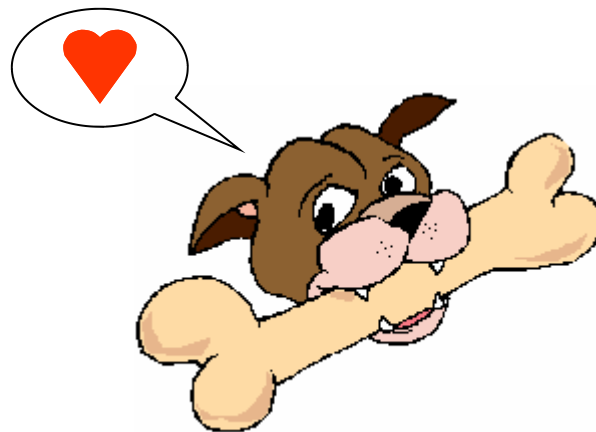


Handbook for Pit Bull Adopters



BAD PRESS

**Breed Anti-Defamation, Protection,
and Rescue Society, Inc.**

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New Owner's Checklist

Before bringing your Pit Bull home for the first time,
you should have the following...

- Veterinarian appointment** for vaccinations and a pre-surgical exam (to schedule a spay/neuter operation if your pet is not yet altered)
- Fenced yard or electric containment system** to provide a safe and private area to exercise your pet
- Dog crate and pad/bed***
- Collar***
- Leash(es)***
- Food and water dishes**
- Dog Food**
- Toys***

*Please see "Pit Bull Essentials" on Page 5 for details and tips on choosing appropriate items for your new pet.

Introduction to the Pit Bull

There are various dogs which fall under the name "Pit Bull." The term is primarily used to refer to the **American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT)**, **American Staffordshire Terrier (AmStaff)**, and cross-breeds or mixes thereof. The AKC recognizes only the AmStaff, while the UKC recognizes only the APBT; a purebred dog may be registered as both, but only if it is registered with the AKC first, then the UKC. Many people consider the APBT and the AmStaff one and the same, while others apply the term Pit Bull to taller varieties and AmStaff to shorter dogs more closely resembling their English cousin, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. To some, the APBT is a working dog, while the AmStaff is a show dog.

While the pit bull does have bulldog and terrier blood in its veins, it is not a true "bull-and-terrier" cross like the shorter, Roman-nosed Bull Terrier. Most breed experts agree that the pit bull's origins lie with the ancient fighting and hunting mastiffs of Asia, Greece and the Roman Empire. It was from these dogs that farmers of the British Isles derived the old-style bulldog (a taller, hardier dog than the squat, pug-nosed English Bulldog of today). The strength of these working dogs was admirable, but over time, stockmen desired a companion that could exhibit the courage and might of bulldogs combined with the gameness and agility of terriers. Thus, they developed a powerfully muscular, versatile working dog which was nevertheless a loyal and friendly family pet. The resulting animal was equally at home holding cattle and hogs for slaughter, driving livestock, hunting, and guarding the family homestead. When the New World was discovered, colonists brought the dogs to America, and they were frequently seen accompanying pioneers on the western frontier. The British bred their dogs a bit shorter, developing them into the Staffordshire Bull Terrier; true to the pioneer spirit, the Americans tended to prefer their dogs larger and more robust, resulting in the APBT and AmStaff we know today.

In the hardworking field of agriculture, there was much competition: farmers were eager to see how their best bulls and hogs compared to those of their neighbors, or who had the best-trained sheepdog. It naturally followed that contests were developed to prove who had the strongest and most fearless bulldog. Dogs were pitted against bulls and even bears in bloody competitions on which bets were placed. As time marched on and society became more concerned about animal cruelty, bull- and bear-baiting were outlawed, forcing fans of these "sports" to go underground. Since bulls and bears are large creatures and hard to conceal, gamblers began to pit dogs against each other, and the bloody "sport" of dogfighting began.

Although the pit bull's massive musculature does give him an imposing presence, and his strength can cause great injury, he was not originally bred for viciousness toward humans. In the course of a dogfight, a handler must be able to enter the pit and separate the dogs without fear of harm to himself; therefore, dogs bred and trained in the old style were never human-aggressive. However, as the pit bull gained notoriety in the pits, he became desirable to thugs and gangsters who sought a "tough" dog to enhance an intimidating image. Those seeking a dog that lived up to such an image often abused the animals or trained them to attack, thereby teaching them to act against their nature and thus become unpredictable. Sadly, these practices have resulted in highly-publicized accidents which have severely damaged the pit bull's reputation. It is the hope of pit bull lovers everywhere that, through responsible ownership and positive press, this "bad rap" can one day be overcome.



Some differences you need to know...

Part I

How is owning a Pit Bull different from owning another breed?

A child in a prizefighter's body...

The pit bull is a strong, powerful dog who often doesn't know his own strength. This must be taken into consideration in all aspects of ownership. Leashes, toys, crates and other supplies must be extra-tough in order to withstand your pet's rough treatment. Playtime must be supervised, especially if children and other dogs are involved. Also, care must be taken in any situation which could stress your dog and cause him to bite—a nip from a pit bull can cause far more damage than a full bite from another dog the same size. Just picture a football linebacker with a "Terrible Two's" brain, and you'll be well on your way to understanding what you're up against.

It's an image thing...

Although he was once considered the "All-American Dog," the pit bull now suffers from a terrible reputation. As a pit bull owner, you will most likely face a bit of criticism and negative reactions from those who have had nothing but bad experiences, or none at all, with pit bulls. You can arm yourself by reading up on the breed and by being a responsible owner. Educating yourself and raising your pet to be a good ambassador for the breed can help combat the misunderstandings you'll face. Don't give your pit bull a vicious-sounding name like "Killer" or "Fang," and be sure he gets plenty of training and socialization so that he will behave admirably in the presence of strangers.

The personality factor...

The pit bull is a family-oriented dog who thrives on love and attention. He should never be kept chained outside with little human contact, or shut in a room by himself for most of his life—many of the pit bulls involved in attacks were made defensive and neurotic by such treatment. The pit bull also enjoys physical activity; as an owner of this active breed, you should be prepared to give your pet plenty of exercise. Your pit bull will be fine if crated while you're at work, as long as he gets to spend some "quality time" with his favorite person when you come home. One final—but very important—point to consider is the pit bull's potential for conflicts with other animals. Due to his terrier blood, the pit bull has a strong prey drive and may chase smaller animals or running children. He may also be aggressive toward other dogs. While some pit bulls play well with other dogs and even act friendly toward small pets, constant supervision is essential, no matter how well you know your dog.

Some differences you need to know...

Part II

How is owning an Adopted or Rescued Pit Bull different from owning one purchased from a breeder?

When a puppy is purchased from a breeder, it is mostly a “clean slate.” With the exception of a few inborn personality traits, its behavior is free to be molded and shaped by you, the owner. When you obtain a dog from a shelter or rescue group, however, its history is (in most cases) unknown. The animal may have been exposed to abuse or violence, or may be nervous around people of a certain age, sex, or race due to an unpleasant experience. While the shelter or rescue staff has done its best to assess each dog’s temperament before offering it for adoption, there are numerous precautions that should be taken by anyone who adopts a rescued dog, regardless of breed. Due to the physical power of the pit bull, these precautions become even more important when you open your heart and home to one of these wonderful but misunderstood dogs.

- ♥ **Bring all family members to the shelter to meet your prospective new pet** before you finalize the adoption. This allows the dog to get to know everyone it will share a home with, and provides an opportunity to reveal any potential conflicts.
- ♥ **Your new pet will need time to get used to his new family and home.** Be sure he has a place to retreat to when he feels overwhelmed, such as a crate in a quiet area. Don’t overstimulate the dog with rough play or noisy commotion; do, however, speak to him in soft, friendly tones and pet him gently so he becomes accustomed to your voice and touch. Give him space if he shows signs of stress, such as pulling away, tucking his tail, or pulling back his lips.
- ♥ **Always leash or otherwise restrain your dog when visitors arrive**, and introduce them slowly. A popular trick is to give each visitor a favorite treat to offer the dog so that he will learn to associate visitors with a pleasant experience.
- ♥ **Socialization (exposing your dog to a variety of people, places, and situations) is very important**, but must be accomplished with care. Keep your dog on a short leash when entering a potentially crowded or unpredictable area, such as a pet store, and watch him constantly for any signs of stress or aggression. Be especially cautious when other dogs or children approach, as both can be unpredictable. If your dog becomes agitated, leave immediately and allow your pet some quiet time.
- ♥ **Ask your vet or favorite pet store to recommend a dog trainer** who uses reward-based—NOT punishment-based—methods, such as clicker training or food motivation. NEVER use physical punishment to discipline your dog; this could invoke fear-induced aggression or destroy your dog’s trust in you.
- ♥ **ALWAYS use care and caution**, no matter how trustworthy you think your dog is. Even the best dogs can bite if put in a frightening or frustrating situation.



Pit Bull Essentials

The following items are **MUST-HAVES** for the Pit Bull owner.



A PLACE TO CALL HOME: You should have a **sturdy dog crate**, equipped with a comfy pad or bed. The crate should be just large enough for your dog to stand, turn around, and lie down in comfortably, and should be placed in an often-used but not high-traffic spot in your home. A crate provides a place for your dog to go when he needs to feel secure, as well as somewhere to confine him at times when you need to keep him out of trouble (such as during a party or a repairman's visit). A crate also helps in housetraining. **NEVER keep a Pit Bull chained up outside**—he/she wants to be inside with you!



I.D., PLEASE: You will need a **strong but comfortable collar** (nylon or leather at least 1" wide is recommended) for both control and identification. **Affix a tag** listing your address and/or phone number. If your dog has a neck as wide as his/her head, or slips out of a collar easily, you may want to try a Martingale or greyhound collar — most major pet store chains and internet retailers sell these. Besides a collar with I.D. tags, you should also employ a **permanent** method of identification (a **tattoo and/or microchip**).



CONTROL: The Pit Bull is a powerful dog and will therefore need a leash that is up to the task. Choose a **short- to medium-length (no longer than 6') lead of thick leather, rope, or double-ply nylon**. **NO RETRACTABLE LEADS** — they do not provide adequate control for strong pullers. It's a good idea to buy more than one leash, so you always have one handy at home and in the car. If your dog pulls excessively, try a **headcollar** (Halti® or Gentle Leader®); read the instructions carefully or ask a professional trainer to instruct you in proper use. It is also advisable to purchase a **muzzle** for times when you must subject your dog to frightening or uncomfortable situations, such as nail-clipping or trips to the vet. Used properly, muzzles are not cruel, but merely a method of preventing stress-induced accidents.



YARD, SWEET YARD: You will need a (**preferably fenced**) **yard** for supervised playtime. The fence should be **at least 5' high** (Pit Bulls are good jumpers!), not only to prevent escapes, but also to keep people and animals from trespassing and harrasing your pet. An electric fence is a possible alternative, but only if your dog responds to this kind of restraint. As Pit Bulls have a high pain threshold, some do not respond to shock or vibration corrections; if you are considering an electric containment method, first arrange a tryout with a friend or neighbor who currently uses one. Keep your dog on a long lead during this test to be sure he doesn't get away if he is unaffected by the collar's correction! Regardless of which containment method(s) you use, **never leave your dog outside unattended**.



FUN, FUN FUN: As a powerful chewer and a boisterous playmate, your Pit Bull needs **tougher toys than the average dog**. Squeaky toys, soft rubber, and stuffed animals are usually no-nos. A great choice is a large Kong® or similar heavy-duty rubber toy (choose the black rubber, which is stronger than the red). Large, hard plastic balls are wonderful fun, too. A rope bone can provide plenty of shaking and toss-and-catch exercise, but **avoid playing tug-o'-war** with your Pit Bull—it encourages aggression. If you absolutely insist upon playing tug, first train your dog to reliably release its hold on command, and never let your dog win the game (command him/her to release the toy when playtime's over).

Frequently inspect toys for wear, and discard any that are cracked, frayed, or broken.



Recommended by Pit Bull Owners...



A **police lead** (left) is a sturdy, double-ended leash with several rings attached, allowing the user to adjust its length, secure the dog to a pole or tree, or even wrap around one's torso to free the hands. Nylon versions can sometimes be found in pet stores, but for the best quality, locate an online retailer by entering "leather police lead" in your preferred internet search engine.

A **headcollar** (right) is a device used to deter pulling and increase control when walking your dog. Based on the same principal as a horse halter, the headcollar helps direct the dog by controlling his head. Some varieties, such as the bottom-hitching model shown, even act as a temporary muzzle: if the dog lunges forward, the nose loop will tighten around his mouth.



Another option for the strong puller is a specially-designed **anti-pull** harness (left). There are several brands and designs available, but most operate by putting pressure under the dog's front legs when he pulls. Look for models with padding on the straps to avoid chafing your pup's "armpits"!

A **hard plastic ball** (right), made of polyethylene, can provide plenty of exercise for your pit bull. These balls are available in a variety of sizes, and stand up to a lot of rough treatment. Dogs love to push them around with their noses or chase them across the yard. Some varieties come with a plug that can be unscrewed, allowing you to fill the ball with water, sand, or pebbles to add crazy motion or sound. Always use toys specifically designed and sold for dogs to reduce the chance of breakage and subsequent injury to your pet.



Canine Aggression—Know the Facts

Contrary to popular belief, a dog that is aggressive toward other dogs is not necessarily aggressive toward humans. Terriers (which include Pit Bulls) in general are often feisty toward their own kind; however, they can be quite friendly toward people. The Pit Bull was not originally bred to be aggressive toward humans (see “Introduction to the Pit Bull” on Page 2); behavior of this type is usually the result of abuse or bad training. Still, it is wise for any dog owner, regardless of his/her breed of choice, to familiarize him/herself with the signs of canine aggression and the proper procedures for handling it.

Canine aggression may be elicited by different causes. A dog may display aggression due to **fear, frustration, or dominance/status-seeking**. To the casual observer, all aggression may look alike, but there are important differences. How the aggression is expressed will generally indicate the cause, and therefore the method for dealing with it. In evaluating the cause of a dog’s behavior, one must **pay significant attention to the posture and facial expressions of the animal, and respond to it appropriately** in body language that the dog will understand.

A dog expressing **fear aggression** may be snarling like a bear, but his **posture will be shifted backward**—anything from a subtle rearward shift of weight to a low crouch. Also, the **corners of his mouth will be pulled back**, exposing the teeth in a wide grimace. His ears may be pulled back against or behind his head, and his tail may be tucked between his legs. Although the dog may look menacing, and could bite if provoked, conflict can often be avoided by simply adjusting your posture so the dog feels less threatened. **Shift your own weight backward**, and look away. You may also cock your head to the side—in dog language, this shows you are relaxed and merely curious, and therefore not a threat.

A dog using aggression to express **dominance** will use a different set of postures, not always overt to the unenlightened observer (and therein lies the danger). A dog trying to exert dominance will **stand erect and stiff-legged**, perhaps even leaning forward, and will face you with a **direct stare**. Even if he wrinkles his nose and shows his teeth, the **corners of his mouth will be pushed forward**. He may emit a low growl, or even be completely silent (hence the myth of dogs “attacking without warning”). His **tail may be erect, even waving**, but don’t mistake this for the wide wag of a friendly dog! When faced by a dog with a dominant demeanor, **use extreme caution**, as he will be studying your most subtle movements. **Avert your eyes** from his gaze, and **shift your weight backward**. Back away slowly, but do not make any sudden movements.

A dog expressing **frustration or indecision** may waver between fearful and dominant behaviors. You can defuse a delicate situation by relaxing your posture (always backward), and avoiding direct eye contact.

Above all, **never run away** from an aggressive dog! This will incite the animal’s prey drive, provoking an attack. No matter how nervous you are, try to appear relaxed. Dogs speak in a complex language of facial movements and postures, and will respond to the most subtle cues from you. If you need to ease tensions, you must convey to the animal that he has no reason to defend himself.

For an informative, easily readable explanation of canine behavior and communication, read *The Other End of the Leash* by Patricia B. McConnell, Ph.D. (Ballantine Books, 2002). ♥

Recommended Reading

An educated owner is a responsible owner.

Unfortunately, there is a significant amount of misinformation about pit bulls perpetuated by the media, the internet, and word-of-mouth.

New owners should be especially wary of internet chat rooms and message boards, in which much incorrect and even dangerous information is provided by self-proclaimed "experts" who often defend their opinions in an arrogant or even hostile manner.

New owners—as well as experienced ones seeking to expand their knowledge—should seek their advice from sources reviewed and recommended by fellow owners, veterinarians, behaviorists, trainers, and other trusted sources. The following books, available through most book stores and internet retailers, provide objective and accurate information on the history, temperament, care and training of pit bulls.



Pit Bulls For Dummies[®]

by D. Caroline Coile

For Dummies[®], March 2001

ISBN 0764552910



The Working Pit Bull

by Diane Jessup

TFH Publications, March 1996

ISBN 0793801907



How to Train Your American Pit Bull Terrier

by Liz Palika

TFH Publications, January 2000

ISBN 0793836638



The Ultimate American Pit Bull Terrier

by Jacqueline O'Neil

Howell Book House, December 1995

ISBN 0876052480



A New Owner's Guide to American Pit Bull Terriers

by Todd Fenstermacher

TFH Publications, September 1996

ISBN 0793827620

This handbook was produced by BAD PRESS (Breed Anti-Defamation, Protection, and Rescue Society, Inc.), a non-profit public education and animal welfare organization which assists shelters, animal welfare organizations and rescue groups who support the adoption of "stigmatized" dog breeds such as pit bulls, rottweilers, and akitas. BAD PRESS urges you to give generously of your time, money, or talents to organizations who care about giving these dogs second chances; they are truly deserving of your much-needed assistance.

If you are considering (or are in the process of) adopting a pit bull, we thank you for welcoming a needy animal into your home and heart and wish you and your pet a long, loving life together!

For more information on stigmatized dog breeds, contact:



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