

# Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs



Department of  
**Agriculture and  
Rural Development**

[www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk)

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AN ROINN  
**Talmhaíochta agus  
Forbartha Tuaithe**

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MÁINISTRIE O  
**Fairms an  
Kintra Fordèrin**

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# Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

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# Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

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## Introduction to the Code

This introduction, which is not part of the Code of Practice, tells you about the Code and provides advice on owning a dog.

The code has been designed to incorporate five sections based on the five freedoms contained under Section 9 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ('The Act'). This states you must take all reasonable steps to ensure that you meet the following needs that your dog has, which are set out in the Act as follows:

- (a) its need for a suitable environment;
- (b) its need for a suitable diet;
- (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- (e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease;

Owning and caring for a dog can be a source of great enjoyment, but you should be aware that dog ownership is a major responsibility. Typically, dogs live for about 13 years or longer. Consequently, you should think carefully about all factors that will affect your ability to care for a dog and whether a dog is suitable for you. Would you be able to provide for all of a dog's needs? You will need to consider the size of your property and the financial and time implications of having a dog as a pet. Caring for a dog can be expensive and you should consider whether, for instance, you would be able to afford the cost of routine and unexpected veterinary treatment, or the cost of pet health insurance.

There is no one "perfect" way to care for all dogs because every dog, and every situation, is different. It is up to you to find out what your dog's precise needs are and how to meet them.

Under the Act you are always responsible for your dog's needs. Furthermore, if you are a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 16 years, you are responsible for any animal that child is in charge of. If you are unable to care for your dog at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after it on your behalf. It is important to remember that you remain responsible for ensuring your dog's needs are met, even when you are away. The person with whom you leave your dog will also be legally responsible for your dog's welfare in your absence.

If you own or are responsible for a dog, and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.

## The Code of Practice

This Code of Practice (the Code) applies to all dogs.

The purpose of the Code is to provide practical guidance to help you to comply with the provisions of Section 9 of the Act. It does not tell you precisely how to care for a dog, but it summarises the important things you should consider when making decisions about how best to care for your dog.

A breach of a provision of this Code is not an offence in itself but, if proceedings are brought against you for an offence under Section 9 of the Act, the Court will look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in establishing liability.

If you are unsure about anything to do with the care of your dog you should always seek advice from an expert. Throughout this Code the term “vet” will be used to refer to a veterinary surgeon. You will also find reference in the Code to “other suitably qualified dog care specialists”. These are people who, through their qualifications and experience, can provide expert advice on dog welfare. Examples include veterinary nurses, animal behaviourists, and staff at animal welfare organisations.

Other sources of information are listed in Annex 1. You can find out more about the Act and other legislation relating to dogs at [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk). You can find more advice and information on how to look after your pet, including how to get a pet passport, at [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk).

# Section 1: The need for a suitable environment

## What your dog needs

Your dog needs a safe environment and, whether it lives inside or outside the house, it needs protection from hazards. Examples of hazards in the home include, open windows and balconies in high buildings, which may be inadequately protected to prevent your dog from falling from them; household and garden chemicals; and poisonous plants.

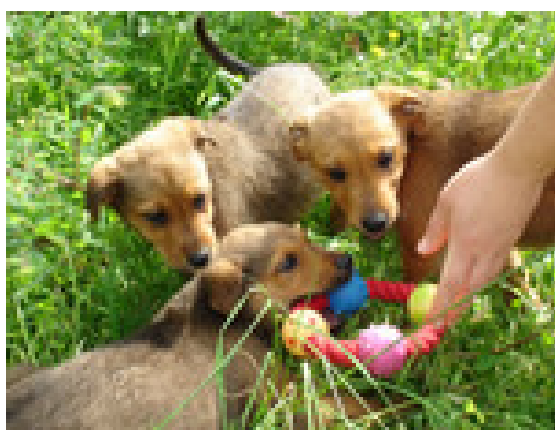
Dogs are naturally inquisitive and a dog may put itself in danger if it is left to explore unsupervised.

Your dog needs a safe, comfortable place to rest, situated in a dry, draught-free area. Living in a cold or damp place can lead to unnecessary suffering. If your dog lives outside, it will need protection from adverse weather or other threats. All dogs must be able to avoid things that frighten them and need a place to hide where they feel safe.

A dog is by nature unlikely to soil its living area and needs regular opportunities to use a toilet area, or it will become distressed. Some dogs may need access to a toilet area more frequently, for example: very young; very old; and those that are ill.

Dogs are particularly vulnerable to heat stress which can quickly become serious and result in death. In hot weather they rapidly become distressed when enclosed in areas such as conservatories, cars and small kennels.

Some signs of heat stress include rapid heart rate, exaggerated panting, excessive drooling, vomiting, dizziness and confusion, shaking, seizures and loss of consciousness.



## What you should do:

- Provide your dog with a safe, clean environment. Make sure that you provide adequate protection from hazards.
- Provide your dog with a comfortable, clean, dry, quiet, draught-free rest area. You should change your dog's bedding regularly and ensure it is comfortable.
- Provide your dog with somewhere it can go to avoid things that frighten it.
- If your dog is kept in a kennel, or tethered, you should check it frequently and ensure it is not in danger or distressed. Dogs should not be kept tethered permanently or for long periods and it is recommended that a run should be provided.
- Provide your dog with access to an appropriate place, away from its resting area, which it can use as a toilet area as needed.
- Allow your dog, if it lives outside, to spend time with its owners and to be part of the family environment.
- Make sure that any place you leave your dog is large enough to ensure, at all times, a comfortable area with effective ventilation and temperature control. Your dog must be able to move around to ensure its comfort and be able to avoid becoming too hot or too cold.
- Dogs showing signs of heat stress need immediate medical treatment, so contact your vet without delay.
- When you transport your dog make sure it is comfortable and safe at all times. Further information on this is available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb10308-dogs-cats-welfare-060215.pdf>
- Do not leave your dog unattended in an unsafe environment, or for any period of time that is likely to cause it distress.

## **Section 2: The need for a suitable diet**

### **What your dog needs**

Dogs need fresh drinking water at all times. Without water to drink a dog will become dehydrated. Water should never be withheld except on the recommendation of a vet.

A dog needs a well-balanced diet to stay fit and healthy. Meals designed for people may not provide dogs with the balanced nutrition they need and some foods commonly found in the home, such as grapes and raisins, chocolate or onions, can be harmful or even fatal to dogs.

An individual dog's nutritional needs depend on its size, age, sex, activity, the type of food it eats, its state of health and whether it has been neutered. Some dogs, such as those that are pregnant or nursing puppies, have special dietary needs. Diets designed for adult dogs are not always suitable for growing animals and puppies, and growing dogs need a diet that provides adequately for growth. Other dogs may have special dietary needs, for example aged dogs, working dogs and those with poor health.

Most dogs need at least one meal a day but it may be preferable to divide this into two amounts provided at different times. How much an adult dog needs to eat depends on the type of food, its bodyweight and how active it is. A healthy adult dog should have a stable weight appropriate to its age, sex, breed and level of activity. Dogs should be neither too thin nor too fat. Overfeeding a dog will lead to its becoming overweight, which can lead to health problems. Underfeeding a dog will cause it to lose weight and suffer.

Dogs can suffer from digestive problems if their diet is changed suddenly. Strenuous exercise shortly before, or after, food can also be harmful.

### **What you should do:**

- Provide your dog with clean fresh drinking water at all times. If necessary carry water, in a suitable container, with you when clean water is unlikely to be available.
- Dogs should be able to reach food and water easily in all situations.
- Make sure your dog eats a balanced diet suitable for its individual needs and maintains a stable weight that is neither over nor underweight for its size, age, level of activity, sex, breed and state of health. Do not let your dog overeat or it will become obese, and do not feed too little or your dog will be underweight.
- Be aware that any change in the amount your dog eats or drinks may be a sign of ill health.

- Read, and be guided by, the feeding instructions relating to any dog foods you buy. Note that some dog foods contain additives, colourants or soya which can cause allergies or other ailments.
- Provide all dogs (including puppies) that have special needs with diets that meet their individual requirements.
- If you are uncertain what to do you should seek advice on feeding your dog from a vet, a suitably qualified dog care specialist, or other reliable source.
- Feed your adult dog at least once each day, unless advised otherwise by your vet.
- Allow your dog to eat its meals without being disturbed.
- Do not change your dog's diet suddenly. Changes should be made gradually over several days.
- You should not feed your dog shortly before, or after, strenuous exercise.



## **Section 3: The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns**

### **What your dog needs**

The way a healthy dog behaves is individual and depends on its age, breed or type and past experience. However, most dogs are playful, sociable animals and they enjoy playing together with toys, people and other dogs. Play is an important part of getting along with people and other dogs, and although dogs will spend some time playing alone with toys etc., they should have regular opportunities for interactive playing.

Dogs are intelligent animals and can suffer from boredom. If your dog is bored, and does not have enough to do, it may suffer or engage in inappropriate behaviour. Changes in behaviour may indicate that something is wrong with a dog's health.

All dogs, in particular puppies, need rest. However, individual dogs have different needs and some will sleep for long periods after exercise or food; others will need less rest and will be more active. A dog needs regular exercise and regular opportunities to walk and to run free under proper supervision. The amount of exercise a dog needs varies with age, breed and health. Some breeds of dog need a lot of exercise and you should take account of this when choosing a dog. Young dogs may need to have their exercise restricted during periods of rapid growth, to avoid developmental problems. Exercising dogs in extremes of weather can lead to unnecessary suffering.

Training a dog, including the house training of puppies, is important to help it learn to behave appropriately and to make it easier to keep under control. Puppies need to get used to the many noises, objects and activities in their environment, some of which are frightening when first experienced. Socialisation is an important part of a puppy's early experience and helps it to develop appropriate behaviours. Good training can enhance a dog's quality of life, but punishing a dog can cause it pain, unnecessary suffering and cause longer term behavioural problems.

### **What you should do:**

- Make sure your dog has enough to do so that it does not become distressed or bored.
- Make sure your dog has access to safe toys and suitable objects to play with and chew and that these activities are properly supervised.
- Ensure that your dog can rest undisturbed when it wants to. Puppies and older animals may need more rest.
- Provide your dog with regular opportunities for exercise and play with people or other friendly dogs.

- Give your dog the exercise it needs, at least daily unless your vet recommends otherwise, to keep your dog fit, active and stimulated.
- If you are unsure how much exercise your dog needs; take advice from your vet or other suitably qualified dog care specialist.
- You should get to know the behaviour of your dog when it is fit and healthy. If you become aware of changes in behaviour, you should seek veterinary advice, as your dog may be distressed, bored, ill or injured.
- All dogs should be trained to behave well, ideally from a very young age. Only use positive reward based training. Avoid harsh, potentially painful or frightening training methods.
- Ensure children allow dogs to exhibit normal behaviours.

## **Section 4: The need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals**

### **What your dog needs**

Dogs are sociable animals that need, and enjoy, company. Consequently, most dogs do not like being left alone and may suffer if left without company, or with nothing to do for long periods of time. Some dogs become distressed if they are left on their own, even for short periods. The length of time individual dogs can be left alone varies, depending on factors such as age, training, previous experience of being left alone, breed or type, lifestyle and housing conditions. However, no dog should routinely be left on its own for prolonged periods. If the time alone is excessive, you can expect behavioural problems that are distressing for both you and your dog.

If dogs are treated well as puppies, they learn to see people as friends. Learning to get on with people, dogs and other animals is an essential part of social development for a puppy. Puppies that are deprived of opportunities to develop social behaviour can become withdrawn, anxious and aggressive as adults dogs. However, if a dog has appropriate contact with other dogs early in its life it will be more sociable and this can enhance its quality of life. Dogs that have not had opportunities to develop socially, or which have bad experiences involving people or other animals, may be frightened or aggressive in normal social situations. Dogs which are frightened show characteristic signs such as flattening of the ears and lowering the tail or signs of stress such as excessive panting, licking lips, hiding, cowering or aggression.

Dogs usually get on well with other dogs in the same household, but they may still need time to get to know each other when introduced. However, dogs will need to have their own space and places to get away from other dogs if they want to. Dogs get to know the people they regularly interact with. They can become confused and distressed if the behaviour of those people is inconsistent and unpredictable. It is never acceptable to frighten a dog, or encourage it to behave aggressively by tormenting it.

### **What you should do:**

- Make sure your dog has opportunities to spend enough time with people and friendly dogs so that it is less likely to become lonely or bored.
- Make sure that your dog is never left alone long enough for it to become distressed.
- Encourage your dog to be friendly towards other dogs and allow it to interact with friendly dogs on a regular basis.
- Puppies should be given regular opportunities to socialise with other dogs and people. You should always check health issues with your vet before allowing your puppy to mix with other dogs.

- If you keep more than one dog, you should keep them together for company if possible. They will need to get on with each other, but will also need space to get away from each other when they want to.
- When dogs live together you should provide enough extra resources (e.g. toys, beds, food and water bowls and places where they feel safe) to stop them from becoming competitive and fighting with each other.
- If your dog is fearful of, or aggressive towards other dogs, avoid the situations that lead to this behaviour and seek advice from a vet or suitable qualified dog care specialist.
- If social encounters distress or frighten your dog, you should seek professional help from a vet or other suitably qualified dog care specialist.
- You should ensure that dogs in your care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults, children or animals, including people who look after your dog for you when you are away from home.
- Be consistent in the way you, your family and friends, react to your dog and do not encourage aggressive or other anti-social behaviour.
- When you are away, make sure your dog is properly cared for by a responsible person. When someone else is looking after your dog they also have a legal responsibility to ensure its welfare, and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have.
- Never leave your dog unsupervised with another animal or person who may deliberately or accidentally harm or frighten it.

## **Section 5: The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease**

### **What your dog needs**

Dogs feel pain and it is believed that they have similar pain thresholds to people. However, individual dogs and different breeds or types may show pain and suffering in different ways. Any change in the way a dog behaves can be an early sign that it is ill, or in pain. Dogs which are ill or in pain, often change their eating and drinking habits. They may eat less or stop eating and lose weight. They may drink water excessively; drink less or not at all. Some dogs become withdrawn and unwilling to exercise or play, cry when approached or touched, show uncharacteristic fear or aggression when approached, or they may try to hide. They may also show specific signs of ill health such as discharges from the eyes, ears or nose, excessive salivation, vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation, difficulties with passing urine, coughing, and they may scratch excessively and develop skin sores. Limping and swellings are also signs of possible ill health. This list is for guidance only and is not exhaustive.

Dogs are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases and other illnesses. They need protection from serious infections, which can be provided by vaccination. Nosodes are another homeopathic alternative to vaccination which you may wish to discuss with your vet. Like people, dogs benefit from routine health care.

Many people choose to have their dogs neutered and this is recommended if you do not intend to breed your dog. Your vet can advise on neutering and the health benefits of neutering dogs. If you decide to breed your dog, your vet can advise on the risks of inherited conditions that could affect the welfare of the puppies. A dog's future health and welfare can be affected by the circumstances under which it was bred. A dog which can be easily identified (e.g. by microchip) is more likely to be reunited with its owner if injured, or lost, particularly if it loses its collar. It is thus more likely to receive the prompt veterinary treatment it needs if injured. From 2 April 2012 it will be a legal requirement in Northern Ireland to have your dog microchipped before a new or renewal licence is issued.

### **What you should do:**

- Take sensible precautions to keep your dog safe from injury.
- If you notice changes in your dog's behaviour you should seek advice from your vet or other suitably qualified dog care specialist.
- Check your dog over regularly and watch out for signs of injury, disease or illness. Make sure someone else does this if you are away. It is also a good idea to have your dog screened for genetic conditions that are common to the breed.

- You should carefully check your dog's coat regularly for fleas and infestations and groom your dog, if necessary, to maintain a healthy coat. Preventative measures should be taken if appropriate.
- You should pay attention to your dog's dental care and seek advice from your vet if there are signs of problems.
- If you recognise signs and symptoms of disease or suspect that your dog is in pain, ill or injured, contact a vet promptly and follow veterinary advice regarding its treatment. If at any time you have concerns about the health or welfare of your dog you should seek advice from a vet or suitably qualified dog care specialist.
- You should ask your vet how often your dog needs a health check, and about the things you can do to protect your dog's health. You should follow the advice you are given.
- Your vet is the best person to ask about routine preventive healthcare, such as vaccination and treatments to control parasites (e.g. fleas and worms), as well as any current health problems your dog may have.
- If your dog is kept outside, clean up any dog mess regularly to reduce the risk of disease transmission.
- Medicines intended for humans or other animals can kill dogs. It is important that your dog is only given medicines authorised for dogs or that have been specifically prescribed or advised by your vet for your dog.
- You should always consult your vet if you are concerned that your dog has eaten or come into contact with anything that could be harmful.
- Your dog is required to wear a collar and identity tag when in a public place. Collars should be of the correct size and fit, and should not cause any pain or discomfort. As dogs are also required to be microchipped, remember to keep the microchip database up to date with any changes in your contact details.
- You should seek the advice of your vet before allowing your dog to breed and take all reasonable steps to ensure that you will be able to find suitable homes for puppies. Some buyers may prefer to buy from a member of the UKAS accredited breeders scheme.

# ANNEX 1: Sources of further information

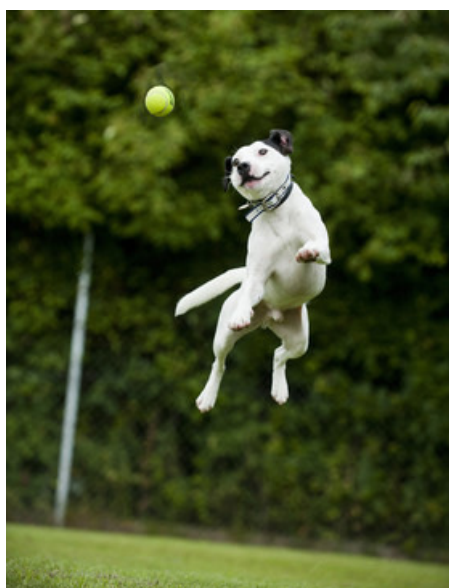
The structure and relevant contact details for enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 is set out on the DARD web site at the following link:  
[Enforcement for the Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)

## Links to relevant legislation

- [Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 1972](#)
- [Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)
- [Noxious Weeds \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1977](#)
- [The Welfare of Animals \(Transport\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2006](#)
- [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1/2005 on the Protection of animals during transport and related operations](#)

## Additional information:

- Your vet. You can contact the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to find details of vets in your area: [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk) – the website has a “find a vet” facility.
- Local libraries and bookshops for up to date books on dog care.



Websites such as:

Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour:

<http://asab.nottingham.ac.uk/>

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors:

[www.apbc.org.uk](http://www.apbc.org.uk)

Blue Cross:

[www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)

British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation:

[www.bva-awf.org.uk](http://www.bva-awf.org.uk)

Defra and Directgov websites:

[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk) and [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) – have information on the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) and copies of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs.

Dogs Trust: [www.dogstrust.org.uk](http://www.dogstrust.org.uk)

PDSA: [www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)

Petlog: [www.petlog.co.uk](http://www.petlog.co.uk)

Pet Care Trade Association: [www.petcare.org.uk](http://www.petcare.org.uk)

Pet Food Manufacturer's Association: [www.pfma.org.uk](http://www.pfma.org.uk)

Pet Health Council: [www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk](http://www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk)

Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: [www.uspca.co.uk](http://www.uspca.co.uk)

The Kennel Club: [www.thekennelclub.org.uk](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk)

<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/assuredbreederscheme> provides information on the Assured Breeder Scheme