

Conversational Adoption Counseling
Open Questions Quick Reference Sheet

Desire to have pet and commitment to pet:

“It is nice that your landlord allows pets. What will your plan be for _____ if your landlord changes his/her pet policy?”

- if they say “my landlord won’t change their mind” we want to just ask again with something like “things change, properties get sold and new landlords take over, etc. Let’s just say “what if...what will your plan be?”

“As a renter I am sure you don’t want to lose your security deposit or have to move if _____ were to bark too much, or cause damage by having accidents in the house, chewing, scratching, etc. What might your plan be if you run into these types of concerns with _____?”

“We all have our limits and there is no shame in that. What situations might leave you feeling like _____ just isn’t a good fit for you/your family and could lead you to return or re-home him/her?”

Making the Match: (other questions listed in other areas fit here too)

“What are you looking for in a pet, that is, what personality or behavior traits will make a pet a good match for you?”

“What is it about (insert name of pet interested in here that appeals to you?”

“I am sure you know that cats like to scratch to maintain their claws properly. How does your furniture feel about this?”

Physical and Emotional Needs:

“I see you currently have pets. What is it about them that you enjoy? What do you wish were different about them?”

“The average cost of care for a cat or dog, is between \$600 and \$1000.00 per year depending on dog size, age, etc. That doesn’t allow for emergency care. We’ve already vaccinated and S/N the pet but future vaccinations and care will be your responsibility. What are your questions or thoughts on this?”

“_____ is a high-energy dog and a breed that needs regular mental and physical stimulation. If he doesn’t get that need met you might see some behavior challenges such as.....For you this means walking _____ in the morning right when you wake up, and a walk after work and again one or two times before bed. Also he will need playtime inside and activities to keep his mind busy. What are your thoughts?”

“Tell me what a typical day will look like for _____ from the time he wakes up until bedtime?”

“Your children are at an age where they are still learning how to interact safely and appropriately with a pet. There may be moments when they need a break from _____ or _____ needs a break from them. How might you allow for that?”

When the adopter already has pets:

- “Wow! (Insert number of pets here) pets must keep you busy. What is like getting all of them to the vet? That must be fun!”
- “I see your cat is not spayed. It must be a challenge to have litters to deal with. Tell me more about how you usually manage that?” Then be sure to offer any S/N resources you have or can refer to.
- How do you handle (insert existing pets’ name(s)) vaccinations each year?

Other:

Pets as Gifts:

“You’ve said your Mom wants a cat and we can appreciate the the element of surprise. However, we often see these pets returned because the person receiving the pet really didn’t want it. Can you tell me how Mom has indicated she wants a cat?”

“We offer gift certificates for folks who would rather select their own pet which can often increase the bond between human and animal. Might this be a better option for you?”

“A cat or dog will make a great gift for your kids and let me ask you...when you get this pet for your kids what will it mean for you?”

Special Needs Pets:

“ _____ isn’t your typical dog. He doesn’t do well with other dogs or cats and unless you are trained to read dog behavior, he could fool you into thinking otherwise. Knowing this you will have to be extra alert to the presence of other animals. What steps might you take to ensure he doesn’t cause some trouble for you?”

“ _____ isn’t what one might call a “lap cat”. _____ will come to you when she/he wants attention and might get a bit physical with you should you push your luck. How does this fit what you are looking for in a cat?”

“As you know _____ will invite you to his/her party but refers kids stay home. I know you don’t have kids but what will you do if you encounter kids in public such as on a walk or while at the vet?”

General response to misc. comments:

We cannot predict and allow for every possible scenario so when something comes up in conversation that warrants further conversation use open-ended questions or statements (questions that do not have a yes or no answer) such as...

- “Tell me more about that?”
- “That must have been difficult for you (then pause and wait for them to speak)”
- “What was it about that situation that lead you to that conclusion?”
- “That is a progressive approach to training. Where did you learn that?”

Wrap-Up:

“We don’t know what we don’t know and at (insert organization name here) we are happy to guide you whenever you need it. In regards to caring for a (insert dog or cat here) and ensuring you both enjoy each other, what other information can I provide for you today?”

Note: It may not be necessary to ask each of the questions listed. These are a guide for staff use to make it easier to feel good about qualifying folks for adoption.