two handlers present when introducing a pit bull dog to another dog. A squirt bottle can be handy to deter inappropriate behavior, however, keep in mind that it will not stop a fight if one ensues. A water squirt bottle can be used as a mild deterrent for mouthiness, mounting, or other inappropriate behaviors. Handlers of pit bull dogs should be prepared if a fight occurs.

WHAT IF MY PIT BULL DOESN'T PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS?

Some pit bulls will not play well with other dogs, particularly in an off-leash situation. If you find that your dog gets too aroused during off-leash play, you might limit the time the dogs are off-leash together. For example, if you observe that your dog gets over stimulated after about 15 minutes of play-time, then stop the play after 5 or 10 minutes, before the dog gets over stimulated. Make sure you are praising your dog for appropriate play skills when he demonstrates them. In addition, make sure you select dogs with very good social skills for your pit bull to interact with!

If your dog cannot handle the freedom of off-leash play with the other dog, but did well during the leash-walk, then you may wish to do leash-walks only. Taking a nice walk together with another dog is still socialization!

Another way to socialize your dog is to take an obedience class. If your pit bull does not like other dogs, consider taking a class that is smaller in size. Also, ask the instructor if you can observe a class first to see the training methods used, the type of dogs in the class, and the skill level of the other handlers and their dogs. A beginner class with lots of bouncy, barky dogs may be too much for a reactive pit bull.

Do NOT be discouraged if your pit bull doesn't like other dogs; what is most important is that your pit bull is people-friendly!

INTRODUCING A FOSTER DOG TO RESIDENT DOG

If you are fostering a pit bull and currently have other dogs, it is best to wait until you have had a considerable period of evaluation and observation (at least a few days or even weeks) before doing introductions. Dog introductions can involve several stages of a process, which may be shortened or lengthened depending on the success of the introduction. It is important to take your time with introductions and not rush through them. Do not attempt to introduce dogs if you know very little about the foster dog. As a foster parent, you should never leave dogs loose together when unattended, even for a brief time. The foster dog and resident dogs should always be separated in different rooms or with crates when there is no one home to supervise them. Even if your foster dog and resident dog get along, it is still important to give each dog individual attention AND individual time away from each other.

Do not introduce a new dog to multiple resident dogs at the same time. Start with your friendliest or least reactive dog and gradually introduce them. Do not try to push introductions with several different dogs in the course of the same day. Crating and separating for several days, even a week, is a good idea. Your resident dog(s) know the dog is there and can see and smell a new dog in the home. Let them acclimate. There are other reasons not to introduce an unfamiliar dog right away, mainly DISEASE! The reason it is recommended to only introduce one dog at a time is that dogs act differently together (pack mentality), and you could potentially set things off on the wrong paw. A pack of multiple dogs greeting a new dog can be overwhelming.

It is recommended to remove high value toys, chew items, and possibly food bowls, from the dogs' access in the foster home. If you are not already schedule-feeding your pets, now is a good time to start. Free-feeding (i.e., always having a full bowl on the floor accessible to the dogs) may encourage guarding behavior or result in a conflict. Instead, feeding may be done in crates, which also helps with crate training. Or you can feed the dogs in separate areas.

Implement obedience into the daily routine, 'sits' for food, water dish filled, at doorways, etc. This helps maintain a routine in the home and improve basic obedience for all dogs in the home. See our "No Free Lunch" training page. Do not allow dogs to crowd or get pushy at doorways...too much opportunity for a conflict in a tight space. Teach your dogs a 'back up' cue and to 'sit' at the door.

You might also consider buying DAP (dog appeasing pheromone) to install in a home with multiple dogs.

ADDITIONAL TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Be cognizant of different types of canine behaviors: resource guarding, barrier frustration, same-sex aggression, territorial aggression, etc. Any of these behaviors in either dog can complicate an introduction.

Brief, repeated introductions over time that end on a positive note are far more beneficial than a long, drawn-out introduction that may become problematic.

Once you are off on the wrong paw with a bully introduction, it's hard to 'undo' it. Better to go slow and be successful!

Remember, it's always easier to prevent a fight than to break one up! Never trust a pit bull not to fight. Always supervise and remain relaxed but vigilant.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON DOG INTRODUCTIONS AND DOG AGGRESSION:

<http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/item.php?id=1&topic=40&item=82>

<http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/item.php?id=1&topic=40&item=235>

Note: The suggestions on this webpage are not intended to be a substitute for having a professional trainer assist you with dog introductions. It is impossible for PBRC to address every possible scenario that could arise; this page is for informational purposes only.

Websites for responsible information on Pit Bulls

www.pbrc.net – Breed Information, Chat list, screening service for adoption application.

www.understand-a-bull.com – BSL and Breed information

www.badrap.org – Breed Information

www.workingpitbull.com – Breed Information

www.vrcpitbull.com/ - Villalobos Rescue Center, breed information

www.pitbullpress.com/ - Articles. Information

www.realpitbull.com/ - Breed Information

www.animalfarmfoundation.org/ - Information

www.pitbullsontheweb.com - Information

Recommended Reading

Pit Bull Specific

The Working Pit Bull
By Diane Jessup

The American Pit Bull Terrier
By Jacqueline O'Neil

The Ultimate American Pit Bull Terrier
By Jacqueline O'Neil

American Pit Bull and Staffordshire Terriers
By Joe Stahlkuppe

How to Teach a New dog Old Tricks
By Dr. Ian Dunbar