

When many owners can no longer care for a pet, or when their pet has had a litter, many of these owners place ads in various media advertising these unwanted pets as "free to a good home". While these owners mean well & some free pets end up in wonderful homes, we strongly advise against this approach as "free" is all too often seen as "worthless."

Studies show that pets obtained for free are less likely to ever be taken to a veterinarian for basic immunizations and checkups, let alone an illness or injury, and even less likely to be spayed or neutered eventually leading to even more unwanted puppies and kittens. Free pets are also more likely to be neglected and/or discarded because "there are plenty more where that one came from!" Since we ask about the original source of a pet when they are brought to us we can say that well over 90% of the pets surrendered to us by their owner were originally obtained as a giveaway/free pet or are the progeny of that free pet.

And sadly there are some harsh realities of what can and does happen to some "free" pets. There are those who get a puppy/kitten for children and then when it is older and less cute (or summer is over) they 'get rid of it' and later on get another puppy or kitten for the children to play with until, it too, is no longer 'fun.' Small puppies and kittens can be used as snake or other predator food. Some horrible people will purposely get a free animal for purposes of torturing it or using it in some bad-taste prank and sadly there is an active ongoing criminal case of just this happening in north Alabama right now where the person obtained kittens via Craigs List and tortured and killed them. There are people who buy, steal or get free animals for the purpose of using them as bait dogs (training aids) by dog fighters or sell them to puppy mills for breeding stock, or sell them at flea markets or on the street to make money. Please don't think you will be able to pick-up on their nefarious purpose either as they may show up with children in tow or a wife/girlfriend with children may come to get the innocent puppy/kitten.

So what should you do if you need to re-home your pet? If your pet came from a responsible breeder, call them first to see if they can take it back or assist with placement as a truly responsible breeder will be there for the animal they produced. You should consider charging a fee that will not only 'value' your pet but discourage resale of pets to others. Spay or neuter your pet to avoid attracting backyard breeders or puppy mill operators and also just to ensure your pet isn't contributing to even more unwanted pets needing homes. Interview potential new owners by asking for their identification, phone number, previous pet experience, their current pets and children in the household, how the pet will be contained, and their veterinarian's name as a reference. Keep their contact info, call their veterinarian for a reference and visit their home to see how and where your pet will live before your release it to the new owner. For the puppies or kittens, or if you can not afford to have your pet spayed or neutered, ask the new owner to pledge that they will have the puppy/kitten fixed when it is six months old and the adult immediately. If a potential adopter isn't willing to give you their information or let you visit their home our advice is to politely send them away empty handed. You owe it to your pet to take the time and effort to make sure it goes to a good home. And if you care - trust your gut!

If time is critical or you are simply not willing to screen potential owners, then please take your pet to a reputable animal shelter rather than give it away free to someone you don't know anything about. Each county in our tri-county area has an open-admission shelter and while none of us can guarantee placement due to overwhelming numbers, we will do our utmost to find adoptable pets loving and lifetime homes. We work to screen & educate adopters to make sure they are appropriate and ready to take on a new pet and our adoption fees cover immunizations, de-worming, the mandatory spay or neuter, a health exam from your vet, and often a ton of toys, treats and information to help you and your pet get off to a good start.

Please take the time to make sure your pet(s) go to people who will love and care for them for life and if you need any other advice on re-homing your pet, feel free to call us at 567-3377 or email [hselco@bellsouth.net](mailto:hselco@bellsouth.net) .