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Update date: 3/30/20 to reflect the most current information¹

Adoption Protocol

Definitions

Open Adoptions: removing barriers to adoption and creating a welcoming and non-judgemental experience for the public.

Conversation Based Adoptions: Relying on productive conversations with potential adopters in order to steer adoption decisions, instead of depending on application answers to approve/deny adopters.

Purpose

In order to prepare for the potential impact that COVID-19 could have on shelters due to an increase of intake or a decrease in rescue pulls, implementing open adoption policies is crucial to maximizing lifesaving. The cornerstone of open adoptions is embracing a non-judgemental approach to every adoption. Counselors will start from a place of “Yes” unless the adopter presents a reason that otherwise cannot be overcome. All adoption decisions will be made on the assumption that a visitor is a good person who came to an animal shelter today to do the right thing: adopt a shelter pet or support the organization. (Ex: [Dog Adoption Philosophy](#), [Cat Adoption Philosophy](#))

Procedure & Metrics

Immediately:

- Adoption Application: Change the traditional application into a questionnaire. This should be no longer than a handful of questions and should only be used as a guide for the adoption conversation and to help adopters find the best fit. See: [Adopters Welcome Questionnaire](#). Implement a *conversation based adoption** process.
*See definition above
- Home checks. Reference. Background Checks: Cease all of these checks, allow adopters to adopt and take home the same day.
- Landlord/ Insurance: Cease all calls to landlords or insurance companies to determine if certain breeds, size, or if pets are accepted. Adoption counselors are to educate potential adopters about any restrictions that may exist, but the adopter will ultimately make this decision and take on the responsibility.
- Promote Veterinary Care without requiring proof: Cease all calls to potential adopter's Veterinarians to verify that resident pets are up to date on medical care. Instead, use this time to educate and provide resources. If the adopter indicates that their resident puppy/dog(s) have never been vaccinated and they want to adopt an undervaccinated puppy: provide a resource sheet with all low-cost/easily accessible Veterinary or mobile clinics that the adopter can ideally get in the same day.* Allow these adopters to return after

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Due to COVID-19 Shelter in Place government mandates and to accomplish a 90% reduction in social interaction, while maintaining the practice that every pet who enters a shelter should receive urgent, individualized treatment and care, with the goal of a live outcome.

vaccinating their resident pets and approve their adoption. Otherwise, for cats and fully vaccinated shelter pets, the adoption should proceed without this step. **This requirement is only due to the prevalence of parvovirus and distemper.*

- Meet and greets: Provide tips and resources on how to integrate a new pet into the home without requiring a meet and greet.
- Family Members: All family members are not required to be present at the time of adoption. Adoptions should happen the same day, and the primary caretaker(s) will make the decision of who in their family needs to meet the pet prior to adopting.
- Spay/Neuter of Resident Pets: If resident pets are not spayed/neutered, use this as an opportunity to educate and provide low-cost spay/neuter resources, but this is not a reason for an adoption denial.
- Declawing: Educate adopters on the realities of declawing in an informative and non-judgemental way. If the adopter still insists on declawing, match them with a cat in shelter or foster that is already declawed.
- Outdoor Dogs: If a potential adopter indicates that they want their dog to be primarily outside. The counselor will educate on ways to integrate a dog into the home. If the adopter cannot be dissuaded, then the counselor should find a dog that would be an appropriate match: ie: hearty, medium/large dog, playmate for another dog etc. The adopter will need to indicate a plan for inclement weather and socialization.
- Pets as Gifts: Treat adopters wanting to adopt a pet as a gift on a case by case basis, and eliminate a “no pets as gifts” policy. Rely heavily on conversation and education to ensure the person is making the right decision for the pet and the gift recipient.
- Adoption Denials: These should be extremely rare and will not be made out of judgement on appearance, socioeconomic status, or race, and must fall into one of the categories below. In the case that an adoption denial takes place, the counselor should approach the situation from a place of non-judgement, education, and persuasion with hopes that the adopter will come to the decision on their own terms:
 - Indicates that dog will be kept tethered/chained and or as an outside dog with no inclement weather plan.
 - Plans to give outdoor access to a kitten under 9 months or a declawed cat or cat missing a limb/eye/etc. Will not be dissuaded.
 - Verbally abusive to counselors/staff.
 - Appears mentally unstable and/or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 - Refuses to provide basic medical or daily care for their adopted pet.
 - A death of a previous pet through negligence/neglect.
 - Not having the correct home set up for this dog (ie., have children with a no child dog)
- Volunteers: Send a plea to the community for volunteer adoption counselors that can assist with the adoption process. These volunteers should be provided with a simple training guide and/or learn simple steps of the process to decrease adoption wait times and the overall workload on limited staff.

Adoption Process Adjustments:

- In the event that staff and volunteers are reduced onsite or the shelter closes to the public, adoptions are still recommended to continue with protocol adjustments to keep everyone healthy.
- Shifting to an appointment based adoption process will allow more adoption traffic control and eliminate people congregating in different areas of the shelter.
- Utilizing Facebook live, videos, photos, and social media has been an effective way to market onsite pets so adopters do not have to walk the kennels to see who's available.
- Streamlining the process by conducting “virtual meet and greets” and having the adoption conversation over the phone will greatly decrease person to person contact.

- For adoption meet and greets and in person adoption processing, utilize an open air space and establish checkpoints with signage that separates people and limits contact.
- Utilize drive through style adoption pickups where adopters stay in their car and the pet is put in their vehicle.

Resources & Links

- *Adopters Welcome Manual:*
<https://www.animalsheltering.org/page/adopters-welcome-manual>
- *Maddie's Fund Removing Barriers to Adoption:*
<https://www.maddiesfund.org/removing-barriers-to-adoption-learning-track.htm>
- *National Animal Care and Control (NACA)*
<https://www.nacanet.org/covid19/>

AmPA! has virtual support services available for each of these protocols in the AmPA! COVID-19 Animal Shelter Preparedness Guide. For custom support or guidance on any of these protocols, or how to implement for your organization, contact us [here](#) and include "COVID-19 Support" in the message.