

What Fostering Is Not

Since I started fostering, I have discovered that there are a number of misconceptions about the true purpose of fostering a dog. Some people view fostering as a trial period to determine whether they want to adopt a dog permanently. Some start out with the right intentions, but become too attached to the dog and are unable to give it up. Others are only willing to foster one particular dog that they already feel an attachment to. Some potential adopters think fostering is a good way to get a free dog, free vet care and supplies. In my opinion, none of these attitudes reflect the true spirit or intent of foster care programs.



Although I can understand why the general public may be confused about the purpose of foster care for dogs, I am continually surprised to find that many people in animal rescue don't always get it either. Encouraging foster families to adopt their foster dogs is generally not a great idea! Why? Because in most cases, people who foster already have one or several "forever" dogs. They probably don't have many extra slots for new dogs in their packs, either because of time and space constraints, or because their municipality allows only a certain number of pets per household. If a foster family adopts a dog, that "slot" is no longer available for the next needy dog. I have two wonderful dogs, plus one "slot" for a foster dog. If I adopted one of my fosters, I would have to give up fostering altogether. There are no number limits where I live; I simply don't have the time or the space for four dogs. And thinking logically rather than emotionally, I don't want three full-time dogs. My two, Brin and Echo, fulfill every dog-related need I have -- except for my desire to help the others.

So how do I prevent myself from becoming too attached? I never think of a foster dog as "mine." Each dog already belongs to someone else -- it just so happens that I haven't met that person yet. The dogs just stay with me until their special person is able to come and take them home. Another foster volunteer looks for minor, arbitrary faults in each new dog: "Oh, well, we don't need another male." "This one's nice, but we already have a white one." And of course the easiest way to keep from getting too attached is to remember that there is another dog that needs my help after this one goes home.

I try not to be too picky about which dogs I will foster. Within limits, I will take whichever dog needs me at the time. My only requirements are that the dog can reasonably be expected to get along with my other dogs and not devour my cat. I don't go to the shelter and say, "Oh, that one's cute and quiet and will be easy to place without a lot of work." Instead, I wait for a call



saying, "There's a dog that really needs help." This is probably why I usually end up with the big, rowdy, untrained, adolescent, shy, sick, or ordinary-looking ones. They need my help to become healthy, trusting, well-behaved companions. Sometimes they are perfectly healthy and well-mannered, but just need a little extra time and effort to find a new owner who can see their inner beauty.

Fostering is not a way to get a free dog. It is not a trial period before adoption. And it certainly isn't easy. Fostering is a way to help a dog that really needs you. At times, it's incredibly stressful. It requires dedication, hard work, serious time commitments, lots of stain remover, and -- above all -- an understanding of the purpose of the process. If you can't give your heart to a dog and then let it go when it doesn't need you anymore, you probably shouldn't get involved.

So what is fostering? For me, it's the most rewarding thing I've ever done.

Source: <http://www.fosterdogs.com/isnot.html>