

Code of conduct and Duty of Care for responsible dog owners

Duty of Care

“Duty of care” is a legal phrase which means that someone has an obligation to do something. Prior to the Animal Welfare Act 2006, people only had a duty to ensure that an animal didn’t suffer unnecessarily. The new Act keeps this duty but also imposes a broader duty of care on anyone responsible for an animal to take reasonable steps to ensure that the animal’s needs are met. This means that a person has to look after the animal’s welfare as well as ensure that it does not suffer. The Act says that an animal’s welfare needs include:

- A suitable environment (how it is housed);
- A suitable diet (what it eats and drinks);
- The ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Code of Conduct

A guide to responsible dog ownership:

- Never let your dog off the lead near farm animals. A farmer has the right to intervene if the dog is causing the animals distress.
- Never leave dogs in cars, even in mild weather. Dehydration can lead to death. They are also at risk of being stolen.
- Always put your dog in a crate or a suitable seat belt harness when travelling.
- Register your dog with a vet and go for regular checks ups and inoculations.
- Treat and check regularly for fleas and worms.
- Never leave your dog tied up outside a shop, they can be stolen or become tangled up
- Train your dog to be sociable, it is never too late.
- Groom your dog regularly and keep them clean.
- Wooden sticks can cause serious injuries, even death. Choose a throw toy wisely.
- Feed your dog at regular times with a nutritionally balanced diet; adjust the diet as and when necessary.
- Neutering is always advisable unless you want to breed from your dog.
- Always clear up after your dog, wherever it is. Scoop the poop.
- Stop your dog from urinating or defecating on private property
- Stop your dog from barking unnecessarily as this can become a nuisance for your neighbours.
- Make sure someone responsible looks after your dog when you are away and that they have the relevant contact details (your vets and the animal warden for example).
- Make sure your dog is wearing an identification tag when in a public place, it is the law.
- Check that any identification product your dog has (be it a microchip or ID tag) is kept up-to-date (with the owners current mobile number, address and so on).
- Make sure your dog does not approach other people or dogs on leads without permission.
- Always keep your dog under proper control.

There are many reputable dog trainers within the Lincoln area who can give suitable advice.

Laws for dog owners include:

- The owner or person in charge of a dog can be fined up to £5000 if the dog is not wearing a collar showing the owner's name and address when in a public place, even if the dog is tattooed or microchipped
- The owner or person in charge of any dog which causes injury or damage to a person, property or livestock is liable and may have to pay compensation
- It is an offence for any dog to be "dangerously out of control" in a public place
- The owner or person in charge of a dog who fails to pick up and dispose of their dog's mess can be prosecuted with a fixed penalty of £75 or a maximum court fine of £1000 and a criminal record
- Stray dogs can be picked up by the dog/animal warden and there will be a charge before the dog can be reunited with its owner
- You can be prosecuted if your dog is a nuisance to your neighbours with a maximum fine of £5,000
- If you kill a dog whilst driving a vehicle you must report it to the police

Dog fouling



Photograph of a dog fouling notice

It is every owner's moral duty and legal responsibility to clean up after their dog. If your dog fouls in a public place please clean it up.

The Countryside

Dog mess is not only a problem in our towns and urban areas. Some owners, visiting the countryside, seem to forget about their duty when they are out of town. The mess of visiting dogs often surrounds car parks at popular beauty spots and public open spaces, often the same areas where people picnic and children play. Wherever you are, you must always collect and dispose of your dog's mess.

Toxocariasis

Fears about the danger to human health from dog faeces have spread throughout the population although most people's knowledge of the rare *Toxocara canis* infection is limited to hearsay and media reports. However, the facts are:

- The eggs of the *Toxocara* worm, if deposited in soil, can lie dormant for up to three years, they are highly resilient to temperature changes and chemical disinfectants have little effect on them.
- In tests five per cent of dogs were found to expel *Toxocara* worm eggs
- Of this five per cent, the majority were puppies between two weeks and six months of age or pregnant bitches
- As the eggs of the *Toxocara* worm take over two weeks to hatch and become active, there are no health risks to you from immediately clearing up after your dog
- Foxes and cats also act as hosts to the *Toxocara* worm
- Toxoplasmosis can also be caught from eating raw or undercooked meat, unpasteurised goat's milk products and food contaminated by infected faeces

Solutions

Possible solutions to the problem of dog fouling include:

1. If you have a garden, teach your dog to go there before you leave home. The faeces can then be put straight into your dustbin or digested in a sunken dog loo.
2. Always carry the means to clear up after your dog. Research shows that simple plastic bags are far more convenient, more effective and cheaper than most poop scoops. Your bags should be as unforgettable as a lead when you take your dog out.
3. Every time your dog fouls, 'bag it and bin it', whether it is in a park, wood, path or roadside gutter. Remember the rain does not wash it away.
4. Respect your Local Authority rules on dog-free areas. Dogs cannot read signs, so it is up to you to keep them away from children's play areas and sports pitches. If dog-waste bins are provided, then use them.
5. Never let your dog out alone to 'go to the loo'. This should go without saying, but it does still happen. Apart from the fouling problem, you may never see your companion again.
6. Get involved when your Local Authority is considering new rules on dog access. Keep an eye on the announcements in your local paper. If positive views, opinions and the benefits of dog ownership are not presented, they will never be considered.
7. Get your dog wormed. Visit your veterinary surgeon for advice on the products suitable for your pet and the frequency of doses.
8. Politely but firmly encourage guilty owners you meet to do their duty. You do not need to be rude, simply offer them one of your bags: embarrassment over their unacceptable behaviour often gets results.
9. Always wash your hands after walking your dog and before eating. While *Toxocara* infections are very rare and are more likely to affect children because of their play habits. Remember adults can become ill too.