

Conversation-Based Adoptions

- Making better matches
- Reducing Length of Stress and Stay
 - Saving more animals

Traditional v. Conversational ("Open")

Traditional Adoption Counseling	Conversational Adoption Counseling
Pass/Fail	Matching Process
Standard questions for everyone	Open conversation based on individual person's experience/interest and animal's needs
Policy-based approach	Determination and appreciation for experience and judgement; use of discretion
"We know what's right for you"	"Let's talk about your expectations and find an animal that matches your lifestyle/interests/experience; let's work together"
Not approved for pet (and client goes elsewhere)	Redirected to another animal (and a shelter animal finds a home 😊)

Four Hard-n-Fast Rules or “Inflexible Mandates”

- No history of animal abuse → *Chameleon → SD County*
- Must be sober
- Pet not to be used as food
- Willing to engage in conversation; open and forthcoming

Everything else is up for discussion and exploration.

Because What's Really Important?

- Making a good match for the family and animal.
- The animal is afforded veterinary care.
- The animal's social, behavioral, and companionship needs are met.
- The animal has a livable environment: food, water, exercise.
- The animal will be respected and valued.

- Source: ASPCA Report of Adoption Forum II

Discussion v. Policy

- Dog-to-dog meet at shelter: will this be stressful to resident dog? time consuming? an accurate read? Do we want two newly introduced dogs getting in the car to go home?
- Dog-cat meet: usually not recommended, too stressful/dangerous for cat; not an accurate read or fair to the shelter dog who might be calmer in the home
- Meet all family members: depends on age kids and experience with dog; availability of adult household members; is this a special-needs dog?
- Landlord: Relationship between adopter and landlord.
- Fenced yard: no yard= more leash walks and interactions; depends on lifestyle and dog's social/exercise needs

no fence check?

How Is It Done?

Determine the client's expectations through open-ended questions and appreciation of their experience with animals.

Interest + Survey

- What qualities are you looking for in a dog? (i.e. active, good with children, office dog, mellow, trained, friend for resident dog, good with cats)
- How would you describe your lifestyle?
- What are your plans for the pet when you are gone during the day?
- Tell me about your past experience with pets?
- What type of sleeping arrangement are you able to provide for your pet?
- Where will the animal be when kept when you are not home?
- What behaviors do you think you can't be tolerated or would be difficult for you to manage? *Come back because don't hold*
- Tell me about the types of activities you'd like to do with the dog.
- What questions do you have for me?

The Important Topics

1. What are your expectations – and does the dog you are looking at have the potential to meet those expectations?
2. Do you have permission from your landlord?
*Not mandatory
Not end of world
if come back.*
3. Dog-to-dog and dog-to-cat introduction advice
4. Importance of supervising the dog around children
5. Where/how will the dog be when alone? Crates, yards, day care, tie-down in house – what is suitable for this dog?
6. Medical and nutritional needs

Landlord and Family Meet

Use this discussion time to inquire about landlord & other family members:

- “If you rent your home, we strongly recommend checking with your landlord before adopting. Landlord conflicts are the number one reason animals are surrendered to shelters and we really want to set you and Buster up for success. Have you spoken to your landlord?”
- “Is there anyone else at home who should meet the dog? He’s very energetic and may intimidate your younger child. She may not enjoy playing with such a large dog.”

“Open” doesn’t mean “Yes”

Landlord

“So what I’m hearing is that you just started renting your house and the topic of pets didn’t come up. Let’s go ahead and put Roscoe on hold while you confirm with your landlord.”

Family Meet

“Roscoe is a great dog, but he’s very enthusiastic and I’m concerned his size and energy level may be too much for your younger child. I’d feel better if we put him on hold and plan a time for you to return with your daughter.”

Redirecting v. Rejecting

Once you and the client have defined their expectations and the qualities that they need in a dog you can work with them on finding the right dog.

“I know you’re interested in Buster, but one of the things you mentioned was having a dog that will thrive in a busy household. Buster is really shy and is going to be stressed with lots of people coming and going. He needs a quiet home. Let’s find you a dog, like Shilo, who is more social and confident.”



Rethink Returns

It's a 'matching process', not a failed adoption.

Now that we know more about the client's interests/abilities redirect to a better match

Adopted & returned dogs are really just 'fostered dogs'; glean more information on the animal to help with the next match

Shelter staff and volunteers often have the luxury of 'test driving' via fostering; we aren't asked to make a 100 percent certain decision based on a 10 minute interaction with an unknown dog...

- ordinance based refusals
- outside dogs
- how is returned dog entered in system?