



## **The Emotional and Psychological impact on surrendering a dog.**

### **Introduction**

The decision to surrender a dog to a shelter or rescue organization is often carried out with good intentions by the owner, And I completely acknowledge that in some cases surrendering a pet to a shelter is the only option, So by no means is this article to make those who surrendered pets guilty, My goal is just to highlight the impact it has on the dog and the importance it is to avoid surrendering where possible. A 2025 research showed that the most common reasons people surrendered dogs was as a practical response to financial strain, housing instability, behavioral challenges, or life transitions. Reasons which are all plausible, however it is easy forget the deeply emotional and psychological impact it has on the dog, Which I think is frequently overlooked. I think many people have the out luck that surrendering a dog to a shelter is for the dogs benefit however, Based on my observations and supported by many studies show that dogs that have been surrendered to a shelter go under massive emotional and psychological stress compared to those who are born into shelter environment.

Dogs are descendance of the wolf, Which are pack animals, So dogs tend to form strong bonds with their owner and family. Leaving the dog feeling scared and alone and the human with guilt and the feeling of abandonment which can effect us both consciously or subconsciously, Bringing me onto the topic of ...

## **The Emotional Side of Surrender**

Surrendering a dog is not just a practical decision, it carries significant emotional weight. Many owners feel guilt, sadness, and stress when giving up a dog. Likewise, dogs experience stress when removed from familiar surroundings, routines, and people they trust. Understanding these emotional dynamics is critical to addressing the root causes of shelter overpopulation.

Research shows that dogs surrendered after experiencing a family home often face more stress than dogs born in shelters. A dog that has known love, attention, and stability suddenly finds itself in an unfamiliar environment, surrounded by noise, confinement, and strangers. The trauma can manifest as anxiety, depression, or behavioral problems, making adoption a delicate process that requires education, patience, and understanding.

People bringing a dog into their family and then surrendering them down the line is deeply problematic because dogs are naturally pack animals, and the family represents their pack. When removed from their pack, dogs experience confusion, stress, and a profound sense of loss. This manifest as several psychological problems and may turn a loving family dog into a scared dog that is overlooked as aggressive and so is never adopted, When really all he needs is love and to be able to gain trust in the human race once more.

## **The Psychological Impact on Shelter Dogs**

Being surrendered to a shelter is not just a logistical change for a dog it is a massive emotional and psychological change. Dogs are social creatures, forming deep attachments to their human families. When they are removed from familiar environments, daily routines, and the people they trust, the stress can be enormous.

As I indicated above Dogs that have lived in a loving home experience this transition more intensely than dogs born in shelters. A study published in Frontiers in Veterinary Science indicates that surrendered dogs often display heightened anxiety, increased vocalizations, pacing, and withdrawal behaviors. In contrast, shelter-born dogs, while still stressed by confinement, are more accustomed to kennel life and may adjust more quickly.

One striking observation is how dogs react to the loss of family. Many dogs experience “grief” similar to that seen in humans. Their normal routines are disrupted, and they may refuse food, become lethargic, or display destructive behaviors. This highlights the importance of understanding a dog’s emotional needs during surrender and adoption processes. We need to stop distancing ourselves from animals and open our eyes to how similar we are, then we might begin to learn the impact your decisions have on another soul.

Even simple aspects of shelter life like limited space, high noise levels, and lack of one on one attention can exacerbate stress. While shelter staff work tirelessly to provide care, enrichment, and comfort, the sheer number of dogs makes it impossible to give every dog the individualized attention they need.

Surrendered dogs, have experienced loss, routine disruption, and separation anxiety. They may react unpredictably in new environments or struggle with trust. This highlights the importance of education for potential adopters: understanding that a surrendered dog may need extra patience, stability, and training can prevent future issues and improve the adoption outcome for both dog and owner. So I ask those who adopt a dog, Give them time, Don’t go returning the dog at the first obstacle. As soon as you leave that shelter, The dog becomes part of your family, So look at it that way, Id like to think you wouldn’t just give up on your partner/kids for shouting or wetting their pants (well maybe partner but I hope not your kid!), So I ask why give up on the dog, You made the decision to bring them into your family, So work with them, like any other relationship it requires time patience and hard work, And most importantly prevent all this stress by finding what dog breeds match your lifestyle.

## **The detrimental domino effect of surrendering a dog**

Over the past 2 years of working in shelters, I have started to notice a chain of reactions that stem from a dog being surrendered ( lets say dogs name is Ben). What I've seen time and time again Is a loving family pet being surrendered to shelters as owners feel as though they are not giving Ben the attention he deserves, They feel they are doing right by Ben by surrendering him, But what actually happens is Ben is put in a strange environment, Where

it is extremely noisy and has strange smells, strange people and strange dogs who often have developed psychological problems, Ben senses these issues and becomes fearful. He curls up in the corner and begins to shake, Cortisol which is the stress hormone and adrenaline rushes through his body, Bens natural flight or fight response kicks in and he becomes withdrawn from people and out of fear barks and growls. It's by no means Bens fault nor does it mean he is a "Bad Dog", Bens nervous system has just been overstimulated leading to him diving back into his natural wild wolf like way of thinking where his brain switches from loving companion to survival mode. Exactly how you would react if someone had kidnapped you and put you in a cage!

Next what happens is another loving family arrive at the shelter to adopt a dog, They come to Bens kennel and see either Ben in the back of the Kennel curled up shivering, showing his teeth growling (Flight mode) or Standing at the kennel door barking with a large stance (Fight mode) Either way Ben comes across as a "Bad Dog" and the family swiftly move onto the next kennel. Ben who was once a loving gentle family dog, Is now a scared abandoned and unwanted dog who is overlooked by every passing Human and eventually is euthanised due to being mentally unstable! So please the next time you think of getting or surrendering a dog, As yourself all necessary question to prevent your beloved companion ending up in bens position.