

Your Pet and Deployment



Your pet may be like a member of your family. When you're at home, taking care of your pet's needs is probably part of your daily routine. When faced with a deployment, you may be concerned about your pet receiving the same quality care and attention it gets from you. Making the best possible arrangement for your pet's foster care requires a little advance planning. The tips and resources below will help you get started.

CHOOSING A CAREGIVER FOR YOUR PET:

If you're lucky enough to have a family member or roommate who is willing to care for your pet at home, your search for a caregiver may be over. Your animal will probably have an easier time adjusting to your absence if its surroundings and routine remain more or less the same.

More likely, though, you'll be looking for someone to take your pet into his or her home while you're away. You'll naturally think about the animal lovers among your friends and family, but be sure to consider your pet's temperament as you do so. Smaller animals may need little more than basic care and feeding and can often be left alone all day. A lively puppy might thrive in the care of an active family. An older or more sedentary animal may be a good companion for a retired person who lives alone.

There are also volunteer groups devoted to providing pet foster care for deploying troops. A simple search online will help you identify programs in your area. Ask other military families about organizations or volunteer groups they may have used in the past. You can also look up pet care in the [National Resource Directory](#).

MAKING A PET CARE AGREEMENT:

Whether you're leaving for a few weeks of training or for an extended tour of duty, it's important to have a written agreement with your pet's caregiver. The two of you can write your own agreement or find a form agreement and modify it to fit your needs. You can see one kind of pet-care agreement at the Humane Society (search for "Foster Care Agreement").

Your pet-care agreement should include important points such as:

- **Financial arrangements for food and medical care.** Your caregiver will need money for food, toys, grooming and other routine needs. Be sure to include a plan for reimbursement of emergency medical care.
- Contact information for your pet's veterinarian.
- How to reach you in case of emergency.

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- **Contingency plan for your pet if the caregiver can no longer provide care.** It's important to arrange for a backup caregiver. Talk with friends or family members who might be willing to care for your pet. Describe the care involved, and select the person most able and willing to take on this responsibility.
- **What will be done with your pet if you are unable to reclaim it.** You'll want to make sure your pet is provided for if you become injured or incapacitated. Most states do not allow a person to leave money to pets, but it may be possible to establish an "honorary trust" through which a caretaker is selected who will be responsible for caring for the pet with the trust. A lawyer can provide advice about securing care for a pet when its owner can no longer provide it.
- **Other details about your pet.** Be specific. Include food preferences, medications, where your pet likes to sleep, unusual habits, fears and any other important details.

LEGAL ISSUES:

Most states hold owners responsible for any harm their pet causes. Owners can be liable for damages if their pets injure people, property or other animals.

The following steps can help limit your liability:

- **Train your pet.** If your pet will come into contact with other animals or people at any time, it's your responsibility to make sure it's under control. You can sign up for training classes or read how-to books on training in any library. It's also a good idea to introduce your dog to other animals and people so it won't become fearful and aggressive toward strangers.
- **Make sure your pet's vaccinations are current.** Rabies vaccinations are required by law. If your pet bites someone, authorities will look at the situation much more seriously if its vaccinations are not current.
- **Spay or neuter your pet.** Unless your pet is used for breeding, it's important that you have it spayed or neutered, particularly if you own a dog. According to the Humane Society of the United States, dogs that aren't sterilized are three times more likely to bite than sterilized ones. If you do plan to breed, make sure to do some research first. Several states have breeding laws in place that may impact your decision.
- **Talk to your insurance agent about coverage for injuries caused by pets.** Many homeowners' and renters' policies cover such injuries. If not, you may be able to buy additional coverage for this purpose.