

Adopting a Shelter Puppy

State-of-the-art facilities and progressive policies help today's shelters shed their once dark past.

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Literally millions of dogs are in shelters waiting for someone to rescue them. One is bound to be the perfect companion for you. But, as you head to a shelter to pick your new puppy you feel some anxiety. You don't know what you might find when you visit a shelter. Is it the old, scary dog pound that you see in movies? The Facility Many shelters have come a long way since the days of the dog pound. There are still a few dreary shelters, but many are warm and inviting. Two such shelters are the Dumb Friends League (DFL) in Denver, Colorado, and Operation Kindness in Carrollton, Texas.

We strive to make this a positive and uplifting experience, says Kim Bunker, adoptions manager of the DFL. We want to encourage adoptions. We place comforting items, such as blankets and toys, with the dogs and puppies. DFL has a lobby where people can meet with adoption counselors, rooms to meet with their prospective pets and even an outside courtyard so meeting with a pet can be less stressful.

Operation Kindness also has a state-of-the-art facility. We're lucky that we have a lovely shelter on four acres of wooded land that has a residential look, says Jonnie England, executive director of Operation Kindness. We have skylights, open windows, cathedral ceilings and lots of glass. We also have a screened-in cat porch. When people come to our shelter they can watch the cats play or nap. The Process Adopting a new puppy is more than just walking into the shelter and walking out with a new dog. From the moment you enter the shelter to the time you walk out with a new pup, expect to spend two to four hours to complete the entire adoption process. This isn't intended to make adoption a grueling experience, but rather to make sure that the dog you adopt is the right one for you.

Some shelters have adoption counselors available to help guide your decision-making process—even before you look at the dogs. Counselors will ask questions about your lifestyle, such as whether you work or have kids, to determine what dog or puppy is a great match for your family.

Some of the questions you might expect a counselor to ask are: Who will be the primary caretaker of the puppy? How many hours per day will the puppy be left home alone? What do you expect monthly expenses for your new puppy to be? What is the activity level of your household?

At DFL, they also ask you about your previous pets, your current pets and whether you have a fenced-in backyard. Operation Kindness asks lifestyle questions, and uses the answers to determine which puppy would best suit you and your family.