

GUIDELINES AND CHECKLIST FOR CONDUCTING A NSDTRC(USA) HOME VISIT FOR POTENTIAL ADOPTERS OF RESCUE TOLLERS

(Many thanks to Basenji Rescue and Transport for allowing the NSDTRC(USA) to utilize much of their information.)

Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club(USA) Rescue Home Visit Guidelines

Thank you for agreeing to conduct a home visit for someone who has applied to adopt a rescue Toller. Here are a few guidelines, followed by a comprehensive checklist.

1. Contact the potential adopter to arrange a suitable time for the visit.
2. Reassure the applicant, make him/her feel comfortable, and inform him/her of the following:

A home visit may sound like a big production, but it really isn't. We won't be coming to judge how well you clean your house, and we don't care about your decorating style. What we do care about, is whether or not your house is a safe place for a dog. An untidy garden doesn't matter, but jagged holes in a fence that a dog could escape through, or injure himself on will. Dishes in the sink don't matter, unless you're hoping to adopt an overweight dog that has problems with stealing food. Clutter on the mantle won't matter, but clutter down low could be a problem with a new puppy who may want to taste everything in sight. Part of the point of the home visit is for us to find these things together, so that your Toller will be safe when he comes home.

When we do the home visit, we prefer that all family members and pets be home, and when possible, we bring the dog with us. This way, we can get a better sense of how the dog will fit into your family, and how he/she interacts with everyone, in your home environment.

If everything goes well, we will give you 24 hours to think about it, and make sure no one in your family has any reservations about adopting. After all, your potential new Toller has probably already been through a lot. We want to make sure that he's the right dog for your family, so he doesn't end up homeless again!

3. Determine that the applicant has an understanding of the Toller breed.
4. While the checklist is useful, also consider subjective observations, such as how the people interact with the dog. Is the husband disinterested and likely to want to give the dog up when it has its first big vet bill or chews his favorite slippers? Are the kids maniacs or really good around dogs? Is mom shielding her infant from getting too close to the dog?
5. Talking to neighbors can help, too. Such conversations may explore situations such as: Is the applicant's dog left outside barking all day, etc.? Do the neighbors object to having a dog or additional dog next door even though the potential

family is a good one? Sometimes such discussions can be done on the phone, and should be done with the applicant's knowledge.

Your Role

1. Observe and gather information as objectively as possible.
2. Answer questions the applicant may have about Tollers and the adoption process.
3. Make a note of any information the family requests that you cannot provide, along with questions that you prefer for the coordinator to answer.
4. Share and document the results of your visit with the coordinator, including any concerns or recommendations.

Remember that it is NOT your responsibility to make the decision about the placement. Remind the family that the rescue program director is the one who will ultimately decide, with input from the regional as well as Eastern/Western regional coordinators. This will take a lot of pressure off of you.

Also, keep in mind that the tone of the home visit should be as friendly and informative as possible. You may need to ask a number of detailed questions, but these should have the primary purpose of advising the potential adopters about situations that could pose dangers for the well-being of their Toller. In many cases, problems can be averted through awareness of and/or removal of physical hazards. If applicants appear unmindful of advice or unwilling to take steps to ensure the safety of their new dog, be sure to report this to the coordinator.

IMPORTANT NOTE: When going for the visit, please be aware of your own personal safety and take any precautions you feel are needed. It's perfectly fine to invite someone to accompany you -- perhaps a friend, another volunteer who is interested in learning how to do home visits, a spouse or a partner. If you find yourself becoming apprehensive while on the way to the visit, for whatever reason -- don't go. Return home and let the applicant know you have had to cancel for unavoidable reasons. Then contact the coordinator and explain the situation.

Before taking your own Toller(s) along, be sure to talk to the coordinator. In some cases, it may be crucial for you to take a dog, and in other cases not necessary (such as when the family already owns a Toller). If you do take a dog, observe how each family member responds to your directions on how to interact with it. Also, note how family members give direction to their children and whether the children listen. If other dogs are present, and you can introduce them on neutral territory, observe how they interact -- but don't push it! We certainly don't want any people or dogs to get hurt. If you are not experienced in introducing dogs, do not take on this responsibility. Discuss it with the coordinator. Remember, everything does not have to be completed in one visit or by one person only.

In addition to these guidelines, you have the checklist of questions to ask during the home visit. Feel free to print out these questions and take them along with you. Explain to the applicant that you are writing down some things so that you can remember them accurately. Most people will understand and appreciate your taking care to do a good visit.

The questions in the checklist are meant to let you know what type of information is most useful in evaluating a potential home for a rescue Toller. Some of the questions may not apply in the home you are visiting. Just use whichever ones seem best for the situation. In addition, the coordinator who asked you to do this visit may have questions and concerns that are specific to the applicant. Be sure to ask these questions, since the answers are particularly relevant to the adoption being considered.

When you have finished the visit, use the answers you jotted down as the basis for writing a report to send to the coordinator. Alternatively, you can send the checklist back with answers filled in. Do this via email, if at all possible, since it is helpful to get the home visit results added to the applicant's screener notes as soon as they are available.

Again, thank you for taking time to do this home visit. Your help has very likely made it possible for some deserving Toller to find its "forever home."

CHECKLIST FOR HOME VISITS

Your Name	
Your Area Code/Phone Number	
Your E-mail address	
Applicant's Name and Address	
Applicant's Area Code/Phone Number	
Name of Dog (if applicable)	
Date of Visit	
Time of Visit	

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Give a brief description of the applicant's neighborhood. Are they on a busy street? Are there many children around? Dogs being walked? Any dogs running loose?

APPLICANT AND FAMILY

Does the applicant seem to have a realistic idea of what life with a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever (Toller) will be like?

Is the applicant an adult of legal age?

If the applicant rents, is there written permission from the landlord for the applicant to adopt/own a dog? This is required before the adoption application is approved. A copy or the original statement of permission must be furnished to the person conducting the home visit.

Does the applicant understand that the Toller may not be sold or given away to another person, and if the adopter can no longer keep the animal, for whatever reason, it must be returned to the NSDTRC(USA) rescue program?

Does the applicant agree to the requirement to provide a properly fitting collar bearing a permanent tag with the owner's name, address and phone?

What is the adopter's ability to provide adequate exercise for the Toller?

Is the applicant aware of any unique needs the Toller he/she is being considered for might have (e.g., is the dog likely to climb fences, bolt out the door, need special medical care)?

How does the family plan to address the special needs of the dog? Discuss specifics of plan.

Is everything already in place to address the special needs or do things still need to be done? If so, when will arrangements be complete? Note: a follow-up home visit may be needed for verification.

Are all members of the household present for you to meet? List those present and specify who they are.

Does everyone appear to be informed about Tollers and in favor of the adoption? Do any family members seem overly concerned? If there are concerns that you do not feel comfortable addressing, please notify the regional coordinator.

How do the adults interact among themselves and with any children who are present?

If one person will be the primary caregiver responsible for the Toller's routine walks/exercise, what is the back-up plan if that person is out of town or ill? Is everyone in agreement with the back-up plan?

What will be the Toller's daily routine? How long will he/she be left alone? If left for long periods, what accommodations/arrangements will be in place to assure the Toller receives the needed amount of exercise, food, attention, etc.?

RESIDENT PETS

Ask to meet any pets the applicant already owns. Do they appear healthy and well cared for? (Note grooming, weight, if nails are trimmed, etc.) Are they wearing I.D. tags?

Do the dogs seem well-socialized? Responsive to commands?

How do the pets interact with each other and with family members?

If you've brought your own dog(s) along for the visit, how did the residents pets react?

Do the applicant's cats appear to be dog-savvy? Does the family have a plan to make a "safe" zone for their cat(s) and to keep the Toller away from the cat food and litter box?

Are any other "critters" (birds, hamsters, reptiles, etc.) kept where they will be safe from a Toller who might view them as "prey"? List the other critters owned by the family.

INTERIOR OF HOME

Do furnishings in the home appear reasonably Toller-proof? Describe their condition. Does the family seem comfortable with the "lived in" look that comes from having a dog in the home?

Are there items which a Toller would be likely to destroy? Be sure to point these out to the applicant.

Are there objects, plants, or chemicals which could cause harm to a Toller? Point these out also.

Ask if there are any chemicals used on the lawn, or pesticides in the house. Is the family aware that these substances can sometimes prove harmful to pets? Would the family consider alternative methods of weed-and pest-control?

How is trash handled in the home? Are wastebaskets accessible to pets?

Does the family seem willing to make changes as needed to ensure the safety of both the dog and valuable household items?

Where will the Toller stay when the family is away during the day? Does the area appear warm, clean, and free of dangerous objects? Is there a crate? Fresh water?

Does the applicant understand that Tollers can be very clever and must be closely supervised when they are loose in the house?

Which exterior doors pose a risk, in terms of a Toller's possibly escaping? Do all door latches work properly?

Are all household members aware that Tollers may bolt out through open doors, and is any plan in place to prevent this?

Where will the Toller sleep? Is the area free of drafts? Does the bedding appear clean and warm?

Will the dog have access to the basement, garage, or other storage areas? Are there any hazards in these places that would make such access unwise?

YARD AND FENCE

Is there a fenced and locked yard? Is every part of the fence in good condition? Are there any gaps, loose boards, holes, or places where a dog could dig out of the yard? Be sure to point these out.

How does the applicant plan to exercise his or her Toller? How will this plan work during the different seasons of the year?

Can the gates be locked (against children and thieves)? If the dog jumps against the gate, would it be possible for the dog to hit the latch and cause the gate to open?

Is the applicant willing to make repairs and reinforce the fence as needed?

If the dog being considered for this home has a history of fence-climbing or digging, how is the applicant planning to deal with that?

Where are the utility meters? Will someone have to come into the yard to read them? How will the family ensure their Toller's safety?

Does the yard appear reasonably clean and well-kept?

Is there adequate shade and water? Does the space appear large enough for the number of dogs who will be sharing it?

Has anything been stacked near the fence that a Toller could climb on to get out?

Do you see any signs that dogs have been tied out on a chain or otherwise neglected for long periods of time in the yard?

Does the applicant understand that the Toller must not be an "outside" dog, i.e., must live with the owner/family indoors and not be left outside for extended periods of time?

Are there flower beds, landscaping, or lawn ornaments that a dog might destroy? Make sure the applicant is aware that Tollers, like other dog breeds, may like to dig.

Are there dogs or livestock in adjacent areas? Do these animals appear to be adequately contained?

Do children play in neighboring yards? If they are likely to tease or harass a dog, the applicant may need to supervise while the Toller is outside.

Are there balconies or decks that a dog could leap off of and get hurt?

Is there a doggie door? Will the Toller have unsupervised access to the yard while there are no people home?

Do all family members understand that a Toller should not be off-leash in an unfenced area? If they have other dogs that accompany them off-leash on family outings, how will they handle their Toller?

CONCLUSIONS

Do you feel that this applicant can provide a loving home and responsible care for a rescue Toller throughout the remainder of the dog's life?

During your visit, did you notice anything "odd" or for which no adequate explanation was given (e.g., out-of-state license plates on car, "for sale" sign in yard, evasiveness on the part of the applicant)?

Are there any special needs, unusual circumstances or concerns that we should consider when placing a Toller in this home?

Would you entrust the care of your own dog(s) to this applicant?

Does this adoption "feel" right?

