



Conversation-based Adoptions

The ASPCA's adoption process uses a conversation-based approach, where we ask open-ended questions to gain insight on the potential adopter's experience in pet care and what information we need to provide to establish a well-informed pet guardian. Here are the main talking points to discuss with adopters, and appropriate ways to handle responses.

'What have your past experiences with cats been like?' Use this question to establish a baseline on the potential adopter's knowledge in pet care. If the adopter has no experience with cats (or needs a refresher in cat care), this is a great opportunity to discuss the basics of what a kitten will need, and what they will need to prepare for before bringing home a new pet. If they wish to adopt a kitten as a surprise gift, be sure the person speaking for the adopter feels comfortable being the best representative of the person receiving the kitten. Remember, the goal is to help potential adopters become prepared and informed pet guardians.

'What kind of cat are you interested in adopting?' Time to play matchmaker! The great part about our fosters becoming our adoption counselors is only YOU know your kittens best! This is the perfect opportunity to match the potential adopter with the type of cat they are looking for, whether it is a reserved lap kitty, or a rambunctious playful friend for their young resident cat.

'Veterinary care is important in maintaining a happy, healthy life.' The ASPCA recommends that kittens are vaccinated for FVRCP every 2-3 weeks until 5 months of age and receive a follow-up veterinary exam soon after adoption. Review with the potential adopter all services your foster kitties have received. This medical history is important to keep, and adopters should bring records along with them to their first veterinary appointment. Encourage the potential adopter to proactively think on a Veterinarian for their cat, if they do not have one already. If any of your foster kittens are required to have a medical waiver completed due to a health issue, be sure that a member of the Placement Team has discussed this with the potential adopter.

The ASPCA also recommends adopters speak with a veterinarian if they'd like to get their new cat/kitten tested for FeLV/FIV after adoption. FeLV and FIV are not common diseases in the cat population; therefore, interpreting test results can be complex and a single test result may not be a true indicator of an individual cat's infection status. For this reason, only cats with clinical signs of infection and/or significant risk factors for infection are tested in our foster program.

'What kind of pets do you have at home?' If the potential adopter has any resident pets, ensure that they are up to date on their vaccinations and altered. If they have unaltered pets, inform them on the many benefits of spaying and neutering. While owning an unaltered pet is not an automatic "no" for adopting, it may serve as a "not right now." The interested adopter may want to consider spaying or neutering their resident pets first before deciding to bring home a new pet, as it can cause unwanted behavioral issues. You can also guide them to aspca.org/LAFAQ for information on spay and neuter services, including low-cost options.

You'll also want to take this time to provide helpful tips on introducing a cat or kitten to their resident pet. The ASPCA's adoption packet includes an in depth look at the best methods for pet introductions that the adopter can refer to before and after adoption. You may proactively share this packet to the potential adopter to review in preparation. In the meantime, here are some helpful tips you can briefly touch upon:

If the potential adopter has a resident cat, they'll need to begin slowly and introduce gradually. Allow for the new kitten to first become familiar with their new environment by setting them up in an area separated from their resident cat. Then, both cats can slowly become familiarized with one another's scent by having their bedding swapped. When it's time to physically introduce the cats, utilize a barrier that only lets them sniff each other, such as a door or a baby gate. During this time, create positive associations by offering treats or meals to both cats.

If the potential adopter has a resident dog, begin by asking how their dog normally behaves around cats. If their dog has never been around a cat, the adopter should first gain an understanding of their behavior by having supervised visits with a friend or family member's cat. This will also let the potential adopter know what obedience skills they will need to teach their dog in preparation for a feline addition. In this case, it may be best to reconnect with them in the future to see if their dog is ready for a cat companion. If they have a dog who is cat friendly, great! They will still want to approach the introduction process in a slow and gradual way, similar to how we discussed introducing cats to each other. First have the new kitten become accustomed to their new environment, then slowly physically introduce one another with a barrier and with the resident dog on a leash.

If the potential adopter does not have any resident cats, take the time to explain the benefits adopting a pair. Feline companionship is important in development and overall well-being throughout a cat's lifetime. Cats teach each other appropriate feline manners and keep each other company and entertained when their adopter isn't home or even asleep! However, it is not required to adopt your foster kittens in two's. It may seem like your kittens are bonded (especially if you *only* have a litter of two), but at such an early age a kitten will bond to any feline companion! Do not hold back the opportunity of a great home in fear of splitting up a pair. “

“The ASPCA strongly recommends that the adopter keep their new cat or kitten indoors, how do you feel about that?” Indoor cats generally live longer, healthier lives. Even if the potential adopter is on board with keeping their new kitten indoors, use this time to inform them on the enrichment your foster kitten enjoys at home.”

'If scratching becomes an issue, please reach out to the ASPCA. They have many safe and humane methods to help as an alternative to declawing, including different types of scratching pads, soft paws, and regular nail trimmings.' The best tactic to tackle scratching is to provide appropriate areas to scratch. Provide scratching posts with various materials and encourage the cat to utilize them by adding toys or scenting with catnip.

'Have you considered the allergies of yourself and others in the home? Or the lease regulations for your home?' Allergies do not have to be a barrier for owning cats, and many people with allergies live peacefully with their furry friends. Non-life-threatening allergies can be maintained by weekly baths or air purifiers that remove pet dander. You'll also want to confirm with the potential adopter that they have considered any fees in their lease or rental agreement.

'There is no adoption fee for any of the cats or kittens!' With supported research, the ASPCA strongly believes in waiving adoption fees. Guardians are just as attached to their cat companions and see no decrease in value of their cat.

'I will be checking in to see how your new kitten is doing. We will want pictures and updates to make sure everyone is doing well.' Unless prompted by a specific circumstance, the ASPCA does not perform regular home checks. We do, however, love to develop a lasting relationship with our adopters by checking in with a phone call, email, or even a quick text. Discuss with the adopter that you will be reaching out to them occasionally in the near future and encourage them to reach out to you should they need support for any issues. Adopters may send their picture or video updates directly to you, or they may email us at laadoptions@aspc.org.

Conversation Tips

The way we approach a potential adopter is just as essential as the information we discuss with them. It is important to consider that an adopter may feel nervous or intimidated because they might expect a lengthy, interrogative adoption application. They may feel worried they will be judged because they have never owned a kitten before, or their last cat met tragedy from being kept outside. We want adopters to feel that we understand them, and we are not here to judge, but here to teach and help everyone be the best pet guardian we know they can be.

Develop a trusting and open relationship: Positive interactions encourage honest answers and opens the doorway for future post-adoption questions.

It is important that a trusting and open relationship is developed, allowing the potential adopter to feel comfortable with you during and even after the adoption process. Encourage them to provide honest answers by keeping interactions positive. If someone is not familiar with veterinary care, take the time to happily educate them. This can also open a doorway for adopters to reach out in the future for guidance should any issues begin to arise - instead of resorting to giving up their companion. Whether they end up adopting or not, their experience can lead them to spread awareness on our mission and the importance of adoption.

Be objective, remove judgements: Search for the first qualified home, not the “best” home.

When talking to potential adopters, be objective, remove judgements and search for the first qualified home, not the “best” home. Qualified homes come in all sizes, colors, ages, and even income levels. If you find yourself ready to decline an adopter, ask yourself if you’re being objective, or if you’re leading your search based off your judgments on what you perceive the best home should look like.

Turn “no” into “not yet”: If it doesn’t seem like the best time to adopt, explore what they can do in the future to prepare for a new addition.

If you’ve objectively determined that it is not the best time for adoption, explore what they can do to become prepared for a new addition in the future. Turn “no” into “not yet” by saying something along the lines of: “It sounds like it may not be the best time for adoption (in this case we will use a potential adopter with an intact resident cat). How do you feel about preparing your current cat for a new friend by having him undergo his neuter surgery first? Having an intact pet can potentially cause unwanted behavioral issues when bringing home a new addition.”