



# The **2023** National Dog Survey



## Background

Welcome to the results of our 2023 National Dog Survey - the largest study of dogs and their owners in the UK.

It's the second time we've carried out the survey, and this year we welcomed responses from 244,478 people about 348,533 dogs.

This data gives us an extraordinary insight into the nation's dogs and their lives with us. While the Covid pandemic saw a sharp rise in numbers of puppies and dogs welcomed into our homes, the survey shows the cost-of-living crisis has left many owners struggling to provide for their beloved pets' needs. From food and routine veterinary care to the difficulty in finding affordable rental accommodation that accepts dogs, the UK's canine caregivers have told us about their struggles in heartbreaking detail.

Dogs Trust is committed to caring for the nation's dogs. Following the 2021 survey, we created new services to help the nation's dog owners - including cost-of-living support, reactive dog classes and a new, free-to-access Behavioural Support Line. The 2023 National Dog Survey will continue to help us to better understand the UK's estimated 13 million-strong dog population and the part dogs play in their owners' lives, shaping the future support we offer to canine companions and their families.





## Dog breeders still at the top for a new dog

The 2023 National Dog Survey began with a look at where we get our dogs. **UK-based breeders** are still the most popular sources for finding a new canine family member – 44.9% of respondents to our survey said that was where they'd sourced their dog.

Our Dogs Trust centres rehomed 9,707 pooches in 2022 for a new start in loving, committed homes. UK-based rehoming organisations such as Dogs Trust and other charities accounted for 17.8 % of places where new dogs were sourced, followed by friends and family (11.6 %). We'll continue to work hard to ensure we match even greater numbers of dogs with their new families in loving forever homes.

Dog owners turned to private rehoming arrangements in 7.6% of cases and private selling was the route taken by 7.4%. And some of our dogs come with a passport – 3.8% were rehomed from overseas. Just 0.2% of people say they found their dog – lucky them and lucky dog!

Most dogs in the survey were **born in the UK** (86.5%). The wide variety of other countries listed may indicate the popularity of foreign rescues. Ireland (3.4%) was the next most popular birthplace, with 2.4% of dogs coming from Romania and 1% from Spain. Other countries in the international canine line-up included Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, France, and Poland. And there were even some dogs that had done long-haul flights from the United States, Australia, South Africa, China, and Russia.



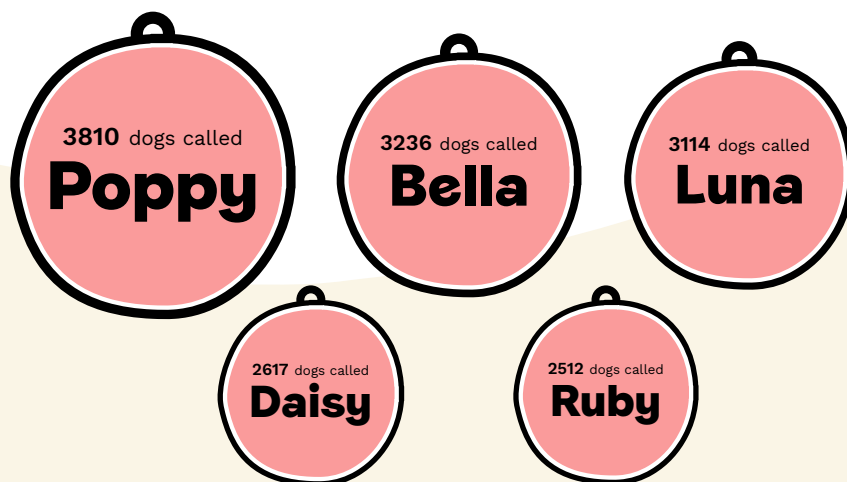
## Baby or dog? We're calling them the same names!

If you're calling for Poppy or Alfie in the park, you might get more than one good boy or girl coming to you for a treat! There were 3810 Poppies owned by our respondents and 2667 Alfies, making them the **most popular dog names in the UK**.

The second most popular female dog's name is Bella, followed by Luna and Daisy. For boys Charlie comes in second, followed by Milo and Teddy.

Our survey also showed that the days of Spot and Rover are gone. We're calling our dogs the same names as our children! Both top ten lists for female and male dogs consist of 'human' names. And indeed some – like Poppy, Willow, Daisy, Oscar, Charlie, and Alfie – also feature in the top 20 of the official statistics for UK baby names in 2022 (source: [www.ukbabynames.com](http://www.ukbabynames.com)).

### Most popular female dog names



### Most popular male dog names

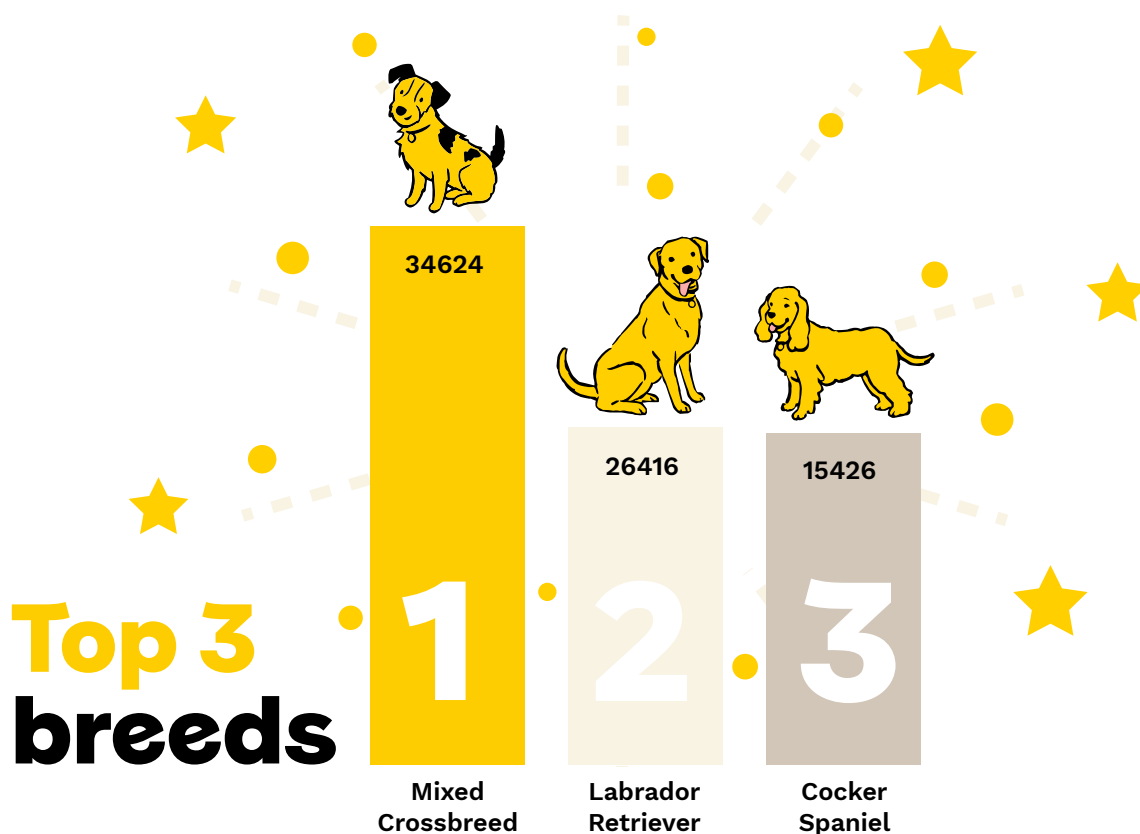


## Crossbreeds wag their way to the top.

The majority (53%) of dogs in Dogs Trust rescue centres looking for new homes are mixed breeds. So we're delighted to see that the **mixed crossbreed remains the most popular canine companion in the UK** - 10.9% of dogs reported in the survey were an unknown mix of breeds. And the ever-popular Labrador Retriever came in second, asking for a tasty snack from their owners' plates in more homes than any other specific breed of dog! 8.3% of dogs reported in the survey were this breed.

And the UK loves spaniels – it's official. Our top 25 list of most popular breeds features five different spaniel breeds or spaniel crossbreeds. Two spaniel breeds come in at third and fourth. The Cocker Spaniel, which makes up 4.8% of dogs enjoying life with UK families, and the Cocker's near relative, the Cockapoo (Cocker Spaniel crossed with a Poodle) - 4.7% of dogs mentioned in our survey.

Hot on its heels/paws comes the Border Collie (3.1%), followed by Jack Russell Terriers (2.5%) and English Springer Spaniels (2.3%) – meaning three spaniel breeds are present in the top ten. Then come German Shepherds (1.9%), Staffordshire Bull Terriers (1.9%), Golden Retrievers (1.8%) and the second most popular terrier – the Border Terrier (1.7%). Greyhounds (1.3%) come next followed by the French Bulldog (1.2%) and Shih Tzu (1.2%) and then... two more spaniels. The Cavapoo (Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and Poodle cross) is enjoying life in 1.2% of homes and the Springer and Cocker Spaniel-crossed Sprocker is taking everyone on walks in 1% of homes.



## Favourite dogs across the (human) age groups

Which breeds are most popular amongst older people, and which are being chosen by younger age groups?

The Dogs Trust 2023 National Dog Survey looked at the age of owners of specific breeds, enabling us to see where trends are emerging.

We found **the same four breeds and crossbreeds made up the top four across every age group** – Labradors, Cockapoos, Cocker Spaniels and Border Collies. Designer poodle crossbreeds like Cockapoos, Labradoodles and Cavapoos were firm favourites with young owners. And there's a new and exclusive entry in the top ten list of breeds owned by Millennials (25 – 34-year-olds) – the **Smooth Haired Miniature Dachshund**. They don't feature in the top ten for any other age group of owners. The French Bulldog was also a hit with this age group – although, elsewhere in our survey, we can see the higher number of Frenchies that are now aged three means their popularity peaked in around 2020.

Border Terriers have fallen out of favour with our survey respondents under the age of 35, Shih Tzus are mostly snuggling on over 65-year-old laps, and Greyhounds are mainly lounging on the sofas of those over 75-year-olds who took our survey.

The rise and fall in the popularity of Staffies is also clearly charted in the results. They're in the top 10 for people between the ages of 25 and 54, but not for those younger or older. And the Cavapoo appears exclusively in the top ten list for 18 – 24-year-olds.

If you have **children under 15 in your household**, you're more likely to choose a designer poodle crossbreed such as the Cavapoo, Cockapoo, Labradoodle or Goldendoodle. Other top choices for households with children under 15 were the lively German Shorthaired Pointer and the Hungarian Vizsla.

## Top 4 breeds across every age group



1

Labradors



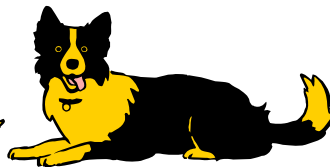
2

Cockapoos



3

Cocker  
Spaniels



4

Border  
Collies



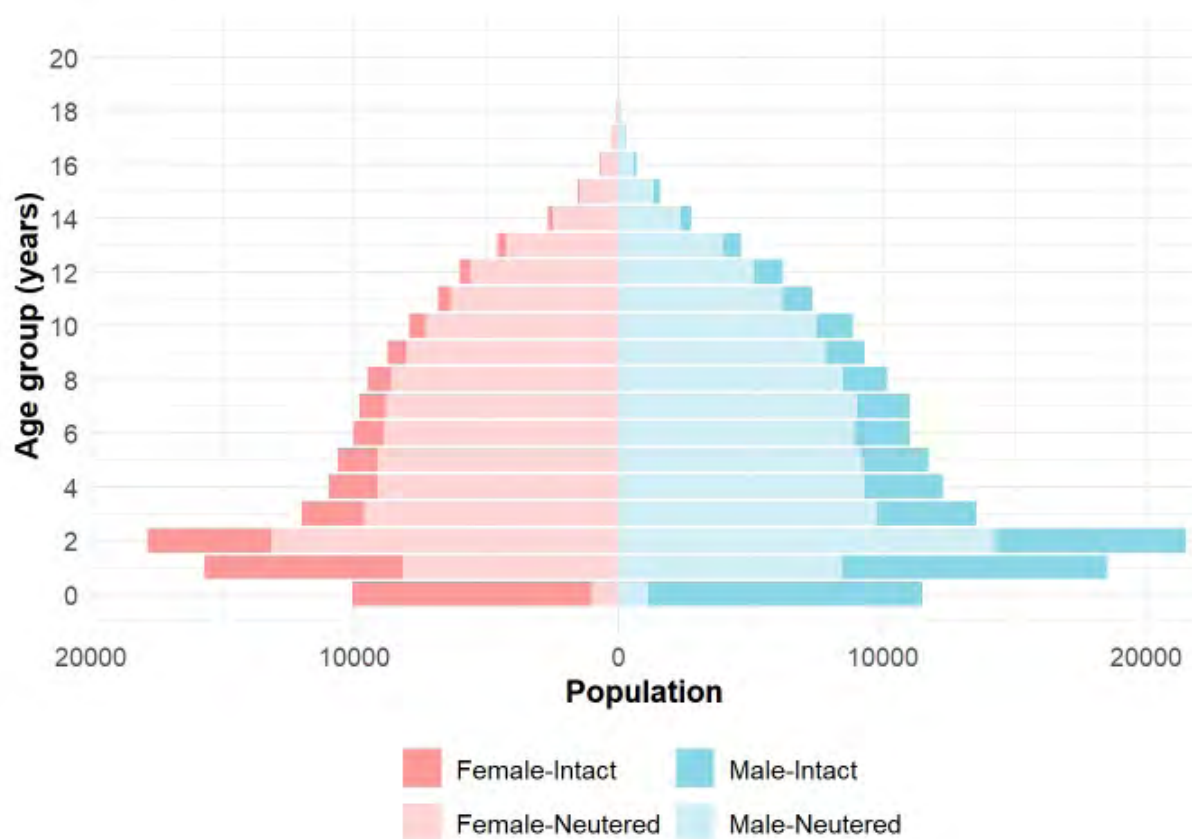


## Lockdown dogs spike in survey

The 2023 National Dog Survey graphically illustrates the much-reported ‘**pandemic puppy boom**’. With people restricted to staying at home, the moment to spend time with a new canine family member for many seemed perfect. While Dogs Trust and other rescue centres were closed to visitors and limited in the amount of dogs they could rehome during the Covid lockdowns between 2020 and 2021, numbers of dogs acquired from sellers, breeders, and family and friends were far greater than in the previous ten years.

Our survey clearly showed the ‘**Covid bulge**’ generations of dogs – 34,202 one-year-old dogs and 39,324 two-year-olds, at the time of survey. Compare that to 23,247 dogs aged four and 22,382 five-year-olds – the dogs born in the years just before Covid.

There were also only 21,590 dogs under the age of one, showing the drop in new puppy ownership since lockdown restrictions were eased. This reduction in numbers of young dogs could also be linked to the rise in the cost of living, with financial constraints meaning people have had to put plans to get a new dog on hold.



### “A dog is for life not just for lockdown”

Dogs Trust is committed to doing all we can to support owners in keeping their dogs through difficult times rather than handing them over for rehoming. There was concern amongst our survey respondents that some people could have impulse-bought a dog during lockdown and may not have planned for the longer term.

*“I’m very cross about the push during lockdown by the media to “get a dog”. A dog is for life not just for lockdown.”*

*"I have concern about the amount of dogs being given up to rescue or dumped due to cost-of-living crisis and because people are no longer working from home after Covid."*

*"I worry about lockdown puppies being abandoned or given up for adoption because post lockdown life isn't tenable for their families."*

*"I am concerned about the number of dogs brought in lockdown now heading for rescue centres unsocialised or trained."*

Our rescue centres have seen many 'lockdown' dogs handed over for rehoming that have sadly not been adequately trained or socialised. We are committed to putting in place supportive, professional programmes of behavioural training, including our **Behaviour Support Line**, to help these dogs start new lives. More than 580 survey respondents said they were also **worried about the lack of canine socialisation** during pandemic lockdowns.

*"Lack of socialisation or training during Covid has led to a generation of pups with behavioural issues."*

*"I am concerned about lockdown puppies that aren't well trained or socialised that make life harder for other pet owners."*

*"Lockdown dogs which haven't been socialised or trained properly - easy to spot them on walks."*

*"As a professional dog walker, aggressive/reactive dogs seem more common than ever and many issues can be stopped with basic obedience training if owners knew how."*

*"As a dog trainer, what matters most to me is the lack of proper socialisation and training in dogs bought during and since the pandemic. I'm seeing more cases of reactive/aggressive behaviour in dogs, as people are unwilling to pay for proper training sessions when they are pups."*

*"As a veterinary professional I would be concerned about the growing number of behavioural issues since the puppy boom during Covid. Inappropriate breeds selected, also no education, more picking breeds as to what looks cool etc."*

*"I am a vet so the issues I am most concerned about are the rise in popularity of brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds and the rise in behaviour issues due to the number of people who purchased 'lockdown puppies' while lacking knowledge/opportunities for socialisation/training."*

*"Misinformation/lack of appropriate training and socialisation giving dogs ability to regulate their anxiety and cope with daily life. As a vet nurse I saw a massive shift in patient behaviour of dogs born/purchased during Covid."*

Some dog owners described how **unsocialised dogs were a cause for concern on walks**.

*"There are so many badly socialised dogs from the Covid lockdown period that walking my dog is much more stressful."*

*"There seems to be an increasing number of dogs about that are poorly trained and/or socialised and/or exercised, particularly larger breeds. A few years ago (pre-pandemic) I was happy to walk my dog off-lead in appropriate areas. I still do so but now am much more conscious of dogs which may pose a threat to mine."*

*"Too many lockdown dogs with owners who don't know how to look after or socialise them. Makes it hard to find places to walk our dogs without encountering antisocial dogs."*



*"I personally think that the lack of social interaction with other dogs is a big problem. So many dogs I meet whilst out walking have not been socialised and are very timid or nervous or aggressive and I know a lot of this has been down to Covid."*

Several owners sadly confirmed **problem behaviours** seen in their own dogs since lockdown. We'll be taking note of their stories and working on future support we can offer owners to help them develop their dogs' social and behavioural skills so they don't have to hand them over for rehoming.

*"My dog can be very aggressive to other dogs. The behaviourist says this is mainly due to fear. He wasn't like this before lockdown. His behaviour means my friends can't have him as they have dogs. Although not intentional, in separating him from another dog he has bitten me a couple of times instead of the other dog. It distresses me as on our own he is lovely, but it is expensive to have to pay someone to have him."*

*"Post Covid lockdown my dog is socially anxious and doesn't like home visitors anymore."*

*"My dog has huge behavioural issues, in particular separation anxiety, that has been extremely exacerbated by the pandemic. As a result, I now have to work from home and this reduces my ability to find new work but also has greatly impacted on my ability to have a social life as I live alone with my dog."*

*"He was a Covid dog so didn't get the chance to socialise with other dogs. Sometimes he can be a bit hyper through other dogs although his temperament with humans is fantastic."*

*"I'm concerned about unsocialised dogs due to Covid. We have one and although would never willingly give her up, she is stress on a stick every day."*

*"Unfortunately my dog was purchased during the pandemic so wasn't socialised or trained properly. Now we're suffering the consequences."*

*"Undoubtedly, there are significant issues resulting from the impact of lockdown on my pet. I had read all the books and manuals and was very prepared to socialise and work hard on puppy training. Our dog arrived just as we went into 2nd lockdown. We had just moved to a new house and the children were being homeschooled. All my plans to socialise our dog were gone. He is now an anxious scared dog as for the first nine months of his life he didn't see any other humans or dogs. He is now fiercely protective of my two children to the point we have to muzzle him if any other child visits. We don't take him to public places. I've tried two dog trainers but no success. We can't ever risk having him around with children, so this has a massive impact on our lives every day. We wouldn't be without him as he undoubtedly supported our children emotionally and does every day. But it makes me sad for the dog he is, is because of lockdown. Our first and only dog, the impact of lockdown will be felt for the whole of his lives and my children's too. They don't have the puppy they imagined who would be playfully running round in the garden playing ball with their friends. Instead he is locked inside the house barking. Or held with a muzzle on or in his crate for his own, as well as everyone's safety."*

On the age range chart we were delighted to see some real **old timers** snoring in their beds around the homes of our respondents - 20 female and 13 male dogs had celebrated their 20th birthday!

## New breeds on the block

Looking at the figures for the age of the dogs owned by our respondents gives us more data on the breeds that are rising and falling in popularity.



If you've seen more wieners on your walks, then you're not alone – the post-pandemic popularity of the **Miniature Smooth Haired Dachshund** is the stand-out. Mini dachshies made up 0.8% of all dogs acquired in the years before the pandemic (2017-2019). In the years 2020-2023, dachshunds accounted for 1.4% of dogs acquired – a whopping 85% rise in relative popularity. Dachshund-loving households are visibly on the rise – they're now 1% of all dog breeds reported and have taken their place in the survey's top 20 most popular. Cavapoos, Cocker Spaniels, Whippets and Greyhounds are also on the up. And there's no stopping the Labrador – currently the UK's most popular dog. Their numbers continue to increase.

Numbers of German Shepherds, German Pointers and Labradoodles remain steady. The biggest fall in popularity for dogs named in the survey is for the Shih Tzu and the Pug, but Yorkies, Miniature Schnauzers, Boxers, Beagles, and Border Terriers and chihuahuas are also winning less fans.

## First time owners love their 'poos and doodles!

Poodle-based crossbreeds were more popular with first-time dog owners than with those who were more experienced. Four **poodle-based crossbreeds** are the most popular for first time dog owners – the Cavapoo (Cavalier King Charles Spaniel crossed with a Poodle), Cockapoo (Cocker Spaniel crossed with a Poodle), the Goldendoodle (Golden Retriever crossed with a Poodle), and then the Labradoodle (Labrador Retriever crossed with a Poodle).

In fourth place comes a dog that's growing in popularity across several of our survey result charts – the Miniature Smooth Haired Dachshund. Trotting along behind her come the Miniature Schnauzer, Beagle, and another crossbreed, the Sprocker Spaniel. And then comes the Poodle in his own right, in miniature breed form.

Jack Russells and German Shepherds aren't choices for first-time owners, according to our survey. Staffies, Collies, Cavaliers and Greyhounds and dogs from unknown mixes of breeds are also more likely to be chosen by experienced dog-owners.

Of course at Dogs Trust **we champion the rescue**, whatever the breed! Our centres always have a mixture of crossbreeds and pure breed dogs, all waiting to take their places as much-loved family members.



## Working from home is a hit.

Someone's got to pay for all those treats and toys!

And 7.1% of dogs go with their owners to work while they earn the money. Of all the rest, **staying at home** is by far and away the most popular daily routine (84.7%). Of these, 38.7% get to snooze in a bed under the dining table desk while their owners work from home, a figure that has no doubt been boosted by the rise in post-Covid home working. And almost as many stay home with a member of the family who doesn't work – 37.1%.

Friends, family, and neighbours help out for 12.5% of dogs, and 9.8% are left at home but have someone popping in at lunchtime for a quick walk and a treat. For 7.2% of dogs, staying at home while their owners go out to work is the order of the day. **Dogs Trust says leaving dogs for longer than four hours should be avoided**, although the amount of time a dog is left will depend on the individual pooch. It's also important to increase time apart from your dog gradually.

A total of 11.7% owners are paying for professional dog care – 7.4% of owners use dog walking services, for 3.4% it's doggy day care centres, 1.6% have an at-home dog sitter and 0.6% turn to home boarding services.

Nearly 10% of owners (8.9%) say they would like their dog to come to work but don't take them in. The main reason is that their **workplace doesn't allow dogs** (reported by 81% of owners) or is not suitable for a dog (according to 44.3% of owners). Others say their dog would simply not enjoy coming to work with them and is happier at home (17.7%) and 2.6% of dogs don't go to work as the owner says they can't travel with them.



7.1%

of dogs go to work  
with their owners



## Home-working - too much for a good thing for dogs?

While homeworking has been a bonus for many, our respondents also voiced concern that dogs are now suffering problems because the pandemic has meant they're not accustomed to being left home alone. Some mentioned separation anxiety.

*"Not personally, but I worry about people who bought dogs during Covid and now have to go to work, and the dog suffers anxiety and lack of exercise and company."*

*"We got our dog during lockdown, and he thinks it's totally normal for me to be there giving him attention all day. When I do have to go to the office, I worry about him all day as I know he's easily bored. Also, he was the first dog I had as a puppy and I didn't manage to train him very well, so he's ruined all of our downstairs floors."*

*"I worry about my own dog's welfare if I have to leave him home alone for any reason, as he gets very distressed after having someone home with him since Covid."*



If you identify signs that your dog may be suffering from separation anxiety, talk to your vet about a referral to a behaviourist. It's important to contact your vet first so they can check that there are no medical problems that may be influencing your dog's behaviour before helping you find a qualified behaviourist. As separation problems can develop for different reasons, treatment programmes need to be tailored to individual dogs

If you are concerned about your dog's behaviour or training, Dogs Trust operates a free **Behaviour Support Line**. Our team of dog behaviour specialists keep up-to-date with all the latest science and research in dog behaviour. We'll chat through any concerns you have over the phone and recommend a course of action. For more information visit - [dogstrust.org.uk/how-we-help/ownership/behaviour-support-line](https://dogstrust.org.uk/how-we-help/ownership/behaviour-support-line)

## No plans for puppy parenthood

Dogs Trust has for many years campaigned on the importance of neutering dogs to prevent unwanted litters of puppies. Our survey showed that for most, **breeding from their dogs wasn't on the cards**.

Through **Together Through Homelessness**, our Dogs Trust scheme which supports dog owners experiencing or at risk of homelessness across the UK, we offer free neutering – in addition to all preventative vet care, such as flea and worming, microchipping, and vaccinations.

Most dogs owned by people who responded to our survey were neutered. Overall, 77.4% of female dogs had had the snip and 69.8% of male dogs.

Out of the neutered dogs, numbers were very high for those that had never had a litter, presumably as they had had the operation while still young. 97.2% of female dogs and 98.3% of male dogs had never had pups when they were neutered.

Only 2.9% of pure breed owners said they had or would breed, compared to just 1.7% of crossbreed or unknown mix owners.

**Only  
2.9%**

of pure breed owners  
said they had or  
definitely would breed

Since older dogs were more likely to have been neutered, our survey showed their owners were less likely to be considering breeding from them. Whereas 8% of juvenile dogs under the age of two had owners who were still considering breeding them.



## The rising cost-of-living impacts dogs.

In the past year **Dogs Trust has had a record number of people enquiring about giving up their dogs** to us because they can no longer afford to look after them. Our survey data backs this up and shows that people are having to prioritise and make difficult and, in some cases, heartbreaking decisions about their dog's care needs.

Nearly a fifth of those who responded (19%) said they may have to **consider changing to cheaper pet food** in the coming year. About 1 in 7 said they would consider **skipping non-emergency vet care** (13.8%).

Not everyone uses doggy day care or health insurance, but for those that do, considering how to reduce those costs in the next year was on the agenda. 38.7% of owners who already used it said they may have to **reduce paid-for care during their working hours** in the next year to save money. Others said that paid-for dog walking (35.2%) might need to be scaled back, followed by purchase of toys and enrichment items such as puzzle feeders, retrieval objects or agility apparatus (34.9%).

Getting out the clippers at home might be more frequent for the 32.3% who had previously paid for groomers and were considering **cutting down on grooming costs** and training classes might also need to go, according to 31.3%. Kennels, home boarding and dog-sitting were next on the list. But only 6.1% of those who had it said they'd cut back on health insurance. And regular health prevention was still a priority with just 3.3% saying they might cut back flea and tick treatments, 3% on vaccines and 2.5% on worming.

The cost of getting a new dog was also on people's minds with nearly 10% (9.2%) who'd been considering it, saying they were **much less likely to get a new dog** in the next year due to the rising cost of living, and 4.6% saying they were slightly less likely to.

The majority of survey respondents rated veterinary bills as the dog-related cost pressure they were most worried about. This was followed by pet insurance, dog food and dog-minding costs.

Dogs Trust offers a number of ways to help people keep their dogs during times of financial trouble. These include **supporting owners with pet food banks and discounted behaviour training**, plus our free Behaviour Support Line. We'll be using the information laid out in this survey to further consider where we can help more in the future.



**1 in 7**

owners would consider  
skipping non-emergency  
vet care



**38.7%**

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paid-for care during  
their working hours, may  
reduce it in the next year  
to save money



## **“My dogs always come first.”**

Many respondents to the 2023 National Dog Survey wrote movingly about the choices they are having to make due to the rising cost of living, saying they themselves would **rather make sacrifices than cut costs related to their dog.**

*“My dog is my absolute world, top priority and best friend. I would rather go without so he doesn’t. I’m a huge animal lover, and I am concerned about how they will suffer due to the cost-of-living crisis.”*

*“So long as I can keep looking after my dog I will make sacrifices so she does not suffer as the cost-of-living crisis is becoming crippling.”*

*“It’s so sad that people are surrendering their dogs because of the cost of living. I would feed my dog before myself as she isn’t just a dog she’s my companion.”*

Dogs Trust is here for any dog owner who is struggling, and that is why we have a number of accessible services including our free **Behaviour Support Line.**

## **“I feel sorry for other people.”**

While the rising cost of living was not impacting them, many respondents said they **felt sympathy for those who were being affected.**

*“I think food and veterinary care is so important to dog welfare. I do feel sorry for people who do have to make the decision to have to compromise these due to the current cost of living crisis.”*

*“I am lucky as financially I’m stable, but due to the cost-of-living crisis it worries me that a lot of dogs will be abandoned due to people having to prioritise their outgoings.”*

*“I constantly see stray/dumped dogs on social media and that people are having to give up their pets due to the cost of living. It breaks my heart as I can’t bear the thought of being unable to care for my pets.”*

*“My dogs are part of the family. The cost-of-living crisis is having a serious impact on pet owners. I worry people cannot keep their pets. The dogs/pets are impacted by being given up. My concern is for the dogs/pets. Also people’s mental health.”*

## **“A perfect storm”**

Dogs Trust has seen at first hand that the **puppy boom during Covid restrictions** followed by a sudden return to work and the cost-of-living crisis has been a culmination of events resulting in potential welfare issues for dogs. This was mirrored by those who spoke in our survey.

*“I’m concerned that rescues seem to be seriously overloaded at the moment - I feel like the lockdown puppy craze plus the cost-of-living crisis has created a perfect storm, and rescue organisations/vets are struggling to keep pace.”*

*“The cost-of-living crisis is the obvious welfare issue because we’ve gone from one extreme of everyone buying dogs in the pandemic to now trying to get rid of them and that’s created a perfect storm of shelters being packed.”*

*“With so many owners having to give up their pets due to the cost-of-living crisis, finding ways to keep owners with their dogs is really important.”*

*“What matters most to me is ensuring owners and their dogs can stay together during the cost-of-living, or any other, crisis.”*

## **Veterinary-related costs**

Respondents were particularly worried about the **burden of paying for pet health insurance or unexpected veterinary bills** alongside increases in the cost of living. Many were worried that they may have to stop paying for pet health insurance and the risks that may pose to their dog’s welfare, an issue which is of great concern to Dogs Trust.

*“I love my dogs so much, but I am worried that if they need to be seen by a vet and need treatment that I may not be able to meet the cost of treatment and my dogs may suffer due to this. Before the cost-of-living crisis I did not worry about this at all because I knew I would be able to cover this.”*

*“I am having to reduce annual vet checks because we cannot afford them due to cost of living.”*

*“I have had to cancel her insurance policy so we’re living on a wing, a prayer and an emergency credit card. I do pay for a monthly health club which helps with booster, flea treatments, etc though. I’d go without myself before letting her feel the change in cost of living.”*

*“It’s not the dog’s fault that the cost-of-living increases have impacted on family life. I had to stop my pet insurance due to cost increases and since having done so my dog has developed health issues. I’m now having to pay for his treatment myself.”*

*“As a veterinary nurse the fallout of the cost-of-living crisis we are seeing in practice is heartbreaking. We’ve had so many sign overs, euthanasias and having to give a lower or less preferable standard of treatment or skipping diagnostics due to people unable to afford their pets care. I really worry for so many patients and owners.”*

## **Keeping the bowl full**

Many respondents were concerned about the **increasing costs of feeding their dog**. Some worried about what sacrifices they would have to make to feed their dogs, while others were concerned about the level of nutrition that their dog would get if they had to switch to a cheaper food.

*“Cost of living scares me as I have two huskies who require a lot of food. I’m struggling to find good food for them that’s cheap.”*

*“I am worried about the rising cost of living especially the increase in price of dogs medication from vets, health supplements, dog treats, toys, but mostly dog food.”*

*“I have changed dog food several times due to massive rise in costs and also lack of availability which made us short of food several times.”*



## Tough times for finding a rented roof over our heads

At a time when there's a shortage of rental housing, finding somewhere that will agree to take a dog presents an extra and, in some cases, heart-breaking challenge. At Dogs Trust we regularly receive desperate calls from owners who fear they are going to have to rehome their dog as they cannot find a place to live with that allows pets.

A quarter of people in our survey who had tried to move to private rented accommodation in the last five years had been **refused because they had a dog**. 11.7% of those in house share had the same experience, along with 5.4% of people in council housing.

Some emotional stories were shared with us by our survey respondents that illustrated how, despite the difficulties, **people refused to give up their dogs**.

*"I could not take my dog into a refuge with me, so living on the streets was my only option til rehoused."*

*"Struggled to find private renting that allowed dogs, so had to move back in with parents."  
"We have been refused council housing in places because we own a dog. And were told to either get rid of the dog or find somewhere else."*

For others, the **search for a property where they could live with their dog** took a long time.

*"Took 3 months to find current flat, dozens refused because of dogs."*

*"When looking for somewhere to rent, got refused 5+ times."*

*"Took seven months and the property we are in now is far from ideal."*

*"When looking for housing, three houses turned down because no pets allowed. Current renter upped rent £100 due to having dogs."*

And the **size of the dog** was reported to play a role in some of the refusals.

*"Trying to rent, whenever I said dog, it was OK until they asked his breed, when they found out he was a big dog it was a straight no."*

*"Was turned down for multiple rental properties due to the fact that I had a very large dog."*

*"Unable to move into a larger rented house as they would not allow a dog larger than a collie."*

For some, heartbreakingly, they had to be **separated from their beloved pets**, at least temporarily.

*"My dog lives with my ex-husband and our son whilst I live in bedsit (no dogs allowed)."*

*"Had to go in emergency accommodation after the death of my husband. I found someone to look after my dog until I could find a home."*

*"When we were trying to rent, I had to leave her behind with my dad :(""*



Through **Dogs Trust's Lets With Pets scheme**, we offer advice to tenants on how to find a pet- friendly property. We've also put together good practice guidelines to help letting agencies and landlords successfully rent their properties to pet owners.

In 2023 **Dogs Trust teamed up with Cats Protection** to urge the Government to introduce better protection for responsible renters with pets following an increase in the number of animals being handed over to rehoming charities.

Currently, there are no legal rights for renters with pets, and landlords can refuse to rent to tenants with pets. However, the Government has outlined plans to introduce better protection for tenants as part of its Renters (Reform) Bill. The bill has had its second reading in Parliament, and at the time of writing is now in the Bill Committee Stage, where MPs are considering the Bill and any amendments.

Dogs Trust submitted written evidence to the committee. Overall, Dogs Trust welcome the Renters (Reform) Bill's introduction of a new legal right for renters to request to keep a pet in their property, which the landlord cannot unreasonably refuse, as this will be instrumental in affording millions of new tenants the joys of pet ownership, plus reduce time spent in kennels for the thousands of dogs and other animals currently waiting for a home.



## Four legged friends of the future

It's a happy time thinking about and preparing for the arrival of a new doggy member of the household. Over half of those who answered our survey (51.3%) who didn't already have one, were **keen on getting a dog** when their situation allowed it. And 16.8% are looking for one right now.

But there were some hurdles in the way. Of those wanting to welcome a dog in the future, nearly a third (32.7%) had had a canine bereavement – they said they'd lost a dog in the past and were not yet ready to have another one. Not being home enough was an issue for another third (32.3%) and not having the time to give the dog the care it needs was a consideration for 16%. Not having enough space was a problem for another 12.5%, and 11.8% said they travelled too much to have a dog. Having young children and other pets not compatible with a dog was stated as a reason not to get one by 7.4% of survey respondents, and allergies in the household affected 2.1%.

But once the time was right, nearly four fifths (79.6%) said they would consider searching at a **UK-based charity or rehoming organisation** for their next canine companion. Of course, as the UK's largest dog welfare charity, Dogs Trust will continue to promote the special joys of adopting a rescue dog in need of a home.

Family and friends are the likely source for nearly a third of new dogs (32.1%). For those wanting specific breeds, a quarter (24.1%) will be looking on Kennel Club breeder webpages and 19.3% on breed group websites. Finding the right dog through community and word of mouth was a potential route for 24.1%, along with pet selling websites like Pets4Homes and UKPets (19.4%). And 15.5 % hoped to get their future dog through an overseas charity or rehoming organisation. Finally, general selling websites likes Gumtree and Preloved would be a source for 8.4%, and social media for 7.4%.

If you're thinking about welcoming a furry friend into your life, there are a number of questions to consider during this incredibly exciting time. Dogs Trust has several resources to help during this period, which include outlining the **benefits of adopting a dog** and how to responsibly and safely choose a puppy.



**51.3%**

of respondents who  
didn't already have  
a dog, were keen on  
getting one

## Pack your treats and toys - it's holiday time!

For the majority of people responding to our survey, taking their four-legged canine family member on a **UK staycation** was an enjoyable way to take a break.

Over two thirds (69.9%) had taken their dogs with them on holidays in the UK. Just 4.9% had enjoyed a break abroad with their dog as well as holidaying in the UK together, and a tiny 0.3% of well-travelled pooches had only ever vacationed abroad.

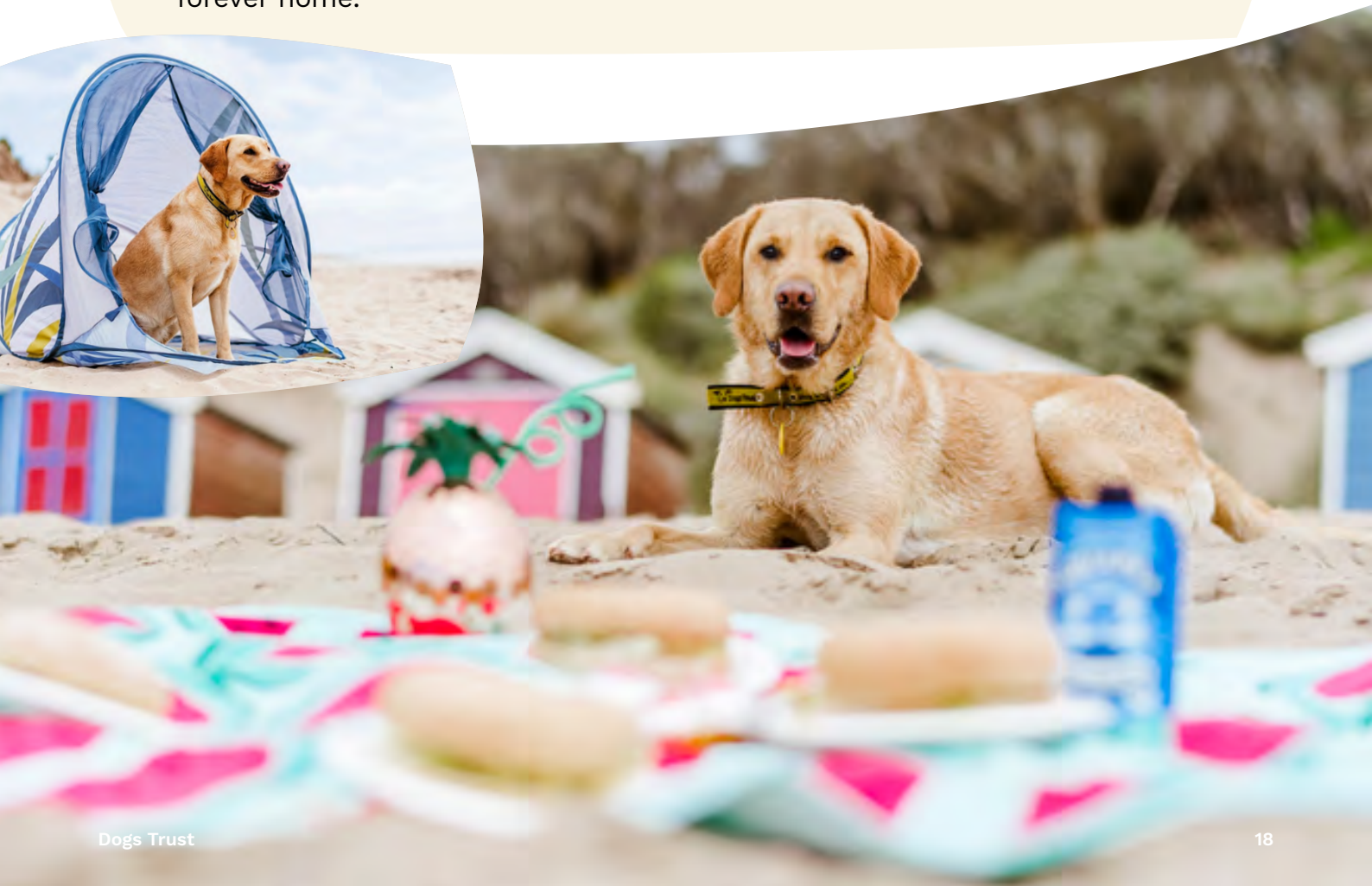
Nearly a quarter (24.9%) said they hadn't holidayed with their dog. But doggy holidays of the future were definitely on the cards. Almost three quarters (70.3%) said they'd like to holiday with their dog in the UK one day, and if they'd already done it in the past then over half (53.1%) said they'd definitely do it again. 22.1% are hoping to visit both UK and overseas destinations in the future. Just 0.2% would consider only holidaying abroad.

By far the **most popular accommodation** for a dog-friendly holiday was a rental property or holiday cottage with 86.4% saying it was their preferred destination. 44.6% were heading for the campsite, hotels were next at 21.5% and B and Bs were the destination for 16.2%.

If you're considering booking a dog-friendly holiday with your pooch, Dogs Trust **has lots of advice** on how to organise a safe and successful trip.

We have additionally teamed up with cottages.com and Hoseasons to create **Dogs Trust Holidays**.

In the 20 years we've been working together, these brilliant organisations have raised more than £1 million to help us find the dogs in our care their forever home.





## Training and behaviour - rewarding the good and dealing with the unwanted

The results of our 2021 National Dog Survey prompted us to expand our behaviour training services – particularly to support people struggling with the cost of training and complicated problems with reactive dogs.

We launched our new free **Behaviour Support Line**, which offers practical advice on common dog behaviour issues before they become difficult habits or escalate and become more serious, sometimes leading to the dog/owner bond breaking down and dogs being given up for rehoming.

In our 2023 National Dog Survey we dug deeper into the issue of how people are encouraging the wins and handling difficult behaviour in their dogs.



### Good boys and girls

The good news is that all dogs are regularly told they're good boys and girls! **Praise** was the standout most popular way of rewarding a dog doing something their owner liked – at 97.6%. Every dog loves a treat to eat and it's the second most popular form of reward used by over two thirds of owners (67.9%). Play comes in third with 57.4% reaching for the toys to let their dogs know they've done well.

Physical rewards for a dog doing something the owner likes that were listed by our survey respondents include **petting, cuddles, stroking, fuss, patting, belly rubs and scratches!**

## Dealing with the difficulties

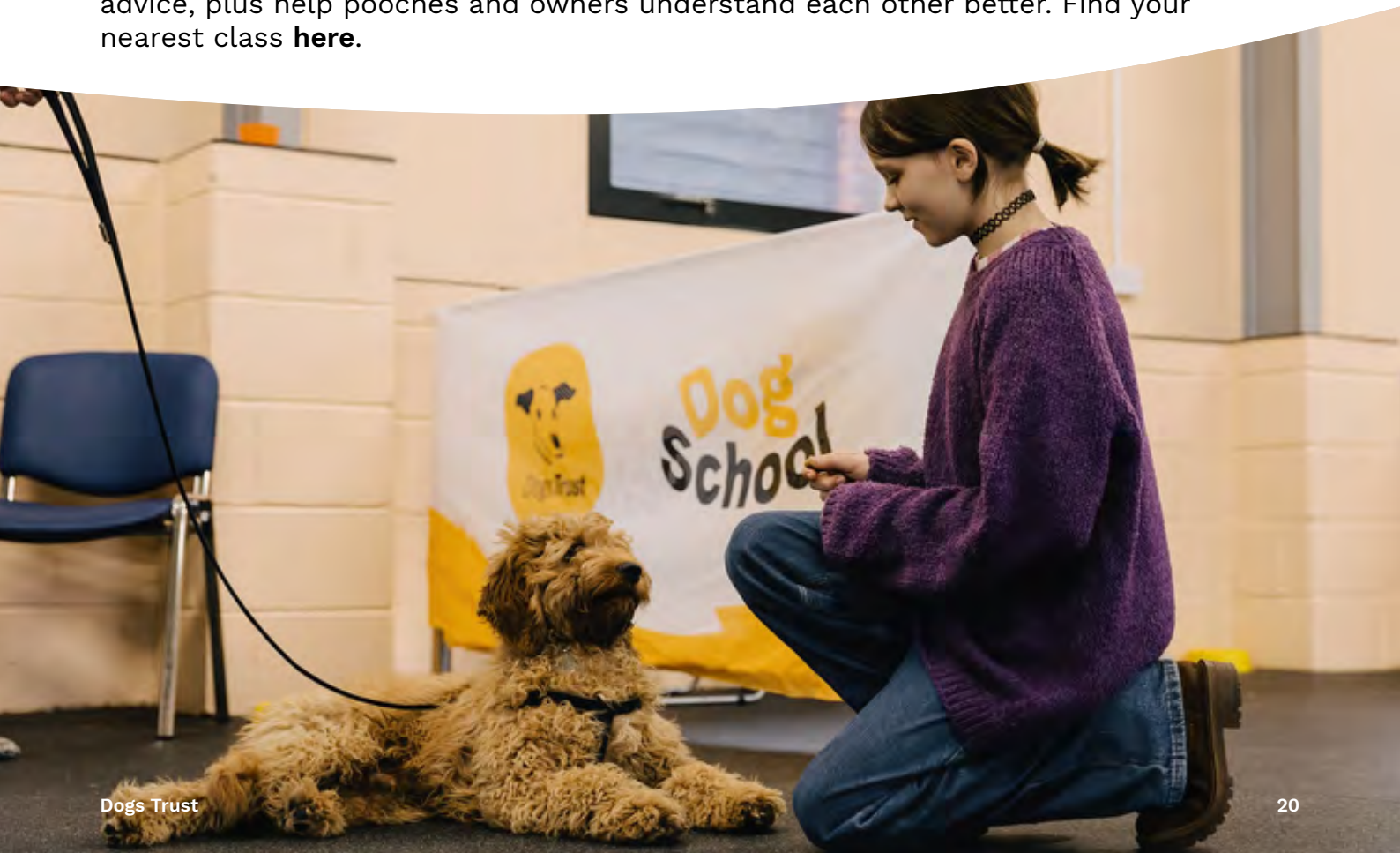
When dogs that do something their owners don't like, **giving their dogs a telling-off** was the go-to for the overwhelming majority at 81.8%. Over a third (36.2%) said they would change the tune and offer a different activity, 19.7% said they'd just ignore it, and 11.8% used 'time outs'. Just 5.1% used other methods and 3.8% used training tools or devices for correction.

Our survey found older owners favoured verbal commands and were less likely to engage in 'active' training – perhaps because they were less active themselves. And similarly, play was a popular reward in the 25 to 34-year-old human age group at 70.1% whereas just 36.1% of over 75s used it. Redirecting their dog's attention by offering a different activity was a popular strategy employed by 25 to 34-year-olds (46.9%) faced with undesirable dog behaviour, but not with over 75s (just 25.5%).

At Dogs Trust we train dogs using reward-based methods, and do not advocate the use of any training equipment which changes behaviour by causing pain or fear in dogs. We believe that **positive reinforcement** – training with rewards – is the best way to train your dog as it teaches them that good things happen when they make good choices. Science tells us that reward-based training is the best way for dogs to learn. And it's a fun process which helps build a positive bond between dog and owner.

Reward-based training can help build confidence and encourages dogs to think for themselves. Additionally, owners that train using rewards report fewer behaviour problems in their dogs.

Dogs Trust runs **Dog School** classes across the country. These four-week courses, which are specifically catered to puppies, adolescents, or adult dogs, give expert advice, plus help pooches and owners understand each other better. Find your nearest class **here**.



## Training tools

**Clickers** - a small hand-held device that makes a clicking sound when pressed – were mentioned by 833 respondents when asked what training tools they used. What wasn't clear though was whether it was being correctly as a marker (along with a treat or toy reward) for desired behaviour, or an interrupter of undesirable behaviour.

*“On lead I use a clicker to get my dogs attention back.”*

*“We use a clicker to get her to focus back on us when she's distracted by other dogs or squirrels.”*

**E-collars** - In April 2023 the UK Government brought forward legislation to ban the use of remote-controlled electronic shock collars (or e-collars) in England from 1 February 2024, but at the time of writing they still have not set a date for the final stage of the law to be passed through Parliament. The use of shock collars has been prohibited in Wales since 2010.

E-collars were used by 1042 (0.4%) of dog owners that answered our survey. These collars are wirelessly linked to a device in the owner's hand and emit an electrical sensation on the dog's neck when the owner presses the button. **Dogs Trust has been campaigning on e-collars for a number of years.** We believe that electric shock collars are cruel; for a dog to avoid performing an unwanted behaviour, the shock administered by an e-collar must be strong enough to cause discomfort or pain.

*“We believe that the use of electronic shock collars as well as other aversive training devices, such as sonic and spray collars, is detrimental to the welfare of dogs. This type of device is not only painful for a dog, but it can have a serious negative impact on their mental and physical wellbeing. As well as distress at the time of use, dogs can develop anxiety and other problem behaviours as a longer-term consequence.*

*“Under no circumstances do we condone the use of equipment or techniques that use pain or fear to train a dog. We care for approximately 14,000 dogs each year using reward-based training methods only. For these reasons, we have long been calling for a full ban on the use and sale of aversive training devices.”*

**Dogs Trust**



## Concerns about breeders, puppy farms and puppy smuggling

2023 National Dog Survey participants were asked to tell us which dog welfare issues mattered most to them. In response, **9358 people mentioned puppy farms**, 5599 mentioned puppy farming, and 528 mentioned puppy mills. Some wanted to see the Government do more about regulating and licencing dog breeding.

At Dogs Trust, we share their concerns. Puppy farms are large-scale breeding operations, where the welfare of the puppies and their parents is often not a priority and profit is put before welfare. The illegal puppy trade has also been linked to organised crime rings. It is paramount that would-be dog owners do their homework before settling on a breeder. Of course, Dogs Trust would also urge potential dog owners to consider adopting from one of our rehoming centres, where all dogs go through a rigorous programme of health checks and behavioural assessment.

However, if you are set on purchasing a puppy from a breeder, there are **a number of tips** Dogs Trust recommends to ensure you are doing so safely from a responsible breeder, who puts the health and welfare of the pups first.

Dogs Trust has a **checklist** which includes tips for before, during, and after the puppy purchasing process.

For over ten years Dogs Trust has been calling for a crackdown on puppy smuggling and exposing the widespread abuse of the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS). Intended for use for people taking their pets on holiday, the scheme has long been used as a cover by unscrupulous traders to illegally import puppies, who are often underage and unvaccinated, into the country.

Through the **Dogs Trust Puppy Pilot**, we continue to fund the quarantine cost for any puppy seized at the border, to aid its interception. **Since the launch of the puppy pilot in 2015, over 3,000 illegally imported puppies and puppies born to pregnant mums have come through the scheme.** If sold to unsuspecting members of the public, these puppies would've made over £4 Million for their illegal importers.

In 2021, the Government made a commitment to tackle Puppy Smuggling via the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. Disappointingly, despite cross-party support, the Bill was dropped. Dogs Trust wants to see legislation that will increase the age at which puppies can be imported to six months and ban the non-commercial transport of pregnant dogs in the last 30% (more than 42 days pregnant) of their gestation period as a minimum.

We would also like to see a complete ban on the commercial movement of pregnant dogs into Great Britain, a ban on the importation and sale of dogs with cropped ears and docked tails for cosmetic reasons, and tougher penalties for smuggling pups to deter deceitful sellers. Without legislation, more dogs will suffer at the hands of unscrupulous breeders & importers.

*"There are too many dogs, many of which have health issues. Over-breeding and irresponsible breeding, puppy farms and dogs being brought in from abroad legally or illegally. I'm concerned about the increase in criminal activity. Too easy for anyone and everyone to acquire dogs. They have become commodities and very expensive ones!"*

*"I'm concerned about people who unwittingly buy dogs from very well-staged puppy farms or just don't do their due diligence and find they have an over-bred breeding bitch, sire or a very poorly*



*bred dog with health and temperament issues.”*

*“We do not do enough to stop puppy farms and trafficking these little pups to the UK. It is disgraceful and upsetting to see what is allowed to happen. Stronger legislation should be brought in to deter the activity.”*

## **Backyard breeders**

Survey respondents also mentioned their worries about ‘backyard breeders’, a term often used to describe **unlicensed home breeders** with little knowledge or experience, leading to poor dog welfare. Health testing, genetic testing, and veterinary interventions due to birthing complications cost a lot of money that backyard breeders might not be prepared to pay. Again, this concern is shared by Dogs Trust – read more **here** on how to spot a responsible breeder.

*“I am concerned about backyard breeders trying to make a quick buck by breeding dogs with such health issues that they can’t even give birth without a C-section.”*

*“I am concerned about indiscriminate backyard breeding of designer dogs like XL bullies. No puppy should cost more than a Kennel Club-registered puppy.”*

*“Breeders being licensed through councils is a false sense of security as many run back yard breeding programmes.”*

*“I think there should be better regulations around preventing ‘backyard breeders’. A neighbour recently bred his 2 yr old female lab for the second time to “pay for a new kitchen...””*

## **“Dogs as possessions not sentient family members.”**

A common theme related to breeding was the drive for looks rather than health. Respondents mentioned breeders **following fashion trends** and breeding so-called designer dogs or trying to produce dogs with certain visual characteristics. Dogs Trust has deep concerns about the trends dogs’ physical appearances, including **Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome** (BOAS) in Brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs.

*“I am concerned about the selective breeding for certain characteristics e.g. small squished-up noses in pugs etc.”*

*“Health issues in dogs bred by breeders who do not take responsibility and sell them despite knowing there are issues whether they be genetic, bad luck or through a lack of care.”*

*“I do think influencers etc and social media is to blame for trendy breeds. My preference has always been to rescue. I wish more people would adopt and think that trends in breeds don’t encourage adopting.”*

*“Messing around with genetics to get the ‘perfect looking’ dog is criminal. Breeding dogs so intensely that they struggle to breath is unbelievably cruel and irresponsible.”*

*“I’m concerned about dogs as fashion accessories. Dogs as possessions not sentient family members.”*

*“The selling of dogs on internet sites by Greeders (my name for irresponsible dog producers for money). Dog owners buying puppies on impulse without proper consideration and no attempt to train or socialise them. These dogs are then advertised again for sale again, dumped in rescues or abandoned if rescues can’t or won’t take them.”*

## A new concern - dog fertility clinics

A small number of respondents (36) mentioned **dog fertility clinics** as a welfare issue. Canine fertility clinics are currently unregulated, meaning procedures such as artificial insemination, ultrasound, and taking blood samples may be occurring without a qualified veterinary professional present.

*"I think that there should be tight regulations on the so-called k9 fertility clinics that are popping up."*

*"Dog fertility clinics sending out sperm leading to dog breeds being created for fashion."*

*"The rise in fertility clinics run by untrained and unregulated people who are potentially causing harm and suffering to dogs."*



## Getting social - listening to dog-fluencers

Looking for paw-some pals? **Social media** is a popular way of finding out a huge variety of information about dogs, sharing tips and no doubt photos as well!

Breed pages and groups are popular - 38.2% of owners follow them. And training or behaviour pages are used by over a quarter (27.3%). When you're looking for a new dog, or even just indulging in some wishful thinking, rehoming pages are the place to go - followed by 22.2% of survey respondents. Vet practices came in as the next most popular - 17.1% follow their own or others for useful info. And who doesn't love a sniff around at the lives of famous people and their dogs? 3.7% follow celebrity dog owners and 5.5% social media influencers.

In a complicated world of misinformation, Dogs Trust online and social media is a trusted place to seek advice. Go to [www.dogstrust.org.uk](http://www.dogstrust.org.uk) and follow Dogs Trust on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.

A close-up photograph of a brown and white dog, possibly a Springer Spaniel, being examined by a person in a green medical uniform. The dog is looking up with its mouth slightly open. The person's hands are visible, gently holding the dog's head. A yellow tag with the Dogs Trust logo is visible on the dog's collar.

# 38.2%

of owners follow  
breed pages and groups  
on social media



## Conclusions

Our 2023 National Dog Survey, in which 244,478 people talked about their lives with 348,533 dogs, has given us important statistics and first-person accounts of not only the extent of devoted dog-ownership around the UK but some of the current challenges and concerns.

With nearly a fifth of owners saying they were considering changing to cheaper food, and 1 in 7 wondering if they could cut the costs of non-emergency veterinary care, the depths of the cost-of-living crisis has been the most significant change in dog ownership since our first survey was carried out in 2021. The shortage of rented housing that accepts dogs also presenting upsetting challenges for many. With a quarter of our survey respondents saying they had been refused private accommodation in the past five years because of their dog, this is clearly another heartbreaking reason that dogs end up being handed over to be rehomed.

Every day we take calls from owners who have reached a point where they feel they can no longer afford to keep their dogs. They describe the steps they've taken to cut costs or find a place to live until they've reached the end of the line. We hear this desperation loud and clear, and at Dogs Trust we're committed to using the survey findings to work on new initiatives that help owners keep their beloved dogs.

Our 'A dog is for life' slogan has never been truer when it comes to underlining what can be up to a 20-year financial commitment (according to some of the ages of dogs quoted in the survey). Dog care is expensive. Beyond food and regular flea and worm treatment, we know the costs of emergency medical treatment, day-care, grooming and treating our dogs to toys and other fun and life enrichment all add up. We also know that many have taken on a dog after careful research and in financially buoyant times, only to have circumstances change. We understand that anyone can find themselves in the terrible position of no longer being able to afford to care for their dog.





While Covid and lockdowns are behind us, many owners are still living with the consequences. They wrote movingly in the survey about their own dogs that have issues from being poorly socialised, and their fears about meeting others on walks with behavioural aggression because they weren't able to spend enough time with other dogs during lockdown. Our Behaviour Support Line, created after the last National Dog Survey in 2021, is there to help, and we will continue to develop policies and support services that mean owners don't give up on their dogs and make the heartbreaking decision to rehome them.

We also hear the wider worries beyond their own pets that were expressed by people who responded to our survey. From designer dog breeding to cruel puppy farms, Dogs Trust shares their concerns and will develop our policy and campaigns around issues where dogs need us most.

The number of respondents saying they would pay for their dog's food before their own gives a graphic illustration of the love we have for our dogs. And this unshakable bond shines through many aspects of our survey. Home working has meant we get to spend more time with our dogs, with over 84% getting to stay at home with someone all day. We enjoy UK staycations with them (69.9%) and even call them the same names as our children!

Our respondents talked of the joy, companionship and peace of mind their dogs bring them, every single day. They make us laugh, they boost our mental health, they're our constant companions in troubled times. Dogs simply make life better for us. And at Dogs Trust we will use the insight from this survey to continue in our work to make life better for them.



## Methodology

### Data collection

Data were collected via online survey at [www.nationaldogsurvey.co.uk](http://www.nationaldogsurvey.co.uk). Depending on whether a survey respondent indicated that they had a dog or not, they were directed to a specific set of questions. Questions for dog owners included dog demographic information, followed by how and where the dog had been acquired, and how the dog was cared for. These questions were asked for each dog and respondents had the option to complete this section for multiple dogs, if appropriate. For each dog owner, questions were asked about how they interacted with their dogs, whether they had taken their dog on holiday, and whether they were worried about the rising cost of living when it came to caring for their dogs. Respondents who did not currently own a dog were asked whether they had ever owned a dog, and whether they wanted to own a dog. For those who did not want a dog, neither now nor in the future, respondents were asked their reasons. For those who did want a dog, they were asked where they would search for a dog, and if not from a UK rescue organisation, then why. All National Dog Survey participants were asked an open-ended question about which dog welfare issues mattered most to them. The end of the survey asked for people's demographic information. All questions in the survey were optional (other than the first question which asked for people to confirm consent to participate). Most of the questions followed a multiple-choice format, requiring respondents to select one or more pre-defined responses, sometimes with the option to complete a free text response under 'Other (please specify)'. Typically (median), the survey took 12 minutes to complete.

### Inclusion criteria

Survey participants were required to be at least 18 years old, and to live in the United Kingdom. Participation was entirely voluntary. Dog-owning participants were instructed to complete the survey for their most recently acquired dog, with the option of repeating the 'About your dog' section for each of their dogs.

### Recruitment

The website ([www.nationaldogsurvey.co.uk](http://www.nationaldogsurvey.co.uk)) was live from 10th May 2023. People who had completed the National Dog Survey 2021 and consented to being contacted were invited via email from Dogs Trust to participate first on 11th May 2023. The survey was advertised through social media including paid Facebook advertisements from 12th May 2023. Advertising ceased on 18th June 2023 and the survey was closed on 26th June 2023.

## Data analysis and presentation

For each question, descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were calculated. Since all questions were optional, percentages presented are based on available responses. Throughout the report, percentages are rounded to one decimal place. A dog breed's overall popularity was calculated as a proportion of all other dogs reported in the survey. As data were obtained via cross-sectional survey (completed at one point in time), to assess a dog breed's popularity over time, age cohorts were used as a proxy of time. A breed's popularity at any given time point was inferred from the percentage of all dogs reported of the same age. To estimate change in breed popularity for dogs acquired post-pandemic (2020 - 2023) compared with pre-pandemic (2017 - 2019), the relative difference in the proportion of a breed between acquisition cohorts was calculated. To find breeds more popular with first-time owners compared with experienced owners, breed popularity was calculated as a proportion of the most recently acquired dogs (2020 - 2023) by first-time or "experienced owners" (i.e., those who reported already having had a dog in adulthood). Analysis of free-text responses commenced with identification and examination for frequently occurring words and combinations of words. Samples of text using subsets of these words were read to identify related topics. Free-text responses were then grouped into themes. Direct quotes were anonymised by redacting dogs' and people's names.

All analyses and data management were conducted using the statistical programming language 'R'.

## Ethical review

The study was approved by the Dogs Trust Ethical Review Board (ERB050).



Since 1891, we've been working for a better future for dogs and the people who love them.

When a dog is in distress, we care for them. When a dog needs a home, we find them a loving family. When an owner needs a helping hand (or paw) – or they just can't cope, we're ready to step in.

For every dog, for every owner, we're by their side through thick and thin, throughout their lives. The bond they have is special to us. It changes lives, making each day happier and more complete. It's why we believe A dog is for life.®

Discover who we are, what we do, and how we'll never stop fighting to make tomorrow's world a better place for all dogs.

**A dog is for life®**



[dogstrust.org.uk](https://dogstrust.org.uk)



[info@dogstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@dogstrust.org.uk)

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