

# Responsible Dog Ownership



Adopting a rescue dog is a fun and rewarding experience. However, it does come with plenty of responsibility! You have a duty not only to keep your own dog safe and well, but also to ensure that they do not present a risk or a nuisance to society in general. There are several UK laws to be mindful of, as well as dog owner etiquette!

## *Laws to be aware of*

### **Caring for your dog**

As the guardian of your new dog, you must provide your dog appropriate care based upon the **five freedoms**. If you do not provide a suitable environment, a suitable diet, appropriate veterinary care, and the freedom to express normal behaviour, you could be prosecuted under the Animal Welfare Act (2006).

Failing to meet the welfare needs of your new dog (or engaging in animal cruelty) could result in your dog being removed, a prison term of up to 6 months, a fine of up to £20,000, or a ban from keeping animals in the future.

### **Out of control dogs**

Under section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) it is an offence to allow your dog to be "dangerously out of control" in either a public or private place. If your dog injures a person, they could be seized and destroyed. However, your dog does not have to have bitten a person, or even have acted aggressively in order to be in breach of this law. If your dog causes someone to feel worried that he may injure them, he may be considered by a court to have been out of control.

In addition your dog may be considered out of control if he attacks another animal, particularly if the owner of the other animal feels they could be injured by your dog if they intervene. Your dog is only considered to be "under control" if they are either on-lead, or under another form of control such as a totally reliable recall. Allowing your dog to chase, frighten or harass people and other dogs whilst off the lead could lead to prosecution and a fine, even if you know your dog has friendly intentions. We would always advise keeping your dog on-lead in public, unless you are sure that they will always return on cue.

### **Dogs and livestock**

It is illegal for your dog to chase or injure livestock. In addition, it is illegal for your dog to be off-lead at certain times of year and in certain areas in order to protect livestock. You could face a fine and have to pay compensation costs if you break this law. In addition, farmers are legally allowed to shoot dogs which are

chasing or presenting a threat to their livestock. We would always advise keeping your dog on-lead in areas where you are likely to encounter livestock.

### **Identification**

By law, all dogs must be microchipped. All Forever Hounds Trust dogs are microchipped prior to homing, but you must remember to update your details with the chip company if you move house, or change your phone number. Dogs must also wear an ID tag when out in public – this must have your name and address on it, but we would also advise providing your phone number. You could face a fine if your dog is picked up straying without ID or a microchip.



### **Dog fouling**

In many areas, you are legally required to clean up after your dog, and could face a fine if you do not do so. Forgetting to bring poo bags is not considered a valid excuse, so make sure you have a bag dispenser clipped to your lead! Even in areas where you are not legally required to pick up your dog's poo, it is the responsible thing to do. Dog poo can contain harmful bacteria and parasites, which can harm people or other animals.

### **Damage**

You could be held legally responsible if your dog damages property, another animal or a person. We would always advise having third party insurance coverage for your dog, which will protect you financially should this happen.

### ***Off-lead etiquette***

As discussed above, letting your dog off-lead in public comes with a number of risks. Whilst it is possible to teach a reliable recall to many rescued sighthounds, some will always struggle due to their breed traits and previous experience. Even if they have a reliable recall, many sighthounds will find it impossible to resist the chance to chase after a rabbit!

Remember that sighthounds are extremely fast and agile, and can cover a large distance in a short period of time. If your dog does run off, it may be very difficult to find or catch them again. Whilst they are focused on the chase, they will not be paying attention to anything else – this means there is a big risk that they will injure themselves, run across a road etc.

We would always advise keeping your dog on-lead unless you are completely sure that they have a reliable recall, and that you are in a safe area (ideally an enclosed field). If you do decide to let your dog off-lead in public, there are some points to keep in mind as a responsible dog owner:

- Do not allow your off-lead dog to approach other dogs who are being walked on-lead. Being approached by an off-lead dog whilst on-lead themselves is something which even sociable dogs find uncomfortable. It is considered very rude and inconsiderate to inflict your dog on others, even if your dog has friendly intentions! The other dog may be on-lead because they are not comfortable interacting with others and are fearful, defensive or aggressive towards them.

Alternatively, they may be old, frail, suffering from a health issue, or recovering from an operation. Being approached by your dog will be an extremely unpleasant experience for these dogs, and is likely to cause a huge setback for them in terms of any training around other dogs. They may feel the need to defend themselves, and injure your dog in the process. It is your responsibility to stop your dog from harassing others. Remember that if your dog is harassing or giving unwanted attention to others off-lead, you could be in breach of the law – by walking their dog on-lead, the other owner is already taking steps to keep their dog under control. If you know your dog is likely to approach other dogs whilst off-lead, always call them back and put the lead on when you spot an on-lead dog.

- Do not allow your dog to approach unfamiliar people when off-lead. Not everyone likes dogs (as hard as that is to believe!) and many people are scared of them. If your dog is very boisterous or excitable when meeting people, he could accidentally knock over or hurt someone. Remember that even if your dog is not acting aggressively, you may still be in breach of the law if they injure someone, or even cause someone to fear that they may be injured.
- There are some areas where it is not appropriate for any dog to be off-lead, even if they have a reliable recall. We would never advise walking a dog off-lead beside a road, in a car park, or in a town centre for example.

## ***Safety at home***

### **At the front door**

According to Royal Mail, around 47 postal workers are bitten by dogs every week. Around 82% of these incidents happen at the front door, or in the garden. Many people-friendly dogs will react negatively towards the postman and other delivery workers, or towards unfamiliar people at the door in general. The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) applies to private property as well as public areas, meaning you could still be prosecuted if your dog injures or frightens a person inside your own home.

- Never leave your dog unsupervised in the front garden.
- Always place your dog securely in another room, or behind a suitable dog gate before opening the front door to a delivery driver/unfamiliar visitor.
- Ensure that your back garden is secure, and that your dog is not able to escape.

- If your dog reacts aggressively to post coming through the letter box, either restrict access to the front door, or install a wire letter basket over your letter box. This will prevent your dog from biting the fingers of anyone delivering letters through the front door.
- If your dog is uncomfortable around visitors, keep them in a separate room whilst you have people in your home (and contact us for free advice).

## Preventing escape

If your dog escapes from your home they could become lost, injured or even killed. Sighthounds are also a very popular target for dog thieves, so are at risk of being stolen whilst unsupervised in public. Remember that if your dog frightens or injures a person, another dog or another animal due to having escaped, you could be at risk of prosecution.

- Make sure your garden is totally secure, and fenced appropriately for your individual dog. Sighthounds are renowned jumpers, with some being able to clear a 6ft fence easily! They can also find and escape through any small gaps in the perimeter, so take time to check that your garden is fully dog-proofed before bringing your new dog home.
- Always keep your new dog on-lead in the garden to start with, until you are sure that they have no plans to escape! To give them more freedom during this time, you can use a long-line attached to a harness.
- Never leave your dog unsupervised in the garden. Even if they normally show no desire to escape, they may feel differently if they see something worth chasing on the other side of the fence! Unsupervised dogs are also at risk of being stolen from gardens.
- Make sure your dog is secured behind a door or gate before opening your front door. Sighthounds are very quick, and can be adept at slipping past your legs! It is also not unheard of for an adventurous hound to jump out of an open window!



## ***Out and about***

### **At the shops**

Never leave your dog tied up outside a shop. Unattended dogs are regularly stolen from outside shops, and there is also a risk that your dog may react defensively if approached by an unfamiliar person.

### **In the car**

- It is illegal for your dog to travel unrestrained inside a vehicle, due to the potential for them to distract the driver. In addition, your dog will be at risk of serious injury during a car accident if not properly secured. We would advise using either a properly fitted car harness to secure your dog in the back seat, fitting a dog guard to secure your dog in the boot, or using a crate secured inside the car.
- Never attach any kind of restraint to your dog's collar inside the car. In the event of an accident, this could seriously injure your dog's neck.
- If your dog travels in the boot behind a dog guard, we would still advise securing them in some other way. This will prevent them from escaping when the boot is opened, or in the event of an accident which damages the vehicle.
- Never leave your dog inside a car during warm weather. The inside of your car can reach very high temperatures even if it doesn't feel that warm outside. At just 21°C outside, your car can reach 32°C inside within 10 minutes, 40°C within half an hour, and 45°C within an hour. Your dog's body temperature only needs to rise by a few degrees in order for heatstroke to kick in, and fatalities can happen within just 15 minutes. Opening the windows has little effect on the temperature inside the car, and even cars parked in the shade can reach extremely high temperatures.

### **On a walk**

- As above, only let your dog off-lead if you are totally confident that he will return. If you want to let your dog run off-lead but are unsure of his recall, there are a number of secure fields throughout the UK which can be hired for sole use.
- Never allow a child to hold the lead on walks. Sighthounds can be incredibly fast and powerful, and can take off at full speed unexpectedly if they spot something interesting! Your child could easily be pulled over if this happens.
- Never use an extendable "flexi-lead" to walk a sighthound. These leads can be very dangerous if your dog suddenly bolts, due to the force generated when they suddenly run out of cord! The thin extending cord can cause serious cuts if it becomes wrapped around either yourself or your dog as they run away. Flexi-leads also provide the handler with very little control over the dog.



## ***Using a muzzle***

All Forever Hounds Trust dogs are provided with a basket muzzle to go home with. We always advise using the muzzle as a precaution for at least the first 6 weeks after adopting your new dog. This is because sighthounds have been selectively bred to enhance their prey drive, and to have the physical speed and strength to back this motivation up.

The majority of our dogs are ex-racing greyhounds and ex-working lurchers, meaning that they have also been encouraged to chase small animals or lures. Many of these dogs have not been socialised with smaller dog breeds prior to arriving in rescue, meaning that they may need time to learn that small dogs are not prey to be chased. Even dogs who are generally social with smaller dogs may make a mistake in certain circumstances.

Responsible sighthound owners are always aware of their dog's breeding and abilities, and take steps to keep both their own dog and other animals safe. Using the muzzle (and keeping your dog on-lead) until you know for sure how your dog is likely to react around smaller dogs in every situation is a sensible precaution to take when adopting a sighthound, helping to minimise the chance of injury should things go wrong. This will not only protect other dogs and animals from potential harm, but will also protect yourself from potential prosecution, and your dog from potential euthanasia.

Properly fitted basket muzzles do not hurt your dog, and allow them to drink and pant normally. The majority of ex-racing greyhounds in particular are very used to wearing muzzles. Please see our fact sheets on "Muzzle Training" and "Sighthounds and Other Dog Breeds" for more information on using a muzzle.

## ***Cats and wildlife***

Like many dogs of all breeds, rescue sighthounds can often be highly motivated to chase cats and wildlife. The difference with sighthounds is that they are more likely to actually catch another animal than many other breeds.

There is currently no specific law in place regarding dog attacks on cats or wildlife (unless you are deliberately hunting with dogs). However if your dog injures a cat, you could be prosecuted for damage to property, or under the Dangerous Dogs Act if your dog is deemed to have been dangerously out of control during the incident. Legal implications aside, such an incident will be heart breaking for the owners of the cat.

- If your dog is motivated to chase cats and wildlife, always keep him on-lead and muzzled when walking in areas where you are likely to encounter either. Cats will often hide under cars, and your dog is likely to notice them before you have a chance to react.

- If your garden is often visited by cats or other animals, it is important to give them time to realise a fast dog has moved in! Keep your dog on the lead for garden visits for at least the first week. Once you start letting him off-lead in the garden, always check for other animals before letting him out, and make plenty of noise as you open the door. In the long term, it may help to add a bell to your dog's collar so he cannot take other animals by surprise in the garden.

The information provided in this document provides general guidance on the matters outlined and is not intended to replace the need for you to take qualified and appropriate behaviour/training advice on these matters.

Please remember, that as an owner of a Forever Hounds Trust dog you have access to our team of qualified behaviourists and FREE behaviour and training advice. No matter what your behaviour or training question is, we are here to help. You can contact the team by emailing: [behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org](mailto:behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org)

Written by Rachel Cartwright, MSc, BSc (Hons) for Forever Hounds Trust, 2020. Reviewed April 2025

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