



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Code of practice for the welfare of

# DOGS



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# Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 15  
of the Animal Welfare Act 2006

December 2017



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

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# Understanding the Animal Welfare Act 2006

## Introduction to the Code

Owning and caring for a dog can be a source of great enjoyment, but you should be aware that dog ownership is a major responsibility. On average dogs live for around 12 years but some may live much longer. Consequently, you should think carefully about all factors that will affect your ability to care for a dog and whether a dog is suitable for you. Would you be able to provide for all of a dog's needs? You will need to consider the size of your property and the financial and time implications of having a dog as a pet and its exercise needs. Caring for a dog can be expensive and you should consider whether, for instance, you would be able to afford the cost of routine and unexpected veterinary treatment, or the cost of pet health insurance.

There is no one "perfect" way to care for all dogs because every dog, and every situation, is different but they all have the same needs. It is up to you to find out what your dog's precise needs are and how to meet them. Under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the Act) you must take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which you are responsible are met, to the extent required by good practice which are set out in the Act as follows:

-  (a) need for a suitable environment
-  (b) need for a suitable diet
-  (c) need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
-  (d) need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
-  (e) need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

It is up to you to find out what your dog's precise needs are and how to meet them

Under the Act you are always responsible for your dog's needs.

Furthermore, if you are a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that child looks after. If you are unable to care for your dog at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after it on your behalf. It is important to remember that you remain legally responsible for your dog's needs, even when you are away. The person with whom you leave your dog will also be legally responsible for your dog's welfare in your absence.

If you own or are responsible for a dog, and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.



# How to provide a suitable environment for your dog to live in

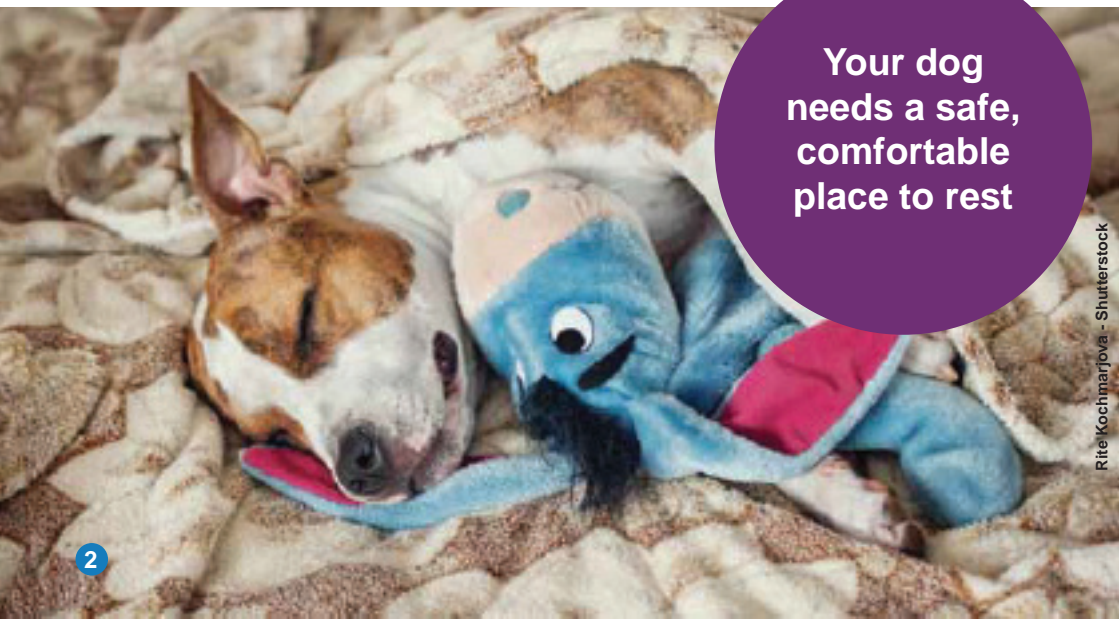
Your dog needs a safe environment and, whether they live inside or outside, they need protection from hazards. Examples of hazards in the home include: open windows and balconies, which may be inadequately protected to prevent your dog from falling from them; household and garden chemicals; and poisonous plants.

Dogs are naturally inquisitive and a dog may put themselves in danger if they are left to explore unsupervised.

Your dog needs a safe, comfortable place to rest, situated in a dry, draught-free area. Living in a cold or damp place can lead to suffering. If your dog lives outside, they will need protection from adverse weather or other threats. All dogs must be able to avoid things that frighten them and need a place to hide where they feel safe.

A dog is naturally disinclined to soil its living area and needs regular opportunities to use a toilet area, or it will become distressed. Some dogs may need access to a toilet area more frequently, for example: very young, very old and those that are ill.

Dogs are vulnerable to heat stress. In hot weather they rapidly become distressed and can die in enclosed areas such as conservatories, vehicles, balconies and outdoor kennels. On warm days, these are inappropriate environments for a dog, even for a short time. Their bodies cannot cool like humans, and so heat can become dangerous very quickly.



Your dog needs a safe, comfortable place to rest

## What you should do:

- Provide your dog with a safe, clean, quiet environment. Make sure that you provide adequate protection from hazards.
- Provide your dog with a comfortable, clean, dry, quiet, draught-free rest area, which has appropriate ventilation and is lit either naturally or artificially.
- Provide your dog with somewhere they can go to avoid things that frighten them.
- If your dog is kept in a kennel, you should check them frequently and ensure they are not in danger or distressed.
- Provide your dog with access to an appropriate place, away from their resting area, which they can use as a toilet area regularly as needed and at least every few hours.
- Make sure that any place you leave your dog is large enough to provide, at all times, a comfortable area with effective ventilation and temperature control, and that your dog is able to move around to ensure its comfort, avoiding becoming too hot or too cold.
- When you transport your dog make sure they are comfortable and safe at all times.
- Do not leave your dog unattended in situations, or for periods of time that are likely to cause them distress or render them unsafe.
- Keep your dog under control and safe at all times and do not let them stray.
- If you are going away and not taking your dog, make sure they are only ever left with someone who can meet their welfare needs.







# How to provide a suitable diet for your dog

Diet includes water, and dogs need fresh, clean drinking water at all times. Without water to drink, a dog will become distressed and seriously ill.

A dog needs a well-balanced diet to stay fit and healthy. Meals designed for people may not provide dogs with the balanced nutrition they need and some foods commonly found in the home, such as grapes, raisins, chocolate or onions, can be harmful or even fatal to dogs.

An individual dog's nutritional needs depend on their age, sex, activity, the type of food they eat, their state of health and whether they have been neutered. Some dogs, such as those that are pregnant, or nursing puppies, have special dietary needs. Diets designed for adult dogs are not always suitable for growing animals and puppies. Growing dogs may have special dietary requirements. Other dogs, for example; senior dogs, working dogs and those with poor health, may also require a special diet.

Dogs need at least one meal a day and how much an adult dog needs to eat depends on the type of food, their bodyweight and how active they are. A healthy adult dog should have a stable weight appropriate to their age, sex, breed and level of activity. Dogs should be neither too thin nor too fat. Overfeeding a dog will lead to them becoming overweight, which can lead to health problems. Underfeeding a dog will cause them to lose weight, suffer and can cause health problems

Dogs can suffer from digestive problems that can be caused by their diet being

changed suddenly. Strenuous exercise shortly before, or after, food can also be harmful.

## BODY CONDITION SCORE

### 1 VERY THIN



- Very little muscle
- Easily seen ribs, backbone and hipbones
- No body fat

### 2 UNDERWEIGHT



- Clearly seen ribs and backbone
- A little fat over hipbones
- Obviously tucked-in waist

### 3 IDEAL



- Can feel ribs, backbone and hipbones, but not prominent
- Smooth, curved, tucked-in waist
- Base of tail smooth

### 4 OVERWEIGHT



- No waist and back broader
- Ribs, backbone and hipbones difficult to feel
- Fat at base of tail

### 5 OBESE



- Bulging pot belly
- Cannot feel ribs, backbone or hipbones
- Thick fatty pads at base of tail

Dog images and information: PDSA

# What you should do:

- Provide your dog with clean fresh drinking water at all times. If necessary carry water, in a suitable container, with you when clean water is unlikely to be available.
- Make sure your dog eats a balanced diet suitable for their individual needs and maintains a stable weight that is neither over nor underweight for their age, level of activity, sex, breed and state of health. Do not let your dog overeat or they will become obese, and do not feed too little or your dog will be underweight.
- Be aware that any change in the amount your dog eats or drinks may be a sign of ill health. If your dog's eating or drinking habits change, consult your vet.
- Read, and be guided by, the feeding instructions relating to any dog foods you buy but adjust so that your dog does not become over or underweight.
- Provide all dogs (including puppies) that have special needs with diets that meet their individual requirements.
- Feed your adult dog at least once each day, unless advised otherwise by your vet.
- Do not change your dog's diet suddenly. Changes should be made gradually over several days.
- You should not feed your dog shortly before, or after, strenuous exercise.
- If you are uncertain what to do you should seek advice on feeding your dog from a vet, veterinary nurse or other reliable source.

**Dogs  
need constant  
access to fresh,  
clean drinking  
water**

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# How to provide for your dog's natural needs

## Dog training and behaviour

The way a dog behaves is individual and depends on their age, breed or type, breeding, rearing and past experiences. However, most dogs are playful, sociable animals and they enjoy playing together with toys, people and other dogs. Play with people and other dogs is a valuable source of interaction and fun, although dogs will spend some time playing alone with toys. They should have regular opportunities for interactive playing. Dogs are intelligent animals and can suffer from boredom. If your dog is bored and does not have enough to do, they may suffer or engage in inappropriate behaviour e.g. excessive barking or destructive behaviour such as chewing furniture. Aggressive displays or changes in behaviour, including vocalisation and eating, may indicate that something is wrong with the dog's physical and mental health.

Dogs experience a range of emotions including happiness, anxiety, fearfulness and anger. How they behave and their body language can help you understand what they are feeling and whether they are physically and mentally fit and healthy.

All dogs, in particular puppies, need rest. However, individual dogs have different needs and some will sleep for long periods after exercise or food; others will need

less rest and will be more active.

A dog needs regular exercise and regular opportunities to walk, run, explore, play, sniff and investigate. The amount of exercise a dog needs varies with age, breed and health. Some individuals need a lot of exercise and you should take account of this when choosing a dog. Young dogs may need to have their exercise restricted during periods of rapid growth to avoid developmental problems. Try to avoid exercising dogs in extreme weather or during events which they may find frightening such as firework displays.

Training dogs is important to help them learn to behave appropriately and to make it easier to keep them under control. It can also help strengthen the relationship you have with them. It is important to seek professional advice to identify/discuss any behaviour problems and the best training options for your dog. An incorrect training regime can have negative effects on your dog's welfare. Reward based training which includes the use of things that dogs like or want (e.g. toys, food and praise) is enjoyable for your dog and is widely regarded as the preferred form of training dogs.

**Use positive, reward, based training such as a treat, favourite toy or praise**

Training which includes physical punishment may cause pain, suffering and distress. These techniques can compromise dog welfare, lead to aggressive responses and worsen the problems they aim to address.

Puppies need to be carefully introduced to the many noises, objects and activities in their environment, some of which are frightening when first experienced. They also need to be adequately and carefully introduced to many different animals and people so that they learn how to interact appropriately and behave normally as adults.

## What you should do:

- Make sure your dog has enough to do so that it does not become distressed or bored.
- Make sure your dog has access to safe toys and suitable objects to play with and chew.
- Ensure that your dog can rest undisturbed when it wants to. Puppies and older animals may need more rest.
- Provide your dog with regular opportunities for exercise and play with people or other friendly dogs.
- Give your dog the exercise it needs, at least daily unless your vet recommends otherwise, to keep your dog fit, active and stimulated.
- If you are unsure how much exercise your dog needs; take advice from your vet, veterinary nurse or other suitably qualified dog behaviourist or trainer.
- You should know the behaviour of your dog when it is fit and healthy and be able to recognise and understand the signals your dog and others use when they are worried, unsure, angry or happy, fit and healthy.
- All dogs need to be trained to behave well, ideally from a very young age and should be introduced gradually and positively to different environments, people and animals.
- Reward based training methods including food, toys and praise are preferred in dog training systems.
- Your vet may refer you to a dog behaviour expert who should have a combination of qualifications, up to date knowledge, skills and experience and who treats dogs in such a way that their welfare is protected.
- If you become aware of changes in behaviour, or your dog is fearful of, or aggressive, towards other dogs and people, avoid the situations which lead to this and seek veterinary advice.
- You should ensure you prevent your dog from chasing or attacking any other animals, including livestock and horses through use of the lead or avoidance of such situations.



Susan Schmitz - Shutterstock



# How to provide the right companionship for your dog

Dogs are sociable animals that need, enjoy and value company. Consequently, many dogs do not like being left alone and may suffer if left without company, or with nothing to do for long periods of time. Some dogs become distressed and suffer if they are left on their own, even for short periods. Experts recommend four hours as the maximum time period.

The length of time individual dogs can be left varies, depending on factors such as age, training, previous experience of being left alone, breed or type, lifestyle and housing conditions. However, no dog should routinely be left on its own for prolonged periods. If the time alone is excessive, you can expect behavioural problems that are distressing for both you and your dog.

Learning to get on with people, dogs and other animals is an essential part of social development for a puppy. Puppies that are deprived of opportunities to develop social behaviour or who are not introduced carefully can become withdrawn, anxious and aggressive as adults. However, if a dog has appropriate contact with people, other dogs and animals early in their life, they will be more sociable and this can enhance their quality of life. Dogs that have not had opportunities to develop socially, perhaps by being removed from their mother or littermates too early, or which have had bad experiences involving people or other animals, may be frightened or aggressive in normal social situations or react inappropriately.

Dogs which are frightened show characteristic signs such as flattening of the ears and lowering the tail or signs of stress such as excessive panting, licking lips, hiding, cowering and aggression.

Dogs usually get on well with other dogs in the same household, but may need time to get to know each other. However, they will need to have their own space and places to get away from other dogs if they want to.

Dogs get to know the people with whom they regularly interact.

They can become confused and distressed if the behaviour of those people is inconsistent and unpredictable. It is never acceptable to frighten a dog, cause pain, injure or encourage them to behave aggressively by teasing or tormenting them.

**Some dogs become stressed and suffer if left alone and may need company**

# What you should do:

- Make sure your dog has opportunities to spend enough time with people and friendly dogs so that it does not become lonely or bored.
- When dogs live together you should provide enough extra resources (e.g. toys, beds, food and water bowls and places where they feel safe) and space to stop them from becoming competitive and fighting with each other.
- Make sure that your dog is never left alone long enough for it to become distressed.
- Encourage your dog to be friendly towards other dogs and allow it to interact with friendly dogs on a regular basis.
- Puppies should be given regular and appropriate opportunities to learn how to interact with other dogs, animals and people.
- If your dog is not fully vaccinated check with your vet before mixing it with other dogs.
- You should always check health issues with your vet before allowing your puppy to mix with other dogs.
- Provide your dog with regular exercise, play and training.
- You should ensure that children are not left alone with your dog.
- If you keep more than one dog, you should keep them together for company if possible. They will need to get on with each other, but will also need space to get away from each other when they want to.
- You should ensure that dogs in your care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults or animals, including those who look after your dog for you when you are away from home
- Be consistent, kind and gentle in the way you, your family and friends, react to your dog and do not encourage aggressive or other anti-social behaviour.
- When you are away, make sure your dog is properly cared for by a responsible person. When someone else is looking after your dog they also have a legal responsibility to ensure its welfare, and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have. You are still legally responsible for the dog even when they are not with you.
- If your dog is fearful of, or aggressive towards, other dogs or people avoid the situations that lead to this behaviour and seek advice from a vet, veterinary nurse or suitably qualified dog behaviourist or trainer.





# How to keep your dog healthy and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Dogs do feel pain and have similar pain thresholds to people. However, individual dogs and different breeds or types may show pain and suffering in different ways. Any change in the way a dog behaves can be an early sign that it is ill, or in pain. Dogs which are ill, or in pain, often change their eating and drinking habits. They may:

- stop or reduce eating and lose weight
- drink water excessively, drink less or not at all
- become withdrawn and unwilling to exercise or play
- cry when approached or touched
- show uncharacteristic fear or aggression when approached
- try to hide

They may also show specific signs of ill health such as:

- discharges from the eyes, ears or nose
- excessive salivation, vomiting, difficulties passing urine, diarrhoea or constipation
- coughing or wheezing
- excessively scratching and developing skin sores
- limping or swelling

This list is for guidance only and is not exhaustive.

Dogs are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases and other illnesses. They need protection from serious infections, which can be provided by vaccination. Like us, dogs benefit from routine health care.

Many people choose to have their dogs neutered. If you do not intend to breed your dog, your vet can advise on neutering and the welfare benefits of neutering dogs.

If you decide to breed your dog, your vet can advise on the risks of inherited conditions and exaggerated features that could affect the welfare of the puppies. Puppies require care, must be microchipped before sale and cannot be sold under eight weeks. Raising puppies is difficult and time-consuming, and the puppies are your responsibility, with the same needs as any dog under the Animal Welfare Act.

**It is a legal requirement to have your dog microchipped and the information kept up to date**

From 6 April 2016, it is a legal requirement to have dogs microchipped, details recorded on an appropriate, recognised database and kept up to date. A dog which can be easily identified (e.g. by microchip) is more likely to be reunited with its owner if injured, or lost, particularly if it loses its collar. This will ensure they receive the prompt veterinary treatment needed if injured. Dogs are inquisitive and may put themselves in danger if left to explore unsupervised.



Battersea Dogs & Cats Home

## What you should do:

- Take sensible precautions to keep your dog safe from injury.
- Monitor your dog daily and watch out for signs of injury, disease or illness. Make sure someone else does this if you are away.
- If you notice changes in your dog's behaviour you should contact your vet and follow the advice you are given.
- You should carefully check your dog's coat regularly and groom your dog, as necessary, to maintain a healthy coat.
- You should ask your vet how often your dog needs a health check, and about the things you can do to protect your dog's health. You should follow the advice you are given.
- Routine preventive healthcare, such as vaccination and treatments to control parasites (e.g. fleas and worms), as well as any current health problems your dog may have, is an essential part of keeping your dog healthy.
- Clean up your dog's faeces to avoid disease transmission.
- Take sensible precautions to keep your dog safe including prevention of access to poisonous food, plants, chemicals and any other hazards.
- Only use medicines and drugs that have been prescribed for your individual dog.
- Human products and medicines intended for other animals can be dangerous to dogs and sometimes fatal. If you are unsure seek veterinary advice.
- You should always consult your vet if you are concerned that your dog has eaten or come into contact with anything that could be harmful.
- Your dog is required by law to wear a collar and identity tag when in a public place. Collars should be of the correct size and fit, and should not cause any pain or discomfort. Once your dog is microchipped, remember to keep the microchip database up to date with any changes in your contact details.



- If you are considering having your dog neutered, your vet will be able to advise you about the best age to have this done.
- You should seek the advice of your vet before allowing your dog to breed and take all reasonable steps to ensure that you will be able to provide the care required during pregnancy as well as finding suitable homes for the puppies.
- If you recognise signs and symptoms of disease or suspect that your dog is in pain, ill or injured; contact a vet promptly and follow veterinary advice regarding their treatment. If at any time you have concerns about the health or welfare of your dog you should seek advice from a vet or veterinary nurse.



# Sources of further information

- Your vet. You can contact the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to find details of vets in your area. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 2AF: [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk) – the website has a “find a vet” facility. <https://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/find-a-vet/>
- Local libraries and bookshops for up to date books on dog care.
- Websites such as:
  - Defra hosted on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) – has information on the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) and copies of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs.
  - Association of Dogs and Cats Homes: [www.adch.org.uk](http://www.adch.org.uk)
  - Battersea Dogs & Cats Home: [www.battersea.org.uk](http://www.battersea.org.uk)
  - Blue Cross: [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)
  - British Veterinary Association: [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)
  - British Small Animals Veterinary Association: [www.bsava.com](http://www.bsava.com)
  - Dogs Trust: [www.dogstrust.org.uk](http://www.dogstrust.org.uk)
  - PDSA: [www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)
  - Pet Industry Federation: [www.petfederation.co.uk](http://www.petfederation.co.uk)
  - Pet Health Council: [www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk](http://www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk)
  - Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)
  - RCVS’ “Find a vet” service at [www.findavet.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.findavet.rcvs.org.uk) for health, nutrition or behavioural advice
  - The Animal Behaviour & Training Council : [www.abtcouncil.org.uk/](http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/)
  - The Kennel Club: [www.thekennelclub.org.uk](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk)

If you wish to take your dog abroad you can find out how to do this at: [www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview](http://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview)



## **This Code of Practice applies to all dogs**

The purposes of the Code is to provide practical guidance to help you to comply with the provisions set out under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act ([www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/section/9](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/section/9)). It does not tell you precisely how to care for your dog but it does summarise important things you should know and what to do when making decisions about how best to care for your dog.

Breach of a provision of this Code is not an offence itself but if proceedings are brought against you for an offence under Section 9 of the Act, the Court will look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in deciding whether you have committed an offence.

If you are unsure about anything to do with the care and welfare of your dog, you should always seek advice from an expert such as a veterinary surgeon, mainly referred to as vet. You will also find reference within this Code to “other suitably qualified dog behaviourists or trainers.” These are people who hold the qualifications and experience to provide expert advice on dog welfare and behaviour.

A list of suitable organisations and places to find help are provided on page 13 of this Code.

You can find out more about the legislation relating to dogs at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)