

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 newspapers or on flyers 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 and 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 abused 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 60% of the pets surrendered to us were originally obtained as "free to a good home" pet. Many pets obtained free are often impulse decisions where later it becomes apparent that the owner was just not prepared for the responsibilities of a pet, or the species/breed type was all wrong for their lifestyle or home situation meaning yet another pet that may have issues or at least is older again in need of a home which just may not be out there.

There are also some harsh realities of what can happen to "free" pets. Some get puppies/kittens for their children or grandchildren and then when it is older they 'get rid of it' until they later get another pup or kitten for the "children" until it too outgrows its cuteness. 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. There are people who buy, steal or get free animals for the purpose of selling them to research labs, to puppy or kitten mills for breeding stock, or to be used as bait dogs by dog fighters.

So what should you do if you need to re-home your pet? If your pet came from a responsible breeder, call them 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 laboratories and others. Spay or neuter your pet to avoid attracting backyard breeders or puppy mill operators. 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 if at all possible, 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.

If time is critical or you are simply not willing to screen potential owners, then please take your pet to a reputable public or private 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 generally cover immunizations, de-worming, the mandatory spay or neuter, a health exam from your vet, and often food and information to help new adopters 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 in re-homing your pet, feel free to call us at 567-3377 or email hselco@bellsouth.net.

"I like a bit of mongrel myself, whether it's a man or a dog; they're the best for everyday."
George Bernard Shaw