

# DEMENTIA FAMILY DOG

A handy guide to getting your own dog  
for families living with dementia



Dementia Dog  
Project



Dementia Dog Project  
A collaboration between Alzheimer Scotland and Dogs for Good



**Alzheimer  
Scotland**  
Action on Dementia



LIFE CHANGING  
DEVOTION

## WELCOME!

This booklet forms part of our Dementia Family Dog service and aims to help guide you and your family to make an informed decision about getting your own dog.

Packed with useful information, tips and checklists we also offer guidance on additional considerations surrounding dementia. For this reason, this booklet focusses on rehoming of adult, older dogs rather than acquiring a young puppy.

We hope you find this a useful resource to help you consider and identify your requirements and prepare the right questions for the dog provider to enable them to find the best match of dog for you and your family.



## OVERVIEW

**Section one** starts with a series of questions to ask yourself relevant to your situation. This includes considerations should you care for someone with a diagnosis of dementia in the same household, such as:

- ✓ **Is a full-time dog the right option for us?**
- ✓ **What are the dog's needs?**
- ✓ **What might be the right kind of dog for us?**

**Section two** introduces the key practical considerations when getting a dog, such as:

- ✓ **Timescales for a dog to settle into new home**
- ✓ **Benefits of dog training**
- ✓ **Equipment and cost considerations**

**Section three** offers:

- ✓ **first contact questions for the dog provider**
- ✓ **question 'prompts' for you to ask once a potential dog has been identified.**

**Notes section:** Feel free to use this section to record any useful information relevant for yourself.

**Appendix of**

- ✓ **How to sign up to our Dementia Family Dog webinars if you are decided on getting a dog or already have a dog**
- ✓ **Other options to consider for having dog interactions in your life, if a full-time dog may not feel the right option for you right now**
- ✓ **Dementia Dog contact details**

## SECTION ONE

In this section we explore some of the key considerations and questions around home life and daily routine that may be relevant to you when deciding on bringing a dog into the family.

The questions aim to help you consider what kind of dog could be the right temperament, size and breed to suit your lifestyle and family.

The more information you're happy to share, the more likely a potential dog provider can match you with the right dog.



## MY BIO

**Name:**

**Family members & ages of any children:**

**Home environment:**

**Lifestyle/daily routine:**

**Health considerations for any family members (eg. include here details of any diagnosis of dementia):**



## Dogs and Dementia

We have seen first-hand through our Dementia Dog work the huge benefits that the right kind of dog can bring for someone with dementia and their family.

This section aims to help you through some of the key considerations of your home environment and how a dog could fit into your lives, should you be caring for someone with dementia in the same household. Alongside considering the type of dog you may want, it is also important to look at aspects such as:

### **How your own energy levels, time commitment and daily routine matches the breed / size / age of the dog you may have in mind?**

For example, if you have a quiet daily lifestyle, then an older more mature dog may be suitable rather than a young high-energy dog that needs lots of walking and interaction?

### **How involved is the person you care for in the decision to get a full-time dog?**

Are they able to have full insight to decide whether they also want a dog in the home? It may be you have both enjoyed having dogs in the past and were planning to again. In order to assess if now is the right time, it is important to fully examine your present circumstances and how easy or difficult it would be to provide for a dog full-time. No one knows this better than you.

### **How would you describe your daily lifestyle?**

- Quiet** - we don't see many people or go out much
- Average** - we enjoy a daily walk, shopping etc
- Busy** - we are always out and about and have regular visitors.



Looking at what happens on a typical day may help assess what type of dog in temperament or behaviour may best suit your needs. For example, if you enjoy shorter walks, then a dog breed and age that doesn't need lots of daily exercise could be a good match?

### **Changing needs for someone with a diagnosis**

Some people with dementia find their emotional response to dogs may change over time. For instance, some people may find it difficult to have the same levels of interaction and engagement with a dog than perhaps they used to.

### **Considering the welfare needs of a dog at home**

Keeping in mind that your home situation may have, or currently be, undergoing physical or emotional changes due to a family member having a diagnosis, how will you also ensure you can meet the welfare and wellbeing needs of a dog?

### **An animal can bring huge joy, comfort and companionship for a person with dementia.**

Sometimes, however, an animal may also become a source of annoyance or stress. By fully considering the wants and needs of you, the person with a diagnosis and a dog, this will help you to make informed decisions that are best for everyone involved.

### **You may have had a favourite breed in the past, would that breed fit into your lifestyle now?**

An energetic dog who needs a lot of exercise and attention may lead to outpacing the person with a diagnosis of dementia which can result in fatigue and confusion. Equally a 'yappy' breed could cause sensory overload and lead to irritation.

### **Ideas to test these considerations**

A good way to gauge some of these considerations, before making the leap to acquire your own dog, is to invite over a friend or family member with their own dog, to see how everyone interacts. This could also tell you a lot about what sort of dog may be the right one for you. If your loved one struggles to engage or perhaps shows a negative response to the dog such as fear, it may be worth considering if getting a dog full-time is the right choice, both for you as a family and the dog.

While this can be a difficult decision to reach, there can still be many other ways to enjoy regular and safe interaction with dogs without having to take on the full-time responsibility of getting your own. You can read more about this in the Appendix at the end of this booklet.

If you are a family member who has a relative with dementia (living in a separate household), you may like to consider if getting a dog could also provide benefits by visiting your family member with dementia.

What is your motivation for considering getting a dog?

- Establish new routines
- Exercise
- Companionship
- Reduction of stress
- Always had a dog

What age of dog are you looking to get?

- Puppy
- Adolescent
- Adult
- Senior
- Don't mind

What are your top three preferred breed types?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

What sort of personality of dog are you looking for?

- |                                 |                                    |                                 |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Passive   | <input type="checkbox"/> Vocal  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet  | <input type="checkbox"/> Playful   | <input type="checkbox"/> Smart  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheeky | <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong |

Please note! We would advise that a puppy may not be the best option for someone who is also actively caring for a person with a diagnosis of dementia. This is due to the intense training involved, disruption of routine and additional stress that can initially be associated with puppy care and training. For this reason, this booklet is therefore focussed on re-homing an older adult dog.

What is your preferred gender of dog?

- Male
- Female
- Don't Mind

What is your preferred size of dog?

- Tiny
- Small
- Medium
- Large
- Giant



What sort of coat type do you both like?

- Short & smooth - Dogs with smooth coat do not need to be groomed often, a quick brush once a day.
- Wire coat - Wire coats need more consistent grooming and may be more prone to tangles and mats. Regular trips to the groomers for stripping may be needed.
- Long coat - Long coats will require more regular grooming than most, suitable brushes for long & coarse or long & smooth coats are available, regular bathing with detangling treatments are needed.
- Double coat - A double coat will need more care. These coats may have long or short fur and will need appropriate grooming tools to maintain properly.
- Curly coat - Dogs with curly or wavy coats have thick and soft curls close to the body and are prone to matting. Daily brushing and regular trips to the groomers every 6-8 weeks is recommended.
- Non moulting coats also require regular clipping



What additional needs would you be willing to work on?

- Poor Health - Minor issues
- Poor Health - Complex issues
- High energy levels
- Nervous with children
- Nervous of traffic/sudden loud noise
- Nervous of strangers
- Excessive barking
- Possessive over toys/food/bone (known as 'resource guarding')
- Unable to be left alone
- Not good in the car
- Likely to chase small animals
- Doesn't always come back when called on a walk
- Pulling on lead
- Not good with other dogs




## What types of walks/level of exercise?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Short regular walks      | <input type="checkbox"/> Fun                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To let the dog toilet    | <input type="checkbox"/> Off lead/free run                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long walks/hikes         | <input type="checkbox"/> On lead                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fitness, walking/jogging | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog sports (Agility, Flyball etc.) |



I'm a Dalmatian, I have lots of stamina and can run all day

## Family and Environmental considerations



Do you have regular visitors to your home?

Who lives in the family home? Very young? Elderly?

Some dogs who are nervous of strangers may struggle with multiple guests to the home.

Are all family members happy to bring a dog into the home?

Does anyone in your household/visitors have any allergies or physical or emotional needs that need to be considered when having a dog live with you?

Would you need permission from any third party for you to rehome a dog? eg. landlord?




How do you plan to introduce a new dog to any existing pets?


Do you have regular visiting pets?



# Your Home Environment

 What size of house do you live in?

- Small
- Medium
- Large

 What style of house do you live in?


- Terraced
- Semi-detached
- Detached
- Bungalow
- Flat/apartment-ground floor
- Flat/apartment-upper floor

 Layout of the house?

- Open plan
- Rooms off the hallway

What will your dog need from your existing home?



 Where will the dog sleep at night?


- Crate
- Dog bed
- Your bed
- Sofa

Will the dog have free run of the entire house?

Think about how to separate the dog in an open plan house, should you need to.

Not all dogs will instinctively be comfortable in a crate. If you would like your dog to sleep in a crate, this will be an important question to ask.



 Does your house have shared access, such as entrance hall, drive or lane?

 Does the front door open immediately onto the road?

I'm small and fast and can escape easily

 Do you have a fenced/ secure garden? (Recommended 5ft high)

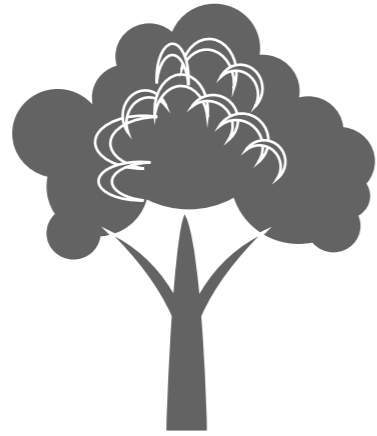
 Size of garden?

I'm a Husky, I love to live with experienced people who understand my complex training needs



Outside environment?

- City
- Town
- Village
- Main Road



- Lane
- Street
- Cul-de-sac
- Other:

How often would you envisage walking your dog?

- Once daily - long walk (over 1hr)
- More than once daily - long walk (over 1hr)
- Once daily short walk
- More than once daily - short walk
- Less than once daily

Do you have a pond?



Do you have a vegetable plot?



Do you have plants in your garden that are poisonous to dogs?



Are there any livestock nearby your property?



I am a pug and won't always like to run around for long periods of time, especially on hot days



Do any of your direct neighbours have pets?



I am a sighthound and like to chase small furry animals

Where will you be regularly walking your dog?

- Park
- Local streets
- Forest
- Reservoir
- Beach
- Fields

How often would you envisage leaving your dog alone at home?

- Daily
- A few days a week
- Occasionally
- Never

If leaving your dog at home, how long for?

- Up to 1 hour
- Up to 4 hours
- 4-6 hours
- More than 6 hours

It may be a good idea to list any holidays you are planning in the six months after you bring your dog home.



## CONTACTS

**Vet:**

**Trainer:**

**Groomer:**

**Dog walker/ sitter:**

**In the event of illness, injury, hospitalisation or respite care being needed, who does your dog know, and would be comfortable with, that could look after them?**

**Family members:**

**Close friends:**



### END OF SECTION ONE

You should now have considered your lifestyle and family and have a better idea of what kind of dog will fit well with you.

## SECTION TWO

In this section we introduce some key practical considerations when getting a dog such as how to settle a into a new home environment, the benefits of positive dog training and what equipment you may need.

### Rule of SIX!

#### The 6 Days, 6 Weeks, 6 Month Rule

##### In the first 6 days:

Your dog may initially feel a bit overwhelmed with their new surroundings. They may be quiet, avoid too much attention and/or may prefer being close to you or hide away. This is okay! Providing a space that is quiet and where your dog feels safe can be helpful, stuffed frozen Kongs, sniffing games or chews can help your dog relax.

##### In the first 6 weeks:

They should be starting to settle in, trusting you and feeling more comfortable. They have figured out their environment and are getting into the routine that you have set. This is the time they will start to relax and show a bit more personality! This is a good time to start introducing some gentle reward based training to encourage the behaviours you would like.

##### In the first 6 months:

At this stage your dog should now be feeling much more settled and comfortable in their new home. You have built trust and are beginning to bond more strongly with your dog, which gives them a greater sense of security with you. Daily routines should be established by now and your dog should be adapted to this routine.

**For some dogs it is important to note that these individual stages may take longer**

**Tip: Try to limit visitors & keep the house quiet & calm**

**Tip: It's bonding time! Reward based training helps build a bond and encourage your dog to desired behaviours**



## Dog training: more than just sit and stay...

Dog training is an important part of living with a dog, regardless of their breed, age or size.

But training can be much more than sit and stay.

Building a mutually beneficial harmonious relationship between you and your dog based on trust, respect and kindness can sometimes be overlooked for a more traditional do as I say stance.

## So why train positively?

Teaching your dog new skills through play and reward-based training has been proven to help dogs develop into confident, friendly, responsive dogs – being friendly with other dogs and coming back when called!



## What is Positive Training?

This kind of training can be given a few different titles such as Positive Reward Training, Force Free Training, Positive Reinforcement or Clicker Training, although there are many more.

Positive reinforcement is a very effective way to train animals and summed up in a short sentence means...

...the addition of something the animal finds reinforcing, such as a toy, treat, run around or praise immediately after the desired behaviour.

Using this method consistently has been proven to increase the frequency and reliability of the desired behaviour without causing the animal any fear or stress to risk damaging the bond between animal and owner.

Finding a positive-reward based dog trainer before you get your dog may be a helpful step. Your trainer may be able to offer you helpful advice, links and support while you choose your dog. Choosing the right trainer will be an important step for you and your dog.

Look at these websites to find organisations that may be able to help you:

<https://ukdogcharter.org>

<https://www.abtc.org.uk>

## General care and wellbeing practices

Dogs can live for many years and require daily care and attention. This will include feeding, exercise, grooming, going to the vets, cleaning up after the dog and more. This chapter examines the various costs and commitments involved in having a dog full-time, to help you consider these alongside a family member you may care for with dementia.

Tip: every time you groom or bathe your dog, we recommend doing a quick health check



**Every time you groom or bathe your dog, we recommend doing a quick health check**



**Formal health checks should be carried out by a vet every 6 or 12 months**



**Vaccination boosters are given annually**



**Professional grooming for dogs that require it should be done every 6-8 weeks.**



**Flea and wormer treatments should be recommended by your vet to be effective against specific parasites in your locality. These are given monthly or 3 monthly.**



There are obvious costs involved with bringing a dog into your home.

It is a good idea to speak to your local vet, dog trainer, groomer or dog walker beforehand for an idea of costs.

## Cost considerations

Take this opportunity to research some of the short term and long term associated costs and write them down. This should help give you a better understanding of costs in relation to your own personal circumstances.

<b>Rehoming or purchase fee</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Microchipping</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Neutering/spay</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Parasite control</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Vaccinations</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Dog Grooming</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Pet insurance</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Dog trainer</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Dog walker</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Pet sitter/holidays</b>	<b>£</b>

The table on the next page lists some equipment you may need to consider for a dog.

ITEM	YES	NO	DON'T NEED IT
Dog bed or beds			
Lead			
Flat Collar			
ID tags with your Name, Full Address and Phone Number			
Harness			
Towels			
Rain jacket			
Poo bags			
Poo bag holder			
Whistle			
Training clicker			
Treat Pouch			
Food bowl or slow feeder			
Water bowl			
Travel water bowl			
Kongs or interactive feeders			

ITEM	YES	NO	DON'T NEED IT
Mixed toys			
Couch covers or blankets			
Dog food			
Chew toys, antlers, yak, milk bones			
Dog safety gates			
Dog guard or crate for the boot of the car			
Travel car harness			
Car seat/ boot covers			
Animal safe household disinfectant			
Indoor crate			
First aid kit			
Grooming brushes and combs			
Dog safe shampoo and conditioner			
Ear and eye wipes			
Toothbrush and dog safe toothpaste			

## END OF SECTION TWO

You should now have a good idea of the considerations to make before choosing your dog.



## SECTION 3

In this section we run through suggested questions for the dog provider and some 'prompts' for you to ask once a potential dog has been identified.

### General first contact and enquiry questions

It could be your chosen dog provider may be a rescue centre, a dog breeder or assistance dog charity.

### First contact questions

Dog provider name \_\_\_\_\_

Dog provider contact details \_\_\_\_\_

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## Questions for any dog provider

Feel free to ask any questions you feel are useful and tick the questions off as you go:

Where available, do you provide a written history of the dog?

Yes

No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the cost for the dog? \_\_\_\_\_

What will that cost include? \_\_\_\_\_

Is the dog up to date on yearly vaccinations including Kennel Cough?

Is the dog up to date on parasite control?

Is the dog spayed or neutered?

At what age was the dog spayed/neutered

Has the dog ever been tested for specific potential medical issues such as hip dysplasia etc?

Does the dog have a registered microchip?

If not, will you provide a microchip service?

Does the dog have any allergies?

Has the dog had a general wellness exam by a vet in the last 6 months?

Does the dog have any medical issues?

Do you provide aftercare support once the dog is homed?

Yes

No

If yes, please tick what this involves:

Settling in the new home

Training and behaviour

Medical veterinary advice

Nutritional advice

Grooming

The law and dogs

Other



## Additional questions for rescue centres

Any reputable rescue centre, breeder or charity will be happy to answer any questions you may have and allow you to spend some time with the potential dog before you commit to rehoming them.

Please note - it is quite common for rescue centres not to have the full history about all of their dogs.

### Where do the dogs you take in come from?

- Local authority
- Public surrenders
- Other charities
- Abroad
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

### As standard, do you spay and neuter the dogs before re-homing?

- Yes
- No

How long has the dog been here? \_\_\_\_\_

## General questions

### Grooming

- What kind of coat does this particular dog have?
- Has the dog been to a professional groomer before?
- Will the dog comfortably allow you to clean teeth and ears, trim nails?
- Will the dog comfortably allow you to bath them?
- Will the dog comfortably allow you to brush them?
- If applicable will the dog be happy to be clipped by a groomer?



## Training

- Is the dog toilet trained?
- Does the dog have any past formal training?
- Does the dog have informal training?
- Has the dog ever been seen by a professional behaviourist?
- Is the dog crate trained?
- How settled are they in the crate?
- Does the dog guard toys or food?
- Is the dog good off lead and will come back when asked?
- Does the dog pull on the lead?
- Does the dog have an issue with excessive barking?
- Do they chew inappropriate things?
- Do they steal things they shouldn't have?
- Are they triggered by anything eg. postman, bikes etc?
- Does the dog have a bite history?
- Does the dog chase wildlife?
- Does the dog shadow chase or chase leaves, feathers etc?
- What style of training (if any) has the dog had? Positive reward, balanced training etc?
- What training aids have been used, choke collar, E-collar, head collar, Harness etc?

## What training cues does the dog know?

- Sit
- Stay
- Down
- Paw
- Heel
- Bed
- Leave
- Off

Others:

## The dog's personality

It is important to note that personality changes are common when a dog moves from one living situation to another. This is especially true of rescue dogs. Quiet dogs in kennels may suddenly become boisterous once they have settled at home and vice versa.

**Tip!** Getting as much information and building a complete picture of the dog will help you navigate this area.

- How much exercise does this dog need?
- What are their typical energy levels?
- How many times a day would they need to be walked?
- For how long?
- Do they settle well?
- Will they settle after playing?
- What are their favourite activities?
- What are their favourite toys?
- What are their favourite treats/food?
- What are they like when left alone at home?
- What are they like when left alone in the car?
- How do they travel in the car? I.e. Harness, crate
- How do they cope with travelling?
- Are they unsure/shy or confident and outgoing?
- Are they afraid of anything in particular?
- Do they like other dogs?
- Do they like cats and small furry animals?
- How is the dog around strangers?
- How is the dog around children?
- How is the dog in busy built up/noisy areas?

If possible, ask to see the dog walking on a lead or walk the dog on a lead yourselves.

Ask to see the dog play with toys and people and free running off lead if safe to do so.

**It is a good idea to visit your potential dog more than once before deciding to bring them home. We would recommend the following:**

**1st visit- The main adopter and one other adult**

**2nd visit- The main adopter and remaining immediate family members**

**3rd Visit- The main adopter and children or pets that need to be introduced**

### **END OF SECTION 3**

You should now feel more prepared in what questions to ask a potential dog provider.

## READY FOR NEXT STEPS?

### Sign up to our Dementia Family Dog support webinar!

Having read this booklet, if you are keen to get your own dog, you can sign up to our 'Dementia Family Dog' webinars, which will offer specialist advice and peer support as you start this exciting new chapter! If you would like to register your interest please email the Dementia Dog team on **bark@dementiadog.org**

## APPENDIX

This appendix aims to provide some alternative options for having dogs in your life, if getting your own dog feels too much to take on at this present time.

Reaching this conclusion, while perhaps disheartening, is still an important and positive step and doesn't need to mean you can't have regular interaction with dogs.

Below we have listed some options to research, including getting in touch with our Dementia Dog team to see if one of our services could help you and the person with dementia who you care for.

- **www.dementiadog.org** our trained Community Dogs and specialist Handlers support people with dementia and their carers, to build social connections and confidence.
- It may be that regular visits from a friend or family member's pet can be a good compromise.
- You could also consider registering with **www.borrowmydoggy.com** this could help fill the void by allowing you to help out local dog owners by walking or having their dog come to stay whilst the owner is at work or on holiday.

## Contact details:

To get in touch with the Dementia Dog team please email us at **bark@dementiadog.org**

You have now reached the end of your booklet!

We hope this information has been useful and has helped guide you in your decision to bring a dog into your family. Should you need any further information or have feedback please do get in touch by emailing us at **bark@dementiadog.org**

### We wish you all the best!



NOTES:







**Dementia Dog is a collaboration between Alzheimer Scotland and Dogs for Good. We are grateful for support from the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust in creating this booklet.**