



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# How to look after your dog

An Introduction to the Code of Practice  
for the Welfare of Dogs

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## Introduction

Owning and caring for a dog can be great fun and very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility and a long-term caring and financial commitment. You control your dog's lifestyle; it is your responsibility to make sure that its needs are met, whatever the circumstances. The law requires that you must take reasonable steps to ensure that your dog's needs are met including:

- a suitable environment to live in;
- a healthy diet;
- the ability to behave normally;
- being housed with, or apart from, other animals and;
- protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Every animal is different and, as you get to know your dog, you will recognise familiar characteristics. It is important that you are able to notice any changes in behaviour as these might indicate that your dog is distressed, ill, or is not having its needs met in some other way.

This document summarises the key things you need to know and signposts you to the relevant sections of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs.

**It is your responsibility to read the complete Code of Practice to fully understand your dog's welfare needs and what the law requires of you.**

## Section 1: Environment

***Your dog should have a suitable environment to live in.***

***This section applies to dogs who live indoors or outside.***

### Sleeping and Resting

You should provide your dog with a comfortable, dry, quiet, clean and draught-free resting area, with clean bedding to which it has constant access and where it will feel safe.

### Secure Space

When you are not with your dog make sure it has enough to do and it is within a suitably sized secure space that will prevent it from escaping or roaming. It should be secure enough to prevent other animals getting in and to deter unwelcome visitors, including those intent on theft.

## Section 2: Diet

***Your dog should have a healthy balanced diet that meets its nutritional needs.***

***Your dog must have access to fresh clean drinking water at all times.***

### How often to feed your dog?

Your dog must be fed at least once a day, but generally, it is advised to feed your dog twice a day.

Do not disturb your dog while it is eating.

### Hygiene

An important part of providing a suitable environment is making sure that it is safe, clean and hygienic. Ensure any disinfectant used is safe for pets. This not only makes the environment cleaner, but also helps to prevent the potential spread of disease.

### Hazards

Ensure your dog is kept away from hazards, such as potentially harmful substances and plants.

### Travel

Make sure your dog is transported safely and comfortably (see Section 1.19 of the Code). Do not leave dogs unattended in a vehicle as **this can be life-threatening in certain conditions.**

### Healthy Weight

Your dog should not be too fat or too thin. Ideally you should just be able to just feel its ribs and clearly see its waist when viewed from above (see Section 2.8 of the Code).

### Other dietary needs

Some dogs have different dietary needs – you should speak to your vet for advice.

## Section 3: Behaviour

***Your dog should have the ability to behave normally.***

### Reward-based training

It takes time and effort to train your dog properly. Reward-based methods should always be used to train your dog (see Section 3.6-3.8 of the Code).

Negative punishment-based training can cause unnecessary suffering and confusion to dogs. The use of any collar capable of administering a shock to a dog is banned in Wales.

### Exercise

It is very important that your dog receives a suitable amount of exercise. If you are in doubt about what exercise your dog needs, seek veterinary advice.

## Section 4: Company

***Make sure your dog's social needs are met.***

### Relationships with dogs, other people and animals

Dogs are a social species and need the company of people, dogs, or other animals. Puppies need positive experience of interaction with other dogs, people and other animals to become happy, well-adjusted and friendly adults (see Section 3.15 of the Code).

Any dog has the potential to bite in certain circumstances. Therefore, never leave your dog unsupervised around children or other animals.

You should be aware of how your dog responds to other dogs, animals and people and act accordingly. Everyone who interacts with your dog should do so in a kind, gentle and consistent way.

### Behaviour

Watch your dog closely for changes in behaviour and seek advice from your vet if you see changes in behaviour or signs of fear, anxiety and stress.

### Going to the toilet

Toilet training is an important part of the training of a dog that shares its environment with humans. You should provide your dog with regular and frequent access to an appropriate place where it can go to the toilet.

### Socialisation

Socialisation with people, dogs and other animals is an essential part of early learning. There is an important early period of learning which lasts from approximately three weeks to 14 weeks of age, although this can be longer in some cases and experiences should continue throughout life.

### When Away From Home

Dogs should not be routinely left on their own for more than a few hours during the day as they are likely to become stressed and bored, leading to barking or destructive behaviour.

You must arrange for your dog to be cared for if you are away from home.

### Number of animals

Large numbers of animals need a great deal of care and you should not keep more dogs than you are able to provide effective care for.

## Section 5: Health

***You must ensure your dog is in good health and protect it from pain, suffering, injury and disease.***

### Health care

You should regularly examine your dog for signs of injury and illness. You must ensure your dog is treated promptly by a vet if it is injured or ill. Your dog's vet will also be able to advise you about routine health care, such as neutering, vaccination, and parasite control (e.g. fleas and worms), as well as any health problems it may have.

### Grooming

You should ensure that your dog's coat is properly groomed. A competent pet care specialist should be able to advise you about coat care.

### Identification

You must not allow your dog to stray; All dogs must wear a correctly fitted collar and identity tag with your name and address when in a public place and must also be permanently identified with a microchip (unless exempt).

### Breeding and Neutering

As a dog owner you should ensure that you make informed decisions on whether about breeding from or neutering animals in your care. After all, you will be responsible not just for the decision itself but also for managing the consequences. Speak to your vet for advice.

### Getting a Dog

The future health and welfare of your dog is influenced by many factors including the circumstances under which it was bred and the previous environments in which it was kept. Not all dogs are bred with appropriate care for their physical and behavioural well-being or health. It is best to take advice from your vet or other relevant organisations about where to obtain your dog. See section 5.6 of the Code.

### Other legislation affecting dogs

As well as the Animal Welfare Act 2006 there are a number of other laws that affect the way you keep your dog. The ones most likely to affect the keeper of a pet dog are summarised in Appendix 1 of the Code.