

AWL Guide for Dog Owners

Learn how to understand your
dog and enrich their life








Welcome to the Animal Welfare League Guide for Dog Owners!

We strive to support new and existing pet owners to be the best fur-parents possible. That's why we've created this guide to help you get to know your dog better! Interpreting your dog's behaviour is the best way to understand how they're feeling and will enable you to take better care of them. We've also included lots of helpful tips on how to ensure your dog lives an enriched and happy life with you.

How to settle in your new dog

Bringing home a new dog or puppy is exciting! However, dogs can find moving into a new environment a little daunting at first. Here's some of our top tips on how to settle your dog into their new home:

-  Allow your dog to settle in at their own pace. Dogs may take time to adjust and want to be alone sometimes during this period, but they'll let you know when they're ready for more interaction. Help them feel comfortable in their new environment and don't expect too much from them while they're settling in (it can take three months or more for them to settle in). It can be very helpful for your dog if you avoid having visitors during the first few days.
-  Ensure your dog has a safe space to retreat to if they need some quiet alone time.
-  Put in place any household rules from day one - it's easier to create habits than try to change them later!

Get to know your dog's body language

Dogs mainly communicate with their body language and facial expressions.

Neutral/relaxed pose - ears and tail are in their natural position, eyes are soft and not looking nervously in another direction showing the whites of their eyes.



Happy pose - body is wiggly and loose, tail is wagging at medium height - some dogs even do a butt wiggle!



Alert pose - ears are perked forward, pupils might dilate, mouth might be open but it will be relaxed.



Fret pose - avoiding eye contact and turning away, panting, ears are back or down, tail is down, body is hunching and trembling.



Flee pose - trying to escape a situation, mouth is tight, barking.



Defensive aggression pose - ears, tail and body are lowered, gums are pulled back and teeth are showing, growling or deep barking.



When you know what to look for, you're able to understand how your dog is feeling and help them when they need you.



Why it's important to microchip your dog

Have you ever thought about what you would do if you lost your dog? If your dog isn't microchipped, you significantly reduce your chance of being reunited with them. This is why registering and microchipping your dog is one of the most responsible things you can do as their owner.

What is a microchip? - A microchip is a method of identification for pets. It's a small chip with a number unique to your pet only. The number is recorded in a microchip registry with your contact details.

How do I microchip my pet? - Only vets and authorised microchip implanters can implant a microchip.

Is it compulsory to microchip my pet? - Yes, it is mandatory to microchip your pet in South Australia.







Training basics


Dogs learn by making associations. When something good happens after they perform a behaviour, they're much more likely to repeat it. Repetition is important for your dog to learn, so when you're training them make sure you repeat things multiple times. When your dog performs a behaviour you want them to, quickly reward them. Training should be fun for your dog, so we've put together some training methods that are positive and reward based:



- Find out what motivates your dog by holding food in one hand and a toy in the other. Next, put your hand holding the food behind your back and try capturing your dog's attention with the toy. If your dog still wants the food, then you know your dog is food motivated!

 Toys are useful when you want your dog to have more excitement. For example, when you're teaching them recall toys can motivate them to run back to you faster.

 Praise and attention are also great ways to reward your dog.

 When your dog performs a behaviour really well or in a difficult situation, you can use a high value treat to make sure they know how well they've done.

Top tip:

Clickers are useful for pinpointing the moment your dog performs the behaviour you want.







Health benefits of desexing

Desexing your dog is compulsory in South Australia and has health benefits that will help them live a longer, healthier life.

Desexed female dogs will not develop diseases of the ovaries or uterus, and will have a reduced likelihood of developing breast cancer.

If you have a male dog, desexing will eliminate the risk of testicular cancer, as well as reduce the risk of prostate disease, perianal tumours and perineal hernias.



Brain games for your dog

Providing your dog with brain games improves their mood, tires them out and prevents them from displaying destructive behaviour. Some brain games for your dog include:

Hide and seek - Hide food or treats around the house or backyard and encourage your dog to find them.

Activity toys and puzzle feeders - Activity toys like Kongs and snuffle mats keep your dog busy and require them to work for their food. Puzzle feeders are similar but also get your dog to use their problem solving skills. We recommend supervising your dog when they're using activity toys or puzzle feeders to ensure they don't swallow anything they shouldn't.

Learning new tricks - Learning new tricks requires a lot of concentration from your dog and is a great brain workout. This is also a great way to bond with your dog.

Sniff safari - Take your dog for a walk, but let them lead with their nose. Exploring new smells provides dogs with a lot of mental stimulation. What better way to do this than by taking them on a sniff safari!

Interactive playtime - Playing with your dog in an interactive way helps keep their minds active and engaged. Some interactive games you can play with your dog are tug-of-war and fetch.





What does Animal Welfare League do for dogs?

Our vision is a South Australia where every pet has a loving home. We believe in giving every healthy dog and cat a second chance. That's why all animals who come to Animal Welfare League are given the best possible care, treatment and opportunity to find a loving home. We also strive to improve dogs' and cats' lives in the community. Supporting and encouraging people to live safely and well with dogs and cats, as well as offering support to pet owners to help them be the best fur-parents possible, are some of the ways we work to improve the lives of pets in the community.



Connecting pets, people and community through a
lifetime of love and memories.

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