



Is a buddy dog right for me?

Being partnered with a buddy dog is a rewarding and exciting time for families. However, everyone's lifestyle and needs are different, so it's important to consider whether a buddy dog partnership is right for you and your child.

Before applying, it's important to check that you meet our eligibility criteria. We will treat everyone who applies for a buddy dog fairly and equally. While it's important that you can meet the eligibility criteria set out in this document, we will also consider each application individually and the different needs of each family and child.

Buddy dog eligibility criteria

Your child

- Your child and/or family is expected to benefit from a buddy dog partnership.
- Your child is aged 4-18, or up to 25 if they have additional needs.
- You'll need to provide proof of a vision impairment for your child. This could be a Certificate of Vision Impairment or a letter from a professional supporting your child stating that a vision impairment has been confirmed.

Your family

- You are the parent or guardian of the child you're applying for. If you are their foster parent, you'll be asked to provide evidence of longevity of care and support from your social worker.
- There is a responsible adult living within the household who will complete all the relevant training and take on responsibility for caring for your buddy dog. Those responsible for walking your dog must be aged over 18, be fully sighted and be healthy and fit enough to handle a large active dog.
- We will consider support with day-to-day care from outside the household on a case-by-case basis. It must be consistent and reliable and those involved must be willing to attend the relevant training and have ongoing contact with us.



- All family members must be supportive of your application for a buddy dog and will interact appropriately with the dog.
- There are no members of the household who have a health problem which would be exacerbated by the presence of a dog. We may need to ask for support from a medical professional in relation to this. Due to the availability and breeds of our dogs, we're not able to provide dogs with a specific coat type for allergies.
- Your family's lifestyle is expected to remain relatively stable over the next two years with no significant changes.
- We will consider different living arrangements, such as split households, on a case-by-case basis and it mustn't impact on the dog's or child's wellbeing and welfare.

Buddy dog welfare

A buddy dog partnership involves building relationships with the whole family. Each dog is an individual with their own needs and they will require care and attention. You'll need to demonstrate to us that your buddy dog will receive a great quality of life in your care, and meeting the needs of the dog will not have a detrimental impact on the needs of any family members.

The following points are the basics of animal welfare, and we would expect families to always promote and enhance their dog's welfare:

1. **Nutrition:** Your dog needs to always have access to fresh water and a nutritionally balanced diet suitable for their individual needs.
2. **Environment:** You'll need to provide a safe, temperature regulated and secure indoor area in a smoke-free room with a comfortable bed suited to your dog. Outdoor areas need to be safe, clean, and fully enclosed. Your dog will also need a child-free safe space that they can easily access throughout the day. All environments your dog will spend time in must be safe and appropriate to meeting their needs, including your home, local walking areas, vehicles and, if relevant, work locations. There must be easy access to an appropriate relief area.
3. **Health:** It's important to ensure your dog maintains a healthy body weight, is provided with regular prescribed flea and worming medication, has their six-monthly vet checks and vaccinations, and receives medical attention for any issues in between check-ups in a



timely manner. You need to have a way to easily access the vets, including in an emergency situation.

4. Behaviour: Your buddy dog will need varied environmental enrichment and appropriate exercise to keep them healthy and happy - as a minimum this should be 1 hour of exercise per day including at least 4-5 off lead sessions per week in an appropriate environment. Always treat your dog with kindness in all aspects of their life and adhere to our standards on ethical training.

5. Positive experiences: You'll need to agree to never leave your dog alone for more than four hours in 24 hours or unattended with children without adult supervision. You'll need to provide appropriate toys, enrichment activities and play with your dog to enhance their life. All family members must interact with your dog in a gentle and positive manner and not exhibit any behaviours which could negatively impact upon the dog's wellbeing or child's safety.

Other pets

- If you have other pets in your home, the presence of a buddy dog must not impact upon their welfare or vice versa, and appropriate measures must be in place to manage introductions.
- Pets must be having their welfare needs met and be in good health - you may be asked to provide evidence in relation to contagious diseases and parasite control.
- You'll need to demonstrate that a buddy dog will bring additional benefit to your family which your current pet is not providing.

Supporting professionals

As part of planning and delivering services we will need to contact or share information with other relevant people or professionals. You'll be asked to provide us details of a professional who we can contact as part of your application. This could be someone from an educational team (e.g. QTVI, class teacher, support assistant, college tutor), health services (habilitation specialist, health visitor, GP, eye specialist, physiotherapists), local authority (e.g. social worker, family support worker, lead professionals) or voluntary organisation (e.g. local society for the blind, RNIB). They must have had recent engagement with your family and respond to contact.



To ensure your child and family will get the most benefit from a buddy dog, we may work with internal teams or external professionals as part of your application.

Your application

- **Proof of identity:** You'll need to provide proof of your identity with evidence of your name and address (for example a passport, driving licence, council tax bill).
- **Language:** You don't have to be able to understand instructions in English to access our buddy dog service. You can be supported by an interpreter to ensure any written or verbal advice is understood. They must be able to support you during the application process and for the duration of your partnership (approximately 10 years).
- **Safeguarding:** We prioritise safety and need to guarantee positive and secure working conditions for our staff, dogs, and other clients. Therefore, we can't consider applications if you have any safeguarding issues that might present a safety risk.
- **Animal ban:** The welfare of our dogs is our highest priority, and you'll need to show an equal level of commitment to your dog's welfare. Therefore, we're unable to accept your application for a buddy dog if you or anyone else in your household has been, or is currently, subject to any animal ban or has had a guide dog, buddy dog or any other animal removed for welfare issues.
- **Data protection:** You must acknowledge our data protection statements which align with current data protection laws and regulations.
- **Residency:** You'll need to prove you have the right to remain in the UK for a further 18 months at the point of application and you have the right to remain in the UK for at least 12 months at the point of beginning training with a buddy dog.
- **Buddy Dog Partnership Agreement:** You'll need to agree with and sign our Buddy Dog Partnership Agreement at the start of your partnership.
- **Ability to travel:** As part of your application you'll be asked to attend sessions at one of our centres as a whole family, however we endeavour to be person-centric with this, especially if your child's needs affect their ability to travel. As a minimum you must be willing and able to travel to a centre with your buddy dog when needed as part of continued support for your partnership.



- **Permission to keep a dog:** If you aren't the homeowner you'll need to provide written permission to have a buddy dog at your property. You will also need to provide written support if you intend to take your dog into your workplace with you or are a foster carer.
- **Financial commitment:** You will need to commit to the long-term financial responsibility of having a dog. We will look to support any family where there is a financial barrier to having a buddy dog, however as a minimum you're expected to cover routine vet bills and a suitable diet. Where a dog has a pre-existing health condition we will cover all costs associated with this.

Motivation and ability to apply skills

- Everyone involved in your dog's day-to-day care will need to complete all the training sessions within a year of your buddy dog being placed. You may also be asked to attend additional training at a future date.
- You'll need to demonstrate your motivation and ability to learn and apply dog handling skills and advice in line our principles, and be willing to work through factors linked to dog ownership such common dog behaviours or helping your dog during the settling in period.
- You'll be expected to maintain good communication and commitment to training through the application process and for the duration of the partnership, including responding to correspondence in a timely manner and be able to attend the required training sessions.

Ready to be matched

- Once you're ready to be matched with a buddy dog, you will need to let us know about any changes in your circumstances. Your eligibility to be matched with a buddy dog will be reviewed regularly and your application may be paused if your readiness for matching changes.
- We match our buddy dog partnerships based on each dog's behaviour and needs, to make sure they fit with your family and lifestyle and that any health concerns can be appropriately managed. We will consider any preferences for breeds or physical characteristics that you include in your application, but these cannot be guaranteed.



- Your application may be closed if it's felt that a suitable match cannot be found within a year, including if two or more matches have been declined.

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