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Tips for Screening Potential Adopters

Checking Veterinary Records

Every applicant who mentions a current or recent (past 5 years) pet should provide a veterinary reference. Appropriate veterinary care includes spay/neuter, vaccinations, and an annual exam at the very least. Some folks may not vaccinate their older cats due to the risk of cancer—this is fine, as long as they are still getting an annual exam. Some pertinent questions:

1. Are the animals up to date on vaccinations and exams? If not, how long since the last visit?
2. Are the animals spayed/neutered?
3. Have all cats in the home been tested for FIV/FelV?
4. Are there any other animals listed under this person's account?
5. If the animal passed away from kidney failure, cancer, etc., does it look like the person did all they could for the animal?
6. Is there any record of the animal being declawed?

Keep in mind that some applicants don't mention that they may have used another vet, or that they went to an emergency vet in the last weeks/days of their pet's life. If there are holes in the vet records (i.e. no visits from 2000-2003), give the applicant the benefit of the doubt and ask them if the animal received care somewhere else during this time.

Checking Personal References

Personal references can be used with applicants who don't have vet records, or in addition to vet records if you wish. This is used to verify pet ownership history and get a feel for the applicant and how they would care for an animal. Here's an example of some questions to ask:

1. What is your relationship to the applicant?
2. Have you seen this person interact with animals?
3. Do you know if this person had pets in the past? If so, what happened to it/them?
4. Is this person responsible?
5. Would you recommend this person as a pet owner?

Landlord Check

If the applicant is a renter, be sure s/he is allowed to have pets and that it is clearly stated in the lease. After all, you don't want to adopt a cat to an applicant, only to have it rehomed a month later when the landlord finds out! Call the landlord and see if there is any fee or condition associated with having a pet, and to notify the landlord that his/her tenant is planning to adopt from you.

Meet and Greet

The references checked out and you are ready for the applicant to meet you and your cat in your home – great! Take the chance to ask more questions and observe. This is also a chance for the adopter to ask questions about your cat's health, behavior, and likes/dislikes. Above all else, go with your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, do not adopt your cat to that applicant. You will regret it later and may find that your instincts were right.

Home Visit

If all the references check out and the meet and greet with you and the cat goes well, it's time for a home visit. You can conduct the home visit when you go to drop off your cat, but always be prepared to turn around and bring the cat back if you don't like what you see. Pay attention to the safety of the home for a cat: are there broken windows, missing window screens, doors that don't close tightly, holes in walls, or unsafe electrical wires? If you are rehoming a kitten, have they "kitten-proofed" the home? Where will the cat be staying--does it get the run of the house? Where will its bed, food, water, and litterbox be?