



Small Angels Rescue Guide to Rehoming Small Animals

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Think Twice before Giving up Your Pet

Small Angels Rescue works to find permanent, loving homes for animals we rescue from local animal shelters. We are an all-volunteer organization, and we place a priority on animals facing euthanasia in animal shelters. We have an average of 150 animals in our foster care program at any one time. We take in an average of 48 animals a month and adopt out an average of 38. So, while we have a number of foster care homes, we simply cannot assist with all of the overwhelming number of calls we receive from private parties looking to surrender their animals.

Please keep in mind that many animal shelters may not have the time, expertise, or resources to care for small animals. And since many people are unaware that adoption from animal shelters is an option for "pocket pets," your small animal may spend a long time in the shelter or may even be euthanized within a short period of time.

We hope this guide will provide you with some resources that may help you continue to care for your pet, instead of giving him or her up. We also have some resources on other ways that you can find a new home for your pet.

Solutions to Common Pet Problems

If you're thinking of giving up your pet, please consider the chances the animal has of being adopted. In particular, age, chronic medical conditions, and behavior problems could all be factors that would keep your pet from being adopted. Please keep in mind that animals depend on us for all of their needs. Would you want your family to abandon you if you got old or sick? Would you leave your children behind if your dream apartment did not allow kids? Before deciding to surrender your pet to a shelter or rescue organization, you owe this animal to take every reasonable step to overcome any problems.

There are often simple solutions to the problems that may cause you to want to give up your animal; we explore some of these issues in this section. If you need help with a small animal problem, feel free to contact Small Angels Rescue. You can e-mail us at info@smallangelsrescue.org or call 301-668-0404.

If you or a loved one has allergies ...

If you think you have animal allergies, ask your doctor to test you for allergies to determine exactly what you are allergic to, because many people are allergic to more than just animals. Reducing the amount of the other allergens in your home will help to reduce your overall allergic reaction. If you are allergic to animals, you can create an "allergy-free" zone in the home, like the bedroom, where the animal is not allowed. Use high-efficiency HEPA air cleaners throughout your home to clean the air of allergen particles. Try to remove or reduce the number of dust and allergen-catching items in your home, such as carpeting, rugs, cloth curtains, and blinds. Clean your home frequently and thoroughly to remove dust and dander, and wash cloth items that collect dander. Always wash your hands after petting your animal companions. Keep ducts, furnaces, and air conditioner filters clean. Ventilate your house. Circulate air in the house by opening windows whenever possible.

You may also want to speak with your doctor about which one of many "anti-allergy" drugs might be right for you. Often, it only takes one pill a day to significantly reduce your allergic reaction, making it possible for you to keep your pet.

Many people use allergies as an excuse for giving up their animal. After having a pet for months, they may suddenly claim they have allergies and have to get rid of him or her right away. Please be completely honest with yourself, and with us, about why you want to give up your animal.

For information on living with allergies to pets, visit www.PetsForLife.org. For more

specific information on living with allergies to guinea pigs, visit www.cavyspirit.com/allergies.htm.

If you are moving ...

If you find a potential apartment that has a no-pet policy or seems wary of having pets, try to sell yourself as a responsible pet caregiver, committed to providing responsible pet care and being a good neighbor—individual homes and condominium owners may be easiest to persuade, rather than large complexes with formal policies. Get a letter of reference from your current landlord and veterinarian. Don't try to sneak your pet in. You may be subject to possible eviction or other legal action.

But if efforts to persuade the landlord fail, look elsewhere. It is possible, with planning and perhaps a few compromises, to find pet-friendly housing almost anywhere. Visit www.RentWithPets.org, a great resource that thoroughly outlines how to find a pet-friendly home. If you are renting now, start to check ads and contact real estate agents and rental agencies at least six weeks before your lease expires. Contact the humane society or animal care and control agency serving the area into which you are moving; the agency may be able to provide you with a list of apartment communities that allow pets. Check community apartment guidebooks and newspapers. Fortunately, most apartments seem to allow caged animals including small animals.

If you're moving out-of-town, ask yourself why that's enough reason for you to give up your pet. If you plan ahead and arrange for an appropriate travel setup, in most cases you should be able to take your pet with you. Please be completely honest with yourself, and with us, about why you want to give up your animal.

If your child has lost interest ...

It is unrealistic to expect any child to take total responsibility for the care of an animal. Allowing children to help care for a pet teaches responsibility and instills a feeling of competency and accomplishment. Choose tasks appropriate for the age of your child. Even young children can be involved in some aspect of caring for an animal friend—selecting a new toy, assisting with cage cleaning, or helping with feeding time. But children should not be expected to complete all of the tasks on their own.

The best way to teach your children how to be responsible pet caregivers is to be one yourself. As soon as you bring a pet into your family, set up and enforce rules regarding proper pet care. For example, tell your children not to pull the animal's tail, ears, or other body parts, and insist that they never tease, hit, or chase the

pet. Set rules about who is allowed to open and close the cage and get the animal out. Teach children how to properly pick up, hold, and pet the animal.

If your child has lost interest, try to rekindle that interest by reminding your child why they wanted the animal in the first place. Set up time every day for the whole family to play with the animal. Make feeding a fun activity. Try new foods and try to guess which ones the animal will enjoy. Go shopping for a bigger, better cage, and look for new toys. Look for Web sites that celebrate the type of animal you have and try to get your child to connect with others who have interest in the animal. And help your child with the daily care—lead by example.

"Getting rid of" the pet isn't just unfair to the pet and your children, but it also sends the wrong message about commitment, trust, and responsibility.

If your small animal has had babies ...

We receive a number of calls from people whose small animal gave birth to a large litter after coming home from a pet store. If your small animal has given birth, it's imperative that you separate her from males immediately. It's also imperative that you separate babies as soon as they become sexually mature. Because this is such a quick window of time for small animals, many people let breeding get out of control and are quickly overwhelmed by the number of animals they have. We can help you with sexing your small animals and guiding you as to when it is appropriate to segregate babies, to help you put a stop to the breeding once and for all.

Animal	Age at Sexual Maturity	Gestation Period	Litter Size
Gerbils	2 to 3 months	24-28 days	Ave. 8 (up to 20)
Guinea Pigs	Females: 4-5 weeks Males: 8-10 weeks	59-72 days	Ave. 1-4 (up to 7 or more)
Hamsters	4 weeks	Dwarfs: 18-21 days Syrians: 16-18 days	Dwarfs: Ave. 8 (up to 14) Syrians: Ave. 8 (up to 26)
Mice	4 weeks	17-21 days	Ave. 8-12 (range 1-20)
Rats	As little as 5 weeks	19-22 days	Ave. 8-12 (range 1-20)
Chinchillas	As little as 3 months	111 days	Ave. 2 (range 1-8)

Recommended Web sites with diagrams for sexing small animals:

Gerbils: www.agsgerbils.org/Gerbil_Care_Handbook/breeding.html#separating

Guinea Pigs: www.cavyspirit.com/sexing.htm

Hamsters: www.petwebsite.com/sexing.htm

Mice: www.afrma.org/sexing101.htm

Rats: www.afrma.org/sexing101.htm

Chinchillas www.huggablepets.com/huggablepets/sexing.shtml

If the animal is “mean,” unfriendly, bites, or doesn’t like being handled ...

Socialization requires effort—animals need to be picked up, held, petted, and talked to every day. The relationship that can develop during this socialization process is one of the joys of caring for animals. The following are some tips to help you care for and work with an unsocialized animal.

First, the animal will pick up on body language from you. If you're tense or frightened, the animal will be tense or frightened—and may dodge, nip, or panic, resulting in injuries for both of you. It's important to understand small animals' perceptions of the world due to their nature as prey animals. If you understand how small animals see their world, you are likely to be less afraid of them. In the wild, small animals may become prey to birds swooping down on them from above. Many domesticated small animals seem to have retained an instinct to fear things coming at them from above, including hands. You can combat this by approaching them from the side and speaking to them so they hear your voice and can sense that you mean no harm. Move slowly and gently; try not to startle them. Always, always make sure the animal is aware of your intentions to pick him or her up, and never pick up a sleeping animal. A surprised animal is one who may bite or nip out of fear or panic. Small animals have poor eyesight and rely on their senses of smell and hearing and their whiskers to smell, hear, and feel their worlds. So use your voice, tap on the cage, rustle some bedding, or move the water bottle as ways of ensuring the animal is aware of your presence.

Small animals are sensitive to food smells and the scents of other animals, including on unwashed hands. So be sure to wash your hands before handling your animal. Otherwise, your animal may take a bite of your hand, thinking it's the pasta you had for dinner or the cat you just petted.

When you pick up a small animal, you don't want to just grab them. The animal may perceive this as aggression and naturally want to defend himself or herself. It's better to scoop up the animal gently, using both of their hands. For guinea pigs, it's especially important to use one hand to firmly support their back legs. Never, never

pick up an animal by his or her tail—this is painful and potentially dangerous. If the animal shows signs of fear like flipping over on his back or running around the cage, it may take multiple sessions consisting of a few small steps at a time. You can place an upturned igloo or container on the floor of the cage and wait for the animal to walk into it, then scoop the “transport” carrier up out of the cage. As you then handle the animal more and more, and he or she learns to relax in your presence, you may find picking him or her up to come much more easily.

If the animal assumes a defensive position by flipping on his back and showing teeth, just leave him or her alone for the time being, and try again later. Small, cautious steps can yield huge rewards, but you may need to work to gain the animal's confidence and trust. If you have an animal who is especially scared or defensive, you may need to just sit with your hand in the cage for several minutes, several times a day. The more you do this, the more the animal becomes accustomed to your presence and learns to relax. Then you can take the next step of learning to pick him up. The process can take days, weeks, or even months. Every animal is an individual with a distinct personality, affected by his or her surroundings in a unique way. The animal may even have memories of how he or she was painfully or wrongly handled in the past. Additionally, an unhappy animal can be an unfriendly one. If you're not feeding, housing, or otherwise caring for your animal in a way that suits his or her needs, you could be contributing to his or her unhappy disposition. Visit our Web site (www.smallangelsrescue.org) and click on “Animal Care Information” for materials on properly caring for small animals.

Finding a Home for the Animal Yourself

If rehoming your pet is the only option you have, there are several steps you can take to find a new home on your own, without contacting a shelter or rescue.

§ **Post flyers** at veterinary offices, pet supply stores, workplaces, health food stores, supermarkets, libraries, churches, and health clubs. Describe the appearance, size, and age, and include a photograph.

§ **Talk to friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers** to see if they are looking for a pet, or know someone who is.

§ **Put an ad in the newspaper** for a minimal cost. Specify an adoption fee.

§ **Create a listing for your animal** on some or all of the following sites:

www.animalhome.com

www.petbond.com

www.petfinder.com (accepts classified ads)

www.h4ha.org/wpa/index.php

1-800-save-a-pet.com

Make sure to screen potential adopters carefully. Do not be afraid to deny a

potential adopter if you just do not feel right about them. Be sure to always ask for an adoption fee, in order to prevent unscrupulous adopters looking to sell the animal for research or to use him or her as snake food. **Never, ever advertise your pet as "free to a good home."**

As you go through the process of placing a homeless pet, keep in mind that creativity, persistence, and a positive attitude are usually rewarded. Try not to get discouraged and don't give up after just one or two interviews. Finding a home can take some work and some time, but if you persevere, you are sure to find a new person for your pet eventually.

If you are trying to place your own pet in a new home, you are this pet's best option for finding a good new home. Since you know the animal, you can provide the most information to prospective adopters and you can best determine the appropriateness of a new home. Please remember that your pet has been a faithful companion to you, so he/she deserves the best new home you can find. You will sleep better knowing that your pet is happy, healthy, and safe in a wonderful new home.

Giving Your Animal to Us

If you have gone through all of the above steps and have not been able to find a solution, contact Small Angels Rescue to discuss surrendering your animal. Keep in mind that because we do not have a physical shelter of our own and give priority to animals in shelters, there's a good chance we won't have room for your pet. There are a few ways we can proceed. First, we could list your animal on our Petfinder site as a courtesy post. Petfinder visitors would be instructed to contact you directly to adopt your animal. Or, we could "take in" the animal with you as the foster parent. Potential adopters would be required to fill out our adoption application, complete our interview process, and pay our adoption fee. Depending on the number of animals we have at any one time, we may not have the time or resources to explore the second option with you.

If we are able to take in your animal, be prepared to fill out a questionnaire about your animal's history, personality, likes, and dislikes. This information will help us make the best match possible for your pet. Also, please consider the effects of giving up your animal on our organization financially, and make a donation to help us out.

Questions? E-mail info@smallangelsrescue.org or call 301-668-0404.