

Chapter 5 – Doing Home Visits

Volunteering to do Home Visits

SOAR needs to personally see the homes and visit with the families who will be adopting our rescue Airedales. There is no better way to determine if an applicant should be approved or declined than to see where and how our rescue Airedales will live. Home visits are also a great way to see how a family interacts with an Airedale. Coordinators and foster homes need this input to help them make good decisions when matching our rescue Airedales with forever homes.

Before you begin doing home visits for SOAR, you **MUST** sign a SOAR Volunteer Agreement form and mail it to the SOAR Vice President Volunteers.



What it Takes to do Home Visits

You need to be willing to take your Airedale and visit with a family you most likely don't know. Talking with strangers can make some people a little nervous; just remember you have Airedales in common. Your Airedale usually provides a focal point for conversation.

Once the home visit starts, you are there on SOAR's behalf to ask questions and make observations, not to make a decision about this applicant. The state coordinator should have explained this to the applicant ahead of time. Observations include such things as how the applicant answers questions and how the applicant and their family react to your Airedale. Let us know what you observe concerning the applicants home and yard as it relates to a possible rescue Airedale living there. Your observations could end up being more useful than simple answers to questions.

If you are a little nervous about doing a home visit by yourself for the first time, It could be very helpful to see how a home visit is done by someone used to doing one. Your state coordinator can arrange for you to accompany them or another veteran volunteer on a home visit before trying one on your own.

Questions to Ask

SOAR has a Home Visit checklist with some general questions to ask and some general observations to make. Your state coordinator may have some specific questions or observations based on the application. You also may come up with your own questions as the visit progresses.

Back to the Home Visit checklist. Review this checklist prior to doing the home visit. You will find that most of the questions and observations come from common sense and concern about finding the best possible homes for our rescue Airedales. Try not to "read" questions and "record" answers. It would be best if you made a few notes to remind you of points you want to cover and then cover them in a conversational manner. Take notes only if the answers are specific and may be forgotten later – such as names of other pets in the home, a phone number, etc.

Most applicants are more than happy to show you their home and point out how their new dog will be a part of the family. They will want you to see the new dog bed, where the dog will eat, the dog yard and other things. As you walk around with applicant, make mental notes of safety related items such as the condition of the applicant's fence or small items laying around that an Airedale could get into. Check out the other animals in the family to see if they looked well-cared for and loved. Lastly, ask yourself this question: "Would I let this family adopt MY Airedale?"

Bring Your Airedale

Having your Airedale with you will provide a great deal of insight as to how the applicant will interact with a rescue Airedale if they adopt one. Watch how they react to your Airedale. Do they pet your dog or talk to him? Or do they just ignore him? Do they allow your Airedale to explore their home or are they concerned. Are there certain rooms or areas the dog cannot enter? All of these reactions are priceless when trying to evaluate an applicant and cannot be determined through conversations or questions.

Even if your dog is not the best-behaved dog, bring him anyway. It is important to have an applicant see an Airedale - faults and all. If you know that your Airedale might immediately get into trouble if let loose in the applicant's home, keep him on a leash with you. He can still interact with the applicant and their family.

If you know you have an Airedale that is other-dog aggressive, food aggressive, or people aggressive, you might need to think carefully before bringing your dog with you. Only do so if you have good control over the dog and you know the applicant does not have other dogs, cats, small kids, etc. to cause a problem. For food-aggressive dogs, do not allow the applicant to give him treats while you are there. We don't want to put anyone in the position of getting hurt.

If Your Airedale Marks

Most dogs will mark when coming into a strange house – especially male dogs. While we don't want to see it happen, our dogs are sometimes quicker than we are. If it does happen to you, apologize and offer to clean it up. At the same time watch and make note of how the applicant reacts to this situation. You can carry a small spray bottle with enzymatic cleaner just in case. It is almost guaranteed that any Airedale this family adopts will mark in their home until they feel "at home" and get used to the new routine.

Who Should be at the Home Visit

You will be the one to schedule the home visit when it is convenient for you and the applicant. Keep in mind that it should be scheduled when the applicant's family is available. SOAR needs to know how the whole family feels about bringing a rescue Airedale into the family and how they react to your Airedale.

Look Around the House and Yard

Remember that you need to see both the yard and the house and make mental notes of safety issues. You don't want to take an applicant's word for things like the condition of their fence or access to a swimming pool. Be sure to walk the yard and fence to note possible escape routes. You may want to take a digital camera so other coordinators and foster homes can get an idea of what the yard and house look like. Some families may even want a photo of your dog with their family!

If You See Something You Don't Like

When you arrive at the home and before you even leave your car, make a mental note of what you see and how you feel. We had one volunteer doing a home visit who found a yard full of Pit Bulls at the residence she was supposed to visit. In a case like this, you don't need to continue any further. Just go home and contact the state coordinator about what you saw.

If you have entered the applicant's home and started the home visit, you can complete the home visit and just note what you didn't like on the Home Visit checklist. We value your input and want to know what you saw and how you felt about the visit. If you see something you don't like, you may want to ask some questions to see if there is an explanation for what you are seeing. Handle the situation as best you can and in whatever manner makes you feel most comfortable.

To Make a Decision or Not

You do not make the final decision and you should not have to tell the applicant if they are approved.



The results of the home visit are only one part of the approval process. The state coordinator has checked references and done a telephone interview with the applicant. The state coordinator will put all of these things together to come up with a final decision on the approval of an applicant.

Instead, tell the applicant at the start of the home visit that this is only one step in the approval process and let them know the state coordinator will get back with them once you complete the home visit. SOAR does have some “veteran” home visit volunteers who may be able to tell an applicant if they are approved. These volunteers have been doing home visits for a while and will have discussed this applicant with the state coordinator prior to the home visit. Even then, it is usually best to let the state coordinator handle notifying the applicant.

- ✓ Home Visit Checklist or report should be faxed or e-mailed as soon as possible after the home visit while the details are still fresh in your mind. Be sure to include your observations.

