

HOW TO FIND A NEW HOME FOR YOUR TIBETAN MASTIFF¹

Not that long ago, you were thrilled to have a TM puppy of your very own. You never dreamed you'd have to give him up someday. Even if you can't keep him any more, your dog still depends on you to do what's best for him, just like he depended on you when he was a puppy. Now, more than ever, he needs you to make the right choices for his future.

Throughout this article, we're going to be direct and honest with you. *Your dog is your responsibility.* He has no one else but you to look out for his interests. It'll take effort, patience and persistence to find him the right home. He deserves your best efforts.

Finding a new home involves several steps. Before you start, there are some important things you should know...

.....about Animal Shelters.....

Shelters and humane societies were created to care for stray and abused animals. They weren't meant to be a drop-off for people who don't want their pets anymore. Shelters, on average, take in 100 new animals or more each day. Let's face it - there won't be enough good homes for all of them. Even the best shelters can't boast much more than a 50% adoption rate. Only the youngest, friendliest, cutest and best behaved dogs are going to be adopted.

By law, stray pets must be kept several days for their owners to reclaim them. They may not be destroyed until that period is up. Dogs given up by their owners aren't protected by these laws. They may be destroyed at any time. Shelters don't want to kill all these animals but they don't have a choice. There just isn't enough room for all of them. Shelters today are so overcrowded that your dog could be killed the same day it arrives.

¹ This article is adapted from "How to Find a Home for your Chow Chow", published by the Chow Chow Club, Inc. Welfare Committee. We would like to thank the Chow Chow Club, Inc. Welfare Committee for making it available.

Being purebred won't help your dog's chances of adoption either - almost half of the dogs in many shelters are purebreds. Because some people are afraid of TMs, some shelters will not put them up for adoption at all. Your dog may be as good as dead when it walks in the door. If your TM is old, has health problems or a poor attitude toward strangers, its chances of adoption are slim to none.

Sending your dog to a shelter in hopes that he'll find a good home is wishful thinking. It's more likely that you'll be signing your TM's death warrant. A shelter is your last resort only after all your best efforts have failed.

..... about "No-Kill" shelters and Breed Rescue services

True "no-kill" shelters are few and far between. Obviously, no one wants to see their pet killed so the demand for no-kill shelter services is high. So high that they're forced to turn away many pets because they don't have room for them all. Sometimes they have to choose only the most adoptable dogs to work with.

Breed Rescue services are small, private, shelter-like groups run by volunteers dedicated to a particular breed. Most of them operate out of the volunteer's home. Like no-kill shelters, demand for their services is high, so high that your dog may be turned away for lack of room. A breed rescue can still help you place your dog by providing referrals to persons interested in adopting your dog. You'll have the most success if you follow the rescue service's advice and are willing to do your share of the work to find a new home. Call Tibetan Mastiff Rescue, Inc. at 310-989-4466 write to tmrescue@tibetanmastiff.org.

Step 1. Soul Searching

Do you really *have* to give up your TM? There's a big difference between being forced to give up your dog and wanting to "get rid of him". Search your heart for the real reason why your dog can't live with you anymore. Be honest with yourself. Your answer will probably fall into one of two categories: *People Problems* or *Dog Problems*.

The Most Common People Problems:

"We're moving - we can't find a landlord who'll let us keep our dog."..... Many landlords don't allow children either but you'd never give up one of your kids if you couldn't find the right apartment. Affordable rental homes that allow pets are out there if you work to find them. Most people give up too easily. See the end of this article for suggestions that might help you find an apartment and still keep your dog.

"We don't have enough time for the dog".....as a puppy, your dog took far more of your time than he does now. A TM doesn't really take that much time - his requirements for attention are often less than of many other breeds. Grooming need only take time once or twice a year when they blow their coats. Are you really that busy? Can other members of your family help care for the dog? Will getting rid of your TM really make your life less stressful? When they look closely at their lives, people often discover that the dog isn't cramping their style as much as they think.

The Most Common Dog Problem:

Behavior problems.....If you got your dog as a puppy and he now has a behavior problem you can't live with, you must accept the fact that you are at least partly responsible for the way your dog is now.

You have 4 options:

1. You can continue to live with your dog the way he is.
2. You can get help to correct the problem.
3. You can try to give your problem to someone else.
4. You can have the dog destroyed.

Obviously the first option is out or you wouldn't be reading this booklet. You're probably most interested in Option 3 so let's talk frankly about that for a moment.

If you were looking for a dog and could select from all kinds of dogs and puppies, would you deliberately choose one with a behavior problem?

No, certainly not - and neither would anyone else. To make your dog desirable to other people, you're going to have to take some action to fix his problems.

Most behavior problems aren't that hard to solve. We can help you with them if you'll give it a try. Think hard about Option 2 before deciding it won't work for you - because the only option you have left is number 4: Having the dog destroyed. That's the bottom line. If you, who know and love the dog best, won't give him another chance, why should anyone else? Think about that.

...IF YOUR DOG HAS EVER BITTEN ANYONE...

If your dog is aggressive with people or has ever bitten anyone, you can't, in good conscience, give him to anyone else. Could you live with yourself if that dog hurt

another person, especially a child? Can you deal with the lawsuit that could result from it? You stand to lose your home and everything else you own. Lawsuits from dog bites are settling for millions of dollars in damages.

Our society today has zero tolerance for a dog with a bite history, no matter how minor. A dog that has bitten - whether or not it was his fault - is considered by law to be a *dangerous* dog. In some states, it's illegal to sell or give away a biting dog. No insurance company will cover a family with a biting dog. And to be perfectly honest, no responsible person in his right mind would want to adopt a biting dog.

No matter how much you love your dog, if he has ever bitten anyone, you only have one responsible choice - take him to your veterinarian and have him humanely put to sleep. Don't leave him at a shelter where he might be frightened and confused and put other people at risk. Don't try to place him as a "guard dog" where he might be neglected, abused or used for dogfighting.

As hard as it is to face, putting a potentially dangerous, biting dog to sleep is the only safe and responsible thing to do. It's the right thing to do.

Step 2. Call your dog's breeder.

Before you do anything else, call the person you got your dog from and ask for help. Even if several years have passed, responsible breeders care about the puppies they sold and will want to help you find a new home. They may even take the dog back. At the very least, they deserve to know what you intend to do with the TM and what will happen to it. If you can't remember the breeder's name, look on your dog's registration papers. If you got your dog from an animal shelter or rescue service, read the adoption contract you signed when you adopted him. You may be required by the contract to return the dog to that shelter.

Step 3. Evaluate your dog's adoption potential.

To successfully find a new home, you need to be realistic about your dog's adoption potential. Let's be honest: most people don't want "used" dogs, especially if they have health or behavior problems. Your dog will have the best chance if he's less than 4 years old, is healthy, friendly to strangers, obeys commands and adapts quickly to new situations. Look at your dog as if you were meeting him for the first time. What kind of impression would he make? Would *you* want to adopt him?

You already know that TMs are special dogs for special people. Those special people can be hard to find. Most people interested in TMs today have never had one before. They want a dog that will greet them with a wagging tail or will at least allow them

to pet him. If your dog is aggressive to strangers, is "temperamental" or has ever bitten anyone, finding him another home may not be your best option.

What kind of home do you want for your TM? A large fenced yard? Another dog to play with? Children? No children? Make a list of what you feel is most important for your dog. Then get real. No home will be perfect, of course, so you'll have to make compromises. What kind of people are you looking for? What will you be willing to compromise on? Once you have a firm idea of what you're looking for, it will be easier to plan your search and get the results you want.

Step 4. Get your dog ready

Your dog will be much more appealing if he's clean, well-groomed and healthy.

First, take him to the vet for a check up. He'll need a heartworm test, a DHLPP and a rabies vaccination if he hasn't one within the last year. Be sure to tell the vet about any behavior problems so he can rule out physical causes.

If your dog isn't spayed or neutered, do it now! Don't waste your time trying to sell your dog as "breeding stock" even if he's AKC FSS-registered. Frankly, no *reputable* TM breeder will want him unless he came from a well known show dog fancier in the first place. The only kind of "breeder" who'll be interested in your dog will be a puppyfarmer or a dog broker. Brokers seek out unaltered purebreds for resale to puppy mills or research laboratories. That's not the kind of future you want for your dog.

Spaying or neutering guarantees that your dog won't end up in a puppy mill. It's the best way to insure that your dog will be adopted by a family who wants him only as a best friend and member of the family. If you can't afford the cost of surgery, check with your vet, local shelter or rescue group for information about low-cost spay and neuter programs that are available in some parts of the country. Having your dog neutered or spayed is the best going away present you can give him. It may save his life! Give your dog a brighter future - make the appointment today!!

If your dog has never been tattooed or microchipped, this is a great time to do it.

It's not unusual for newly adopted dogs to get loose and become lost. A permanent ID will help your dog get back to you or his new owners.

Groom your dog. You want your dog to look beautiful and make a good impression. He needs to be clean and well-dressed! Get rid of those mats and tangles and give him a bath. Make sure he's neatly trimmed. If you can't do these things yourself, take him to a groomer. Get rid of his old rusty choke chain and buy a nice, new, strong collar and lead.

Set a reasonable adoption fee. The key word is "reasonable". You can't expect the new owner to pay you anywhere near the same price for a "used" dog as they would for a shiny new puppy. A reasonable range might be between \$50-100, enough to help offset your advertising and veterinary costs.

Step 5. ADVERTISE!

Word of mouth doesn't go very far. ***Don't be afraid to use classified ads to advertise your dog.*** Done right, it's the most effective way to reach the largest number of people. It's easy to write a good ad that will weed out poor adoption prospects right away.

Your ad should give a short description of your dog, his needs, your requirements for a home and of course, your phone number. The description should include his breed, color, sex, the fact that he's neutered and an indication of his age. Hints: if your dog is less than 2 years old, state his age in months so he'll be perceived as the young dog he is. If he's over three, just say that he's an "adult".

Emphasize your dog's good points: Is he friendly? Housebroken? Well-mannered? Loves kids? Does he do tricks? Has he had any training? Don't keep it a secret but don't exaggerate either. Knowing his name doesn't make him "well-trained"!

State any definite requirements you might have for his new home: fenced yard, no cats, kids over 10, whatever. Try to say these in a positive way - for example, saying "Kids over 10" sounds better than "No kids under 10". If your TM doesn't like other pets, say "should be only pet" rather than "doesn't like other animals".

Always state that references are required. This tells people that you're being selective and that you're not going to give your dog to just anybody. This statement will do a lot to keep people with bad intentions from dialing your number.

Never include the phrase "free to good home" in your ad even if you're not planning to charge a fee. If possible, don't put in any reference to a price at all. The chance at a "free" dog will bring lots of calls, but most of them won't be the kind of people you're looking for and many of them will be people you'd rather not talk to at all.

Your ad should look something like this:

"Tibetan Mastiff: beautiful, young adult black and tan male, neutered. Friendly, housebroken, well-behaved. Best with children over 10. Fenced yard, references required. Karen 555-1234"

Along with your local newspaper, advertise in all major papers within an hour and a half's drive. Schedule your ad so that it appears in Sunday's paper - the issue that's the most well-read and widely circulated. If your budget is very limited, choose to run your ad only on Sundays rather than throughout the week. Nearly every community also has small, weekly "budget-shopper" newspapers that offer inexpensive classified ads. Take advantage of them!

Don't be discouraged if your phone isn't ringing right away. Most people give up too soon. It can take a month or more to find a new home, so plan on advertising for several weeks. Put a phone number in the ad where you can be easily reached or use an answering machine. People can't call you if no one's home to answer the phone.

Newspapers are just one way to advertise. Take a good cute photo of your dog and have copies made. Duplicating photos can be done for as little as a quarter each at most photo shops. Make an attractive flyer on colored paper that you can have copied for a few cents each. Attach the cute photo of your dog. Your flyer doesn't have to be expensive, professional or computerized, just neat and eye-catching. Since you're not paying for words, you can write more about your dog than you could in a newspaper ad. Be descriptive!

Post your flyers at grocery stores, department stores, vets' offices, pet supply stores, grooming shops, factories, malls, etc. - anywhere you can find a public bulletin board. If you have friends in a nearby city, mail them a supply of flyers and ask them to post them for you.

Step 6. Interviewing Callers.

"First come, first served" does not apply here. You are under no obligation to give your dog to the first person who says he wants it. You have every right to ask questions and choose the person you think will make the best new owner. Don't let anyone rush you or intimidate you.

To help you along, we've included a list of questions that we ask our callers. Make copies of this list and fill in their answers as you speak to your callers. If you like, you can also mail the application for your callers to fill out and return to you. Get out the list you made with your requirements for a new home and compare it to the answers the callers give.

First of all, get your caller's name, address and phone number. Deceitful people may call you from a phone booth or give you a fake address. Ask for information that you can verify.

Does the caller's family know about and approve of their plans to get a dog? If not, suggest they talk it over with their spouse and call you back. The same applies to people living with a companion or roommate. When one person adopts a dog without the full approval of the rest of the family, the adoption often fails.

Do they own or rent their home? If renting, does their landlord approve? You'd be surprised how many people haven't checked with their landlord before calling you. If you have doubts, ask for the landlord's name and number, then call him yourself. Be cautious about renters - they're quicker to move than people who own their homes and movers often leave their pets behind. Remember, you're looking for a *permanent* home for your dog.

Does the caller have children? How many and how old are they? If your dog isn't good with kids, say so up front. How many children can make a difference depending on your dog's personality. A shy dog may not be able to cope with several children and their friends. Very young children may not be old enough to treat the dog properly. If the callers don't have children, ask them if they're thinking of having any in the near future. Many people get rid of their dogs when they start a family.

Have they had dogs, especially Tibetan Mastiffs, before? If yes, how long did they keep them?

These are very important questions! How they treated the pets they've had in the past will tell you how they might treat your dog. The following answers should raise a red flag and make you suspicious:

"We gave him away when we moved." Unless they had to because of unavoidable problems, moving is a poor excuse for giving up a pet. Almost everyone can find a place that will allow dogs if they try hard enough. If they gave up their last dog that easily, there's a good chance they'll give yours up someday, too.

"We gave him away because he had behavior problems." Most behavior problems - poor housebreaking, chewing, barking, digging, running away - result from a lack of training and attention. If the caller wasn't willing to solve the problems he had with his last dog, he probably won't try very hard with your dog either.

"Oh, we've had lots of dogs!" Watch out for people who've had several different dogs in just a few years' time. They may never kept any of them for very long.

Do they have pets now? What kinds? Obviously, if your dog isn't good with cats or other animals and your caller has them, the adoption's not going to work out. Be up front. Better to turn people away now than have to take the dog back later. The sex of

their other dogs is an important consideration. Tms often do not get along with another large dog of the same sex, and especially of a different breed. Dog fights can be serious problems and one dog can hurt or even kill the other. We recommend that you don't put your TM into a home with a dog of the same sex unless you're absolutely sure they'll like each other.

Do they have a yard? Is it fenced? Your dog will need daily exercise. Without a yard, how will he get it? Can the caller provide it with regular walks? If the yard isn't fenced, ask how he plans to keep the dog from leaving his property? Did the caller's last dog wander off or get hit by a car? If so, how will he keep this from happening to his next dog? Does he understand that our independent TMs will wander off if left unsupervised? That they have a mind of their own and don't like to come when they're called? Does he know that keeping a TM tied up can have a bad effect on the dog's temperament?

Where will the dog spend most of its time? Although most TMs love to be outside whenever they can, a whole life outdoors probably isn't what you have in mind for your dog. Dogs always kept outside are sometimes neglected, lonely and may develop behavior problems.

Why is the caller interested in a Tibetan Mastiff? What do they like about them? Find out what kind of dog "personality" they're looking for. Many people are attracted by the TM's beauty but don't know anything else about them. They might not have the slightest idea what a TM is all about and might not like its temperament and characteristics. If their expectations don't match your dog's disposition, the adoption's not going to work. Be honest about our breed's good and bad points. Is a TM really what they're looking for or would they do better with another breed?

References: Get the phone number of their vet (if they've had pets before) and two other personal references. Call those references! Explain that John Doe is interested in adopting your dog and you want to make sure he'll give it a good home. Ask the vet whether former pets were given regular medical care, annual vaccinations and heartworm preventative. Were they in good condition and well-groomed? How long have they known this person? If they were placing a pet, would they feel comfortable giving it to this person?

Step 7: The In-Person Interview

Once you've chosen a family (or families) that you feel are good candidates, make an appointment for them to see the dog. You should actually set two appointments: one at your house and one at theirs. Going to their house lets you see whether their home and yard are truly what they said they are and whether your dog will do well there. It also gives you an opportunity to call off the adoption and take the dog back home with you if things aren't as represented, if you think there'll be problems or if you just get a bad feeling about the whole thing.

If they already have a dog, make plans to introduce the dogs on "neutral" territory, like a park. Most dogs resent meeting a strange dog at home. They may be hostile toward the new dog or even start a fight.

If the family has children, ask them to bring them to the interview. You need to see how the dog will react to them and how the children treat the dog. Some allowance should be made for kids' natural enthusiasm but if these children are undisciplined, disrespectful to your dog and not kept in hand by their parents, your dog could be mistreated in its new home and someone could get bitten.

Do you like these people? Are you comfortable having them as guests in your home? Would they make good friends? If not, don't give them your dog. Trust your instincts. If something about them doesn't seem quite right, even if you can't explain what it is, don't take a chance on your dog's future. Wait for another family!

Step 8. Saying Goodbye

After the interviews are over, give the new family a day or two to decide if they really want to adopt your dog. Make sure they have a chance to think over the commitment they're making. While they're deciding, get a package ready to send along with your dog. This package should include:

- ! your dog's medical records and the name, address & phone number of your vet.
- ! your name, address & phone (new address if you're moving)
- ! your dog's toys and belongings (dog bed, blanket, etc.), a supply of dog food & special treats he loves
- ! an instruction sheet on feeding, special needs, etc.; some reading material about the Tibetan Mastiff breed.
- ! collar and leash; ID and rabies tags
- ! the phone number of Tibetan Mastiff Recus, Inc.: 770-214-2148

Set aside a special time for you and your dog to take a last walk together and say goodbye. We know you'll cry. Do it now, in private, so you're clear headed when he has to leave. He may be confused about being left with strangers and you won't want your emotions to upset him even more.

There are some things you need to explain to the new family before they take your dog home: The dog will go through an adjustment period as he gets to know his new people, learns new rules and mourns the loss of his old family. Most dogs adjust within a few days, but others may take longer. During this time, they should avoid forcing the dog to do anything stressful - taking a bath, obedience training classes, meeting too many strangers at once, etc. - until he's had a chance to settle in. Tell them take things easy at first and give the dog time to bond to them. The dog might not eat for the first day or two. Not to worry - he'll eat when he's ready. Some dogs temporarily forget their training. A well-housebroken dog may have an accident during the first day in his new home. This isn't unusual and rarely happens more than once.

Step 9. Paperwork

Have the new owner sign an adoption contract with a waiver of liability. We've included a sample contract you can use. Keep a copy for your records. A contract will help to protect the dog and the waiver of liability helps to protect *you*. You don't have a crystal ball to predict what your dog might do in the future. Remember - a waiver of liability will *not* protect you if you have lied or misrepresented the dog to his new owners.

Tell the family they should call you if the adoption doesn't work out. Let them know you want to keep in touch and will call them in a few days to see how things are going. Tell them to call you if they have questions or problems. Be willing to take the dog back home if things don't work out the way you both expected.

Make sure they have Tibetan Mastiff Rescue, Inc.'s phone number: 770-214-2148. We're always there to give advice and answer questions. We can also send them a free packet of information about TMs, their care, training and grooming.

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SAMPLE ADOPTION CONTRACT:

Adopter's Name: _____
Phone: _____

Address: _____

Former Owner's Name: _____
Phone: _____

Address: _____

Dog's Name: _____ Breed: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____
Color: _____

Date of last Vet Check-up _____ DHLPP _____ Rabies _____
Heartworm check _____

Next vaccinations & Heartworm check will be needed: _____

To the best of my (former owner) knowledge, this dog has no defects that would make it unsuitable as a family pet. I certify that this dog has never bitten or injured anyone.

I (adopter) understand and agree to the following terms of this contract and understand that non-compliance with the terms of this agreement gives the adopting agent/former owner the right to reclaim this dog without refund of adoption fee.

- ! an adoption fee of \$ _____ will be collected at the time of adoption.
- ! This dog shall be kept and cared for as a family pet in a humane manner and given appropriate shelter and medical care for the duration of its life.
- ! I agree to abide by all state and local animal control and leash laws. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with these laws.
- ! I understand that _____ (former owner/agent) _____ makes no guarantees or warranties regarding the health or temperament of this dog. I agree to adopt this dog and to be solely responsible for this animal and any damages that may result from its actions. _____ (former owner/agent) _____ shall not be held liable for the behavior of this dog or any damages it may cause. I understand that this a binding contract enforceable by civil law.

Date of adoption: _____

Adopter's signature

Former Owner's Signature

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Moving, but can't take your dog?

**Moving is the most common reason
why people give up their pets.
It doesn't have to be this way.**

- ! 1. Most people give up too quickly in their search for rental property that accepts pets. Don't be too quick to jump on the first apartment you see. There'll probably be a better one available soon.
- ! 2. Widen your search. Most people only look as far as the classified ads. Many landlords list their property through real estate agents or rental associations rather than the classifieds. Take advantage of rental services that help tenants find apartments. Ask friends, relatives and co-workers to keep an eye open for you. Many apartments are rented via word of mouth before they're ever advertised in the papers.
- ! 3. A home that allows pets might be in a different neighborhood than you'd prefer. It might be a few more miles from work. It might not be as luxurious as you'd like. It might cost a few dollars more. Are you willing to compromise if it means being able to keep your dog?
- ! 4. "No Pets" doesn't always mean "no pets, period." Many landlords automatically rule out pets because they don't want the hassle. Many of these landlords are pet owners themselves. Just because the ad says "no pets" doesn't mean you shouldn't go see the apartment anyway. During the interview, ask the landlord "Are pets *absolutely* out of the question?" If he answers, "well...", you have a chance! Hint: You'll have better luck asking this question in person than over the telephone - it's harder for people to say no to your face.

To encourage a landlord to let you keep your dog.....

- ! ...bring your *well-groomed, well-behaved* dog to the rental interview. Show the landlord that your dog is well-cared-for and that you're a responsible owner. Bring along an obedience class diploma or Canine Good Citizen certificate if your dog has one.

- ! ...offer an additional security deposit or rental amount to be able to have a dog.
- ! ...bring references from your previous landlords and neighbors. Invite the landlord to see your present home to show him that the dog has not damaged the property nor been a nuisance to the neighbors.
- ! ...use a dog crate. Landlords are much more receptive to dogs that will be crated when their owners aren't home.
- ! 1. In difficult times, people often have to move in with relatives or friends who don't like dogs. This doesn't have to be an impossible situation. Use a dog crate when you're not home or when your family doesn't want your dog underfoot. A portable kennel run can be set up in the yard for exercise and can be sold later when you have your own place and don't need it anymore.
- ! 2. Don't think you're being unfair to your dog by moving into a smaller place than what he's used to. Dogs are very adaptable, they can often adjust even faster than people. Where he lives isn't as important to him as who he lives with. He wants to be with *you* and he doesn't care where that is.