

Task 1: Defining Successful Adoptions

In this task, we'll complete activities that prepare us to entertain new thoughts about adoptions:

- Finding out where pets really come from
- Defining a successful adoption
- Creating the space for new thinking

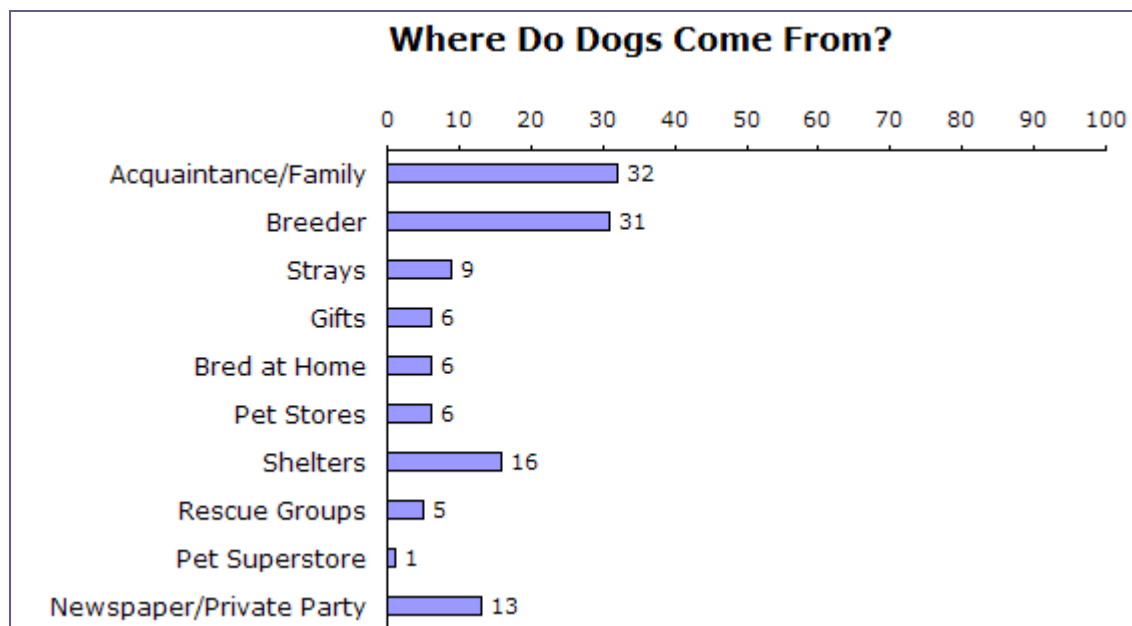
Where Do Americans Acquire Their Pets?

➤ Consider the following statistics about pet ownership in the United States.

- About 63% of all U.S. households have at least one pet, and 45% owned more than one pet: ¹
 - About 75 million owned dogs
 - About 90 million owned cats
- 65% of pet owners acquire their pets free or at low cost.²

A 2005-2006 survey³ of pet owners by the pet food industry identified the following sources for dogs and cats.

Note: Values are percentages, but they add up to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one source. For example, a puppy acquired from a newspaper ad might be given as a gift.

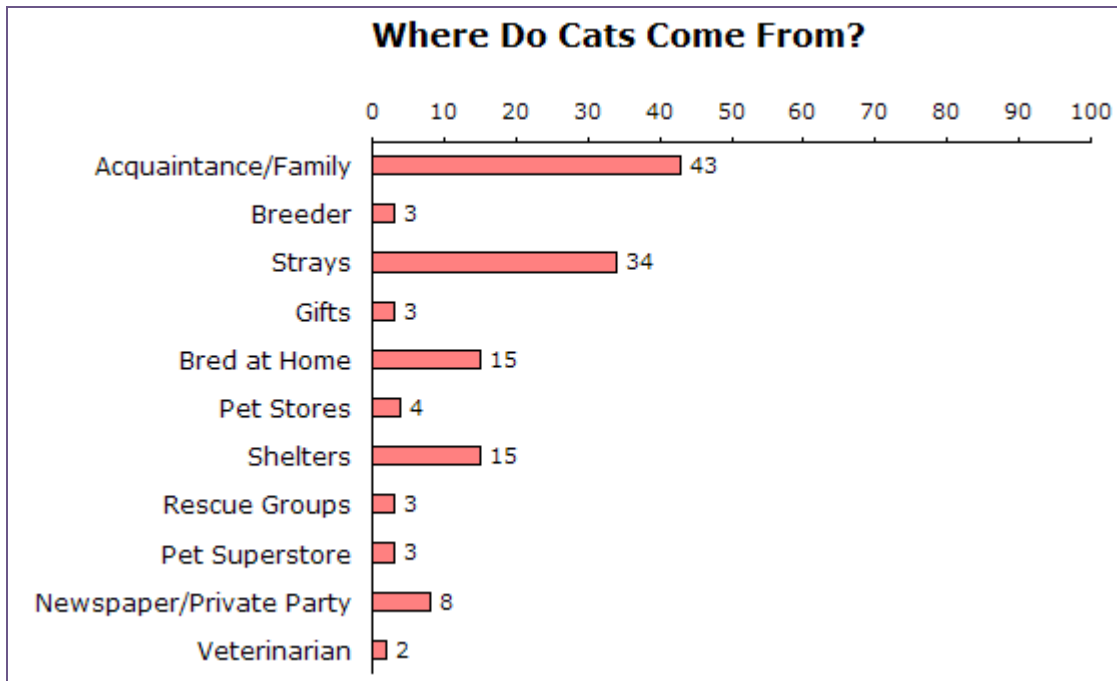


¹ 2005-2006 American Pet Products Manufacturers Association National Pet Owners Survey

² National Council on Pet Population Study & Policy

³ 2005-2006 American Pet Products Manufacturers Association National Pet Owners Survey

Note: Values are percentages, but they add up to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one source.



➤ What surprises you about these statistics?

➤ Why do you think shelter adoptions represent such a small percent of the market share?

Defining a Successful Adoption

- Draw a picture or diagram to illustrate your vision of a successful adoption.

- Read pages 3 – 7 in *Report on Adoption Forum II*.

- Consider the criteria given for a successful adoption, and compare them to your own vision of a successful adoption. In particular, consider:

- What you'd like to happen for an animal in her/his new home

Jot down your notes here:

- We'll discuss our pictures/visions as a group.

Creating the Space for New Thinking

One way to create space for new thinking is to re-evaluate old thinking.

➤ Fill in the blanks for the following statements:

"When it comes to adoptions, I used to be really sure that _____
_____."

Now that I've seen the stats on adoption market share and read the *Report on Adoption Forum II*, I'm wondering _____
_____."

➤ Share your responses with the rest of the group.



Name one or two insights for you from the information and conversations in these learning tasks.

Task 2: Applying Adult Learning to Adoptions

In this task, we'll identify essential factors that influence how adults learn and retain the information they learn. We can then brainstorm how to apply our new knowledge of adult learning to the adoption experience.

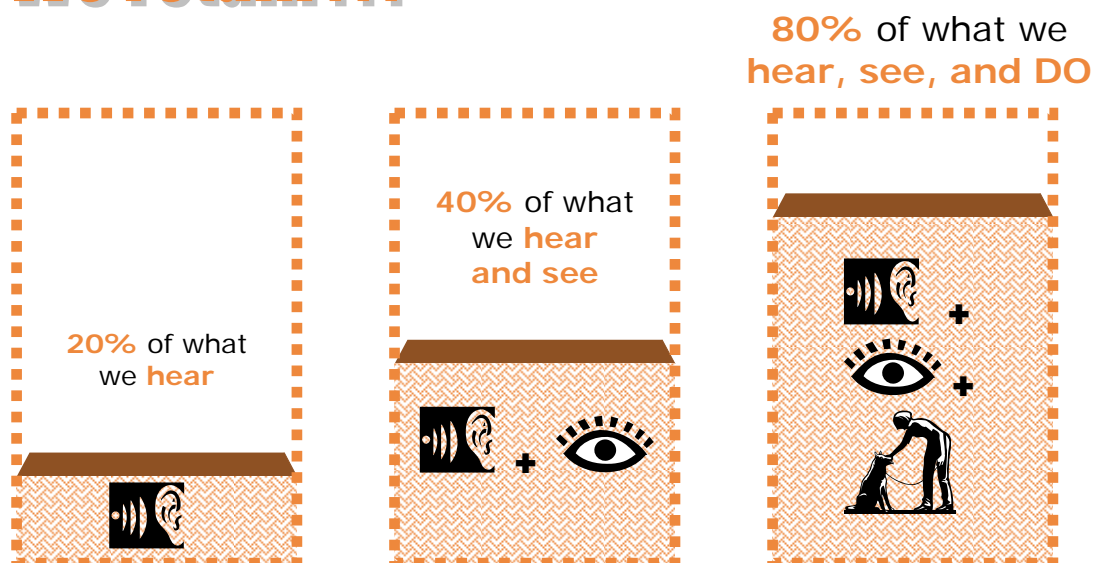
As a warm-up: reflect on a really good learning experience you've had as an adult. Briefly tell one other person about this experience.

So little time and **so much information** often drive our impulse to just tell adopters everything we can. Our motivation – helping adopters succeed – is excellent. Knowing more about how adults learn helps us use the right tools to help adopters understand information, remember it, and put it to use when they need it.

20/40/80 Percent Retention of Information

First, let's consider how much new information we adults can absorb at one time. The following diagram shows how the method by which we receive information affects how well we can hang onto that information.

We retain...



➤ Think for a few moments about what helps you retain new information or a new skill. For example, how do the following influence whether you can bake a loaf of yeast bread on your own in the future?

- Reading a recipe
- Watching an experienced baker
- Making the bread yourself, with a friendly baker to instruct you and point out what to look for and feel as you prepare the yeast and work with the dough

Five Principles to Enhance Adult Learning

Now let's consider how the adult brain determines what information and skills are worth retaining.

In the 1960's, Malcolm Knowles conducted a series of studies to identify the factors necessary for adults to learn. Additional research has confirmed that - in any situation where they are presented with new information – adults learn best when circumstances meet the following principles:

<p>Respect</p>	<p>Adults are more open to learning new things when they are acknowledged for the wisdom, skills and resources they bring to the new situation. The root word for respect is the same as that for "spectacles." Respect can be literally translated as "I see you."</p> <p>To show respect in a learning environment, acknowledge people for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who they are, • What they know and do, and • What they bring to the present situation.
<p>Relevance</p>	<p>When you were in school and a teacher introduced a complex theory or some historical minutia or a difficult algebra equation, do you remember anyone asking, "why do we have to know this?" That question represents the learner's desire for relevance!</p> <p>It's the same for adults, except that adults are in charge of their own lives – so if a "teacher" doesn't make the information relevant to the adult learner, that learner will decide it is unimportant and leave the information behind.</p> <p>To ensure relevance in a learning environment, ask people what they would like to learn and how that information will be useful to them. Then you can work together to find the answers to their questions. Sometimes people don't know what they don't know. In such cases, you can help the adult learner to take in new information by explaining how the information will be useful in their lives.</p>

Immediacy	<p>For adults to retain new information, they must be able to see a useful application for the information – right away – in their own lives. Immediacy builds on relevance, giving the adult learner a way to put their new knowledge to work for them.</p> <p>To incorporate immediacy, you will need to know something about your learners so that you can point out how they can put the information you present to use - right away - in their situations. Often, if you have done a good job of demonstrating respect and relevance, the learners will figure out the immediate applications for themselves (these often look like “aha” moments).</p> <p>You can also ask about plans for the near future. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Do you already have a plan for how you'd like your first night with your new puppy to go?" • "What else can I help you with to get your relationship with your new cat off on the right foot?"
Safety	<p>Learning takes a lot of energy and requires focus. People are more capable of learning when it is safe enough to do so. While there are many variations in how people like to learn, generally a safe learning environment is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive, • Free from threat of physical or emotional harm, and • Meets at least some of the learners' needs for concentration (not too loud or chaotic, etc.) and comfort (not too warm or cold, ample seating, etc.). <p>To practice safety, look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to praise learners for their accomplishments • Ways to correct mistakes that help people retain their dignity <p>Safety doesn't mean there will be no challenge or no corrections; it means only that there will be no dumb questions.</p>
Engagement	<p>Engagement is closely related to the 20/40/80% retention concept. An old proverb speaks eloquently of engagement: "Tell me...and I will forget. Show me...and I may remember. Involve me...and I will understand."</p> <p>People learn best when they are actively involved in acquiring the information. Active involvement can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing a new skill right away • Using new information to solve a problem • Having a meaningful dialogue about the ramifications of the information <p>To reach that 80% of retention – to really engage your learners – look for ways to get your learners to <i>do</i> something (right then and there) with the information you're providing.</p>

➤ As a group, create one-sentence definitions (in your own words) to explain each of these learning criteria. Write your definitions on flipchart pages.

Adult Learning in the Adoption Experience

Your facilitator will organize you in groups to brainstorm specific ways to apply adult learning criteria to the adoption experience.

➤ Write your suggestions on sticky notes, and post them on the corresponding flipchart page.

Remember that many excellent ways to use the criteria aren't necessarily words that you say or questions that you ask. Think of **anything and everything that can help your adopters learn** what they really need to know:

- Look beyond what you can say to an adopter. Consider nonverbal ways of creating a learning environment:
 - How the adoption space is arranged
 - Things to have on hand
 - Posters, fact sheets or handouts
 - Activities you and the adopter can do together to help the adopter learn
- If your examples begin "Tell them ...," this is a good clue that your approach is to lecture – and you can expect only 20% retention at best.
 - How can you convey the information in a way that actively involves the adopter?

Also, be sure to be very specific:

- **Specific:** "When adopter arrives, come out from the counter to greet them, and introduce yourself."
- **Not specific:** "Greet adopter respectfully."

➤ During the group discussion of the suggestions, you may want to jot down the suggestions you'll want to use right away when you are with an adopter.

Concept	Ways You Can Apply It
20/40/80	For example: Tell the adopter how to use a gentle leader; demonstrate how to put a gentle leader on their new dog; then let them put the gentle leader on while you watch and assist.
Respect	For example: Give the adopter eye contact and your full attention (no multi-tasking).
Relevance	For example: Identify the most commonly asked questions of new dog or cat owners, and post friendly, engaging signs or displays that thoroughly answer these questions.
Immediacy	For example: Answer the adopter's questions (or find someone who can).
Safety	For example: Make everything in your adoption center (including your adoption process) easy to understand with clear, friendly signs in simple, plain language.
Engagement	For example: Invite adopting families to join you and their prospective animal in a "get acquainted" room and encourage their interaction with the animal and their questions for you.



What is one way you've already been applying a learning principle in your adoption counseling (before this workshop)?

What is one new way you will apply an adult learning principle in your counseling after today?

Task 3: Learning from Mistakes

In this task, we'll analyze how mistakes often result in learning. Next, we'll consider how we can apply adult learning principles to adopter "mistakes" to turn them into positive results.

Did You Always Meet All the Adoption Criteria?

We establish adoption criteria with the intention of adopting out animals only to people who are able to provide good homes for them. That's our intention. But the results suggest we might have missed something – or someone.

➤ When asked, stand up. Your facilitator will read this list of typical adoption criteria used by shelters and rescue groups around the country. If you hear a criterion that has **ever applied to you**, sit down.

- If one of your animals was ever hit by a car
- If you had an animal that ran away from home
- If you didn't have a fenced yard for your dog
- If you've ever kept an animal without your landlord's permission
- If you've ever surrendered an animal to a shelter
- If you've had an animal that was not kept current on vaccinations

➤ How many potential adopters among your colleagues are eliminated because they (and maybe you too) failed to meet one of these adoption criteria?

➤ As you look around at the people who are seated (and would typically be denied an adoption based on these criteria), what are your thoughts about adoption criteria?

What Have You Learned from Past Mistakes with Your Animals?

➤ In pairs, tell a brief story about a time when you personally learned something about being a better pet owner as a result of a mistake you made with one of your pets.

- How did the learning take place?
- What made it possible for you to learn?

➤ What can we take from our own experiences of mistakes as learning experiences that could be applied to the adoption process?

Turning Adoption Counseling Mistakes into Counseling Successes

➤ Read the Adoption Counseling Case Story on the next page. (Your facilitator may also present the case story as a role play.)

Adoption Counseling Case Story: "Where are all the good homes?"

Tawnya is an Adoption Counselor at an open-admission shelter in the Midwest. She's worked there for two years. She was a volunteer foster parent for litters of puppies before that, and she is confident that she know a lot about raising puppies.

Maria is a young woman who has submitted an application to adopt a Lab-mix puppy from a large litter currently at the shelter. Maria loves dogs, and she is excited about adopting a puppy. Her family raised a few puppies when she was growing up, but this will be the first time she will raise a puppy by herself. She is confident that she knows enough about raising puppies to be a good adopter.

Tawnya begins the interview by verifying all the information Maria wrote on the adoption application. When asked about each item, Maria repeats what she has written on the form. Tawnya tells Maria all the supplies she will have to buy right away before taking a puppy home. Maria nods and says okay. Tawnya lists all the vaccines a puppy needs and when. Maria nods and says okay.

Tawnya lists the series of training classes Maria and the puppy should take, beginning as soon as possible. Maria says, "I grew up with dogs and puppies, so I'm familiar with training them." Tawnya says, "We recommend training classes for everybody, especially if they have a puppy. Oh, and speaking of training: You know you'll need to start house training the puppy right away."

Maria says, "Oh that won't be a problem. I know how to do that. A swat on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper when they mess up teaches them pretty quickly."

Appalled, Tawnya says, "You're kidding, right?" Maria seems confused and replies defensively, "No, I wasn't kidding. That's what my parents always did, and it worked just fine."

Tawnya says, "You should never hit a puppy on the nose – that's animal abuse." Maria is now shocked and very unhappy. She says, "It wasn't abuse! We loved our dogs – and they loved us! We *never* abused them!"

Tawnya says, "Look, you can't possibly adopt an animal from us if you're planning to use outdated training methods like that. We *only* adopt out animals to people who will treat them properly. I'm sorry, but you simply don't qualify to adopt here."

Maria says, "You mean you won't let me adopt the puppy?" Tawnya shakes her head and says firmly, "No. I'm sorry but we can't let you adopt one of our puppies. You have to meet our criteria to adopt, and I'm afraid that you don't."

Speechless and near tears, Maria leaves. Tawnya adds Maria's name and address to the DNA list, and wonders where the good homes will come from for all these puppies.



➤ With your same partner, analyze the case story using the following questions and activities.

- What do you see happening in this situation?
- Why do you think it happens?
- What could Tawnya do to improve her situation?
- Read the story again and underline all the areas where Tawnya could be doing a better job to facilitate learning for Maria.
- For each item you underlined, develop specific suggestions for Tawnya to put adult learning principles into action. Write your suggestions on sticky notes, and post them on the Suggestion Box.

Hint: Make your suggestions specific. For example: "Ask Maria to join her in a quiet space where they can sit and talk for a few minutes" versus "Make the learning environment safe" (which is not specific).

➤ As a group, we'll review and discuss the suggestions.



➤ With your same partner, describe a situation when you were counseling an adopter, and you became stuck or reactive like Tawnya. Use the following questions (and your new understanding of adult learning) to analyze your situation and how you can handle similar situations differently in the future:

1. In hindsight, what do you think was happening in your situation?
2. Why do you think it happened?
3. What adult learning concepts can you use so that future similar situations are more successful? How? (be specific)



What are the most interesting insights you've gained from these learning tasks?

Task 4: Engaging Adopters with Open Questions

In this task, we'll learn about open questions, a conversational technique that facilitates engagement. We'll then practice creating open questions for some of the topics that typically arise during adoption counseling.

What are Open Questions?¹



An open question is **a question without a set, "correct" answer**. In addition:

- An open question asks a person to draw upon her/his own life experiences and creativity.
- An open question invites dialogue.
- An open question engages people by requiring reflection and critical thinking.
- When counselors ask open questions, they are demonstrating respect for the adopters.

Examples of open questions, and phrases that can introduce open questions, include:

- "How did you arrive at that decision?"
- "What does this remind you of?"
- "What does that mean to you?"
- "What do you like about ...?"
- "Tell me about"

Unlike open questions, **a closed question has an expected answer**.

- The listener may assume – often accurately – that there is one correct answer to the question.
- A closed question is defined by the questioner's assumptions. For example, "What kind of fence do you have for your yard?" assumes that the adopter has a fence – and has a yard. An apartment dweller answering this question immediately feels they are at a disadvantage, even if they live across the street from a dog park and go for a 5-mile run every morning.
- Closed questions can make an adopter feel as if they are taking a test. The adopter may focus more on responding with the "right" answers than seriously reflecting on the real issue, such as their plans for exercising their dog.

➤ What questions do you have about open questions?



¹ This material is adapted from *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*. Global Learning Partners www.globalearning.com.

Designing Open Questions to Use in Adoption Situations

➤ The following are examples of closed questions from typical adoption interactions. With a partner, make them into open questions. We'll hear examples of each.

- "Have you ever had a cat before?"
- "Do you own your own home?"
- "How many hours of the day are you away from home?"
- "Do you have a fenced yard?"
- "Do you have any questions?"

➤ With your same partner, take turns asking each other these now open questions and answering them honestly (as if you are the adopter). After three minutes, switch.

- What was it like to answer open questions? To ask open questions?

➤ What are some advantages to using open questions in adoption counseling? What are the drawbacks?



Review your adoption paperwork/process and identify a couple of questions that – if changed to open questions – could improve your adoption counseling.

Task 5: Transitioning to Learning-Centered Adoptions

In this task, we'll identify aspects of your current adoption process that are working well to promote adult learning. From these strengths, we'll use adult-learning principles to find ways to enhance learning throughout the adoption process.

Identifying the Strengths of Your Adoption Process

➤ Picture the adoption process from the time a potential adopter walks through the door to the follow-up call with the adopter (if you do this). What aspects of the experience already promote adult learning? We'll compile a list of your ideas as a group.

Be sure to consider the following areas:

- How your adoption area is set up
- How you greet and orient visitors interested in adopting
- Counseling that you provide
- Forms that you use
- Materials that you make available to adopters
- Follow-up with adopters
- Evaluation of the adoption experience

As a reminder, here are the criteria for adult learning:

- **Respect**
- **Relevance**
- **Immediacy**
- **Safety**
- **Engagement**

And don't forget about the principle of **20/40/80% retention** - we retain:

- 20% of what we hear
- 40% of what we hear and see
- 80% of what we hear, see, and do

Brainstorming: What Will Make Your Process Even Better?

➤ When assigned one of your adoption program's strengths, use the worksheet on the next page to identify the following information:

- The strength you've been assigned
- Ways that you can add to or change this strength to enhance learning
- Actions and resources needed to make these enhancements happen

The *Report on Adoption Forum II* has many suggestions for improving the adoption experience. What ideas would you like to introduce at your agency?

➤ As a group we'll talk about these enhancements and set an action plan in motion.

Worksheet: Building on Success

Already Doing	Can Improve By	Actions and Resources to Achieve
<p>Greeting people as soon as they walk in</p>	<p>Staff/volunteers come out from desk and introduce themselves and ask how they can help the visitor.</p> <p>Staff/volunteers wear name tags and offer business cards with their name and phone extension.</p>	<p>Staff/volunteer buy-in, & training</p> <p>Staff/volunteer buy-in</p> <p>Name tags (What kind? Cost? TBD)</p> <p>Distribute business cards, & ask staff/vols to write their names and extensions on them - legibly!</p>



What is one small step you will *personally* take right away that will begin to improve the learning for adopters?