

Developing an Effective "Pets Are Welcome" Policy



"In life
the firmest friend,
the first to welcome,
foremost to defend."

-Lord Byron

1. Limit the number of animals per dwelling. A person, regardless of the size of his or her home, can maintain only a few pets responsibly. Because pets are often happier living in pairs, don't summarily restrict residents to only one pet. Establish reasonable limits based on the activity level of the pet and the care and exercise provided by the owner.
2. Allow only traditional pets at your rental housing property. Limit residents to owning cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats, gerbils, ferrets, small caged birds and fish. Exotic or wild animals, such as iguanas and hedgehogs, don't belong in homes because they often cannot be kept responsibly.
3. Require that resident dogs, cats and rabbits are neutered before they reach six months of age. Sterilized dogs show less aggression and are less likely to bite, and neutered male cats are less likely to mark their territory by spraying urine. Spayed female cats don't go through noisy heat cycles, and spayed animals of all species won't attract unwanted male suitors. Sterilizing pets also helps reduce pet overpopulation. Require written proof of sterilization from a veterinarian and keep it on file.
4. Require that cats and dogs be licensed and up-to-date on rabies and other vaccinations. If required, dogs and cats should be licensed with the local animal control agency and vaccinated against rabies as required by state or local law.
5. Require that cats and dogs wear collars with identification tags at all times. This will make it easier to return pets that stray to their owners.
6. Require that pets be kept under control at all times. Cats should be kept indoors or on a leash and harness under human supervision while outdoors. Dogs should always be on a leash and under human control when outside.
7. Require pet owners to follow a written set of rules for keeping animals in a community. These guidelines should include a prohibition against using shared laundry facilities to wash pets' bedding and instructions for proper disposal of pets' waste (for example, scooping and properly disposing of dog waste outdoors and securely bagging cat litter before throwing it in garbage containers). Adopt the Denver Dumb Friends League's recommended pet-keeping guidelines for your rental property or condominium.
8. Do not require that cats be declawed or dogs be debarked. Ask responsible pet owners to solve problems such as scratching and barking through humane behavior modification. Appropriate scratching posts and training generally solve these problems. A veterinarian or animal behaviorist can provide advice to owners who are having trouble limiting their animals' scratching or barking. The Denver Dumb Friends League opposes declawing and debarking solely for the convenience of the owner and without benefit to the animal.



9. Evaluate prospective residents and their pets on an individual basis. Breed and size don't indicate a pet's temperament or suitability as a member of the housing community. Each animal should be evaluated on his or her own merits. Ask to meet prospective dog residents and see how they behave and respond to their owners' voice commands. Ask prospective residents questions (see "A Checklist for property owners/managers") regarding their commitment to provide responsible pet care. Check with previous property owners/managers or apartment managers to find out whether applicants' pets caused any problems. Require that prospective residents fill out a "Pet Application/Registration Form."

10. Require pet owners to supply you with a photograph of their pet(s). Keep photographs on file.

11. Require a fully refundable pet deposit and/or charge a reasonable monthly pet rent. If allowed by state and local laws, require pet owners to remit a fully refundable pet deposit specifically to cover any damage caused by pets. It is often easier for residents to come up with an additional \$10-20 per month than a huge "down payment" of the first and last month's rent, plus a deposit and pet deposit.

12. Require current residents to inform you if they intend to acquire a pet. State in the lease that failure to inform you before bringing animals to live on the property is grounds for eviction. Require that residents sign a "Pet Addendum to the Rental Agreement."

13. Tell residents about available resources for pet owners. Pet owners in the Denver metro area are lucky to have plenty of pet-related services at their disposal. Dozens of dog-walkers and pet-sitters are available, as well as doggy daycare centers, groomers and self-pet-wash stations. You can find their listings in the yellow pages under "pet services," "pet boarding and sitting" and "pet grooming."

The Denver Dumb Friends League provides a variety of services. Our Behavior Department offers semi-monthly Pet Parenting classes free of charge. Please call 303-696-4941, Ext. 387 to register. There are also cat and dog Behavior Helplines available. For cat behavior problems, call 303-696-4941, Ext. 348. For dogs, call 303-696-4941, Ext. 346. To register for low-cost dog obedience classes, call 303-696-4941, Ext. 386. Many specific behavior handouts are also available on our website at www.ddfl.org.

If you suspect animal cruelty or neglect, call our Animal Cruelty Investigations Department at 303-923-0022.



DENVER DUMB FRIENDS LEAGUE