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presents

Adulting 101, Independence, & You



Opportunities, Independence, & You

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Project REAL thanks the Nevada Bar Foundation & the Clark County Local Law Enforcement Advisory Committee for making this edition of *Adulthood 101, Independence & You* possible.

This print-run also includes these topic-specific sponsorships which we are incredibly grateful for

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Finally, we also wish to thank our other supporters whose contributions help to sustain this and other projects of ours.

This edition of *Adulthood 101, Independence, & You* was developed while Project REAL was hosted by
Kamer, Zucker, & Abbott | Mace J. Yampolsky Esq | The National Judicial College

We graciously thank all 3 hosts for providing us with space to work from and their ongoing support.

With support from these donors, other organizations, and individuals, Project REAL is able to provide our resources at no cost to tens of thousands of Nevadan students each year.

Adulthood 101, Independence, & You

A Guide To Navigating Life & The Law As A Newly Independent Adult

Inspired By & Adapted From

‘Now You’re 18’
A program and publication produced by
the Washoe County Bar Association

and

‘The Inside Story for Young Adults’
Produced and printed by
Project REAL

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Acknowledgement

This book is an adaptation of ‘The Inside Story for Young Adults’, a publication which was originally created by the Washoe County Bar Foundation as part of their Now You’re 18 program, then printed and produced by Project REAL with their permission.

This new publication would not be possible were it not for the work of Washoe County Bar Foundation, and Project REAL would like to thank them for their work facilitating academic success and participatory citizenship among Nevada’s newest adults

A Very Special Thank You To Our Many Fact Checkers

Additional Recognition

This publication is dedicated to the students and lawmakers that participated in the 2017 Nevada Youth Legislature. Their work on 2017’s SB108 is paving the way for standardized law education in Nevada and across the nation. For this great deed and accomplishment, we recognize & thank them with the utmost sincerity.

This guide was originally developed between May 20, 2016 and April 10, 2022. It was only completed thanks to a foundational grant from United Way of Southern Nevada. That generosity and support helped us turn six years of research and development into a vital resource that now empowers countless young adults each year.

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About Project REAL

Project REAL reduces crime, protects students' futures, and makes Nevada safer for everyone by engaging them in conversations about laws and the consequences of breaking them, and their constitutional rights and how to exercise them. This work empowers young Nevadans to create the lives they want for themselves.

Justice is rooted in knowledge, and our work brings more fairness and justice into the lives of the people we reach. That is why we ensure all of our resources are available at no cost to the schools, families, and individuals in Nevada who wish to use them.

Project REAL helps the students of Nevada to become the greatest versions of themselves with respect for the law through unique activities and educational resources that engage them in critical thinking about citizenship, selfless action, democracy, and the law.

Our program helps to ensure that Nevada is populated by residents who respect the law, contribute to their community, and work to create a world they are proud to call home. By fostering actions of mutual respect and selflessness, and by encouraging commitments to local communities, we contribute to a safer world for us all.

Our History

This book - and the many other Project REAL activities and publications that have preceded it - would not have been possible were it not for the vision, generous support, and championing of Irwin Molasky and Project REAL's other founders.

Since 2004, Project REAL has been teaching the students of Nevada about the law and their rights. Project REAL was founded to ensure that the young residents of Nevada have consistent access to informative and empowering law related education. Because of Project REAL, Nevada's students are and shall remain safer, wiser, and more informed members of the communities they live in.

Continued Support

This book is yours to keep. It's been designed specifically for young people between the ages of 18 – 25. During those years, life is going to come at you *quickly* and you'll find yourself dealing with mundane but super important stuff. The Olds and Millennials refer to this as '*adulthood*'. You might still call it that too.

Adulthood is going to get a bit exhausting.

The older you get, the more there is to do, and the more there is that you'll just be expected to know and act on. All of those new expectations? That additional weight isn't exactly easy to carry. We know. We've been there. We are STILL there, and we can relate. [That's why we're here to help!](https://projectrealnv.org/adulthood)

The team that put this together may not always be around, but Project REAL will be. While our team won't be able to directly offer legal advice or answer questions about specific legal matters, we can - and will - connect you with organizations and resources that may be able to help. If you'd like assistance finding more information about a topic in this guide, please don't hesitate to reach out. Additionally, we will provide ongoing support, videos, additional tools, and more. Follow along as this resource grows:

<https://projectrealnv.org/adulthood>

About The Law

Project REAL’s staff and volunteers worked extensively to research all of the *Adulting 101* content we created for you. We’ve ensured that the information provided herein is accurate, true, and up-to-date at the time of publication (with this third edition being finalized in April 2024). While the content will introduce you to key concepts, rights, responsibilities, and laws which you are likely to encounter as an adult, it is neither an encyclopedia nor replacement for sound legal advice. What it *has* been designed as is a starting point: a tool that can empower you if you use it.

Whether you make Nevada your home or move out of the state, be sure to research your rights and the local laws in the community you call home. This edition was written for young adults in Nevada, so some of the laws and policies we explain are likely to be different in other communities. Remaining up to date and knowledgeable of your rights will only help you in the long run, and potentially protect you from being scammed or taken advantage of.

In each state, laws can vary greatly, especially when it comes to issues like immigration, civil law (ie tenant rights), and gun rights. Should you find yourself living outside of Nevada, be sure to familiarize yourself with local laws and statutes as they may be different from the ones detailed in this manual.

About This Book

Adulting 101, Independence, & You has been designed to help you understand laws and scenarios which tend to be the greatest sources of confusion or legal challenges among 18-25 year olds. While you will have a greater chance at a successful life and a better opportunity to protect your interests if you know the basics contained in this publication, should you ever find yourself wondering ‘Is that legal?’ or ‘Could I sue that person?’, we highly advise that you consult an attorney.

This content was created by Project REAL, a nonprofit organization that serves the students of Nevada. While most companies exist to make money, nonprofits work to spend money in ways that make the world a better place. The funding for this project came from donations made by companies, government agencies, and people just like you.

We work tirelessly to put as many physical copies of this content as we can each year into the hands of Nevadans, and we do that all for free. When we run out of guides, we have other tools that help young Nevadans find and remain connected to digital editions of the content. We’re happy to do that, but we can only print and distribute a limited amount of material each year based on the volume of donations we receive.

This publication is particularly unique – we’re giving it to you yet asking you **NOT** to read it...not immediately at least! Instead, please hold on to it, and maybe tuck it away with your yearbooks. It’s yours to keep and read when you find a need for it in your life. We’ve invested a lot in making this possible. Given that, we *hope* you will treat this guide carefully and with respect while it is in your possession. If you do, we believe you will ultimately find the content inside to be highly informative and (perhaps more importantly) very rewarding: you **WILL** have an advantage over many other 18 – 25 year old young adults.

Good luck out in the world, and welcome to life as an independent adult.

Free digital copies of this guide and access to other resources are available on our website.



<https://projectrealnv.org/adulting>

This Is Not Legal Advice

This publication is intended to be informational only.
The information in this book is not intended as legal advice.

No legal advice is being given.

If you are facing legal issues, whether criminal or civil,
seek professional legal counsel to get your question answered.

This book is not a replacement for legal advice:

Instead, *Adulting 101, Independence, & You* is designed to be a first-step when readers seek out guidance when it comes to questions about everyday matters of adult life, including legal matters.

Rather than serving as an index of laws and a guide to applying them,
this content can aid the reader in understanding how laws might
apply to many different situations they may encounter
while living as successful and independent adults.

To be 100% clear:

**If you ever find yourself in a situation where your life is intersecting with the law,
we highly encourage you to seek the advice and services of a licensed and practicing attorney.**

You should also keep in mind that laws are ever-changing.
Each year many new state and federal laws are created, while some existing ones are repealed.

**Given the ever-changing landscape of laws in the United States,
we implore you to contact an attorney if you ever find yourself
with specific questions related to a legal matter in your life.**

On a final note, we are committed to maintaining this guide with up-to-date information.
We will update the digital version of this text regularly as the laws continue to change.
You can always download the most up-to-date version we have available from our website.

On our site, we've dedicated a page specific to this guide where you'll find the digital copy.
Once there, you'll also be able to access a number of other links & resources you may find helpful
That page, and all the resources it contains, can be found here:

<https://projectrealnv.org/adulting>



SECTION 8
Opportunities,
Independence, & You

ADULTHOOD: Other Benefits of Independence

Miscellanea: Tattoos, Piercings, & Other 'Wait Until You're 18' Things

Tattoos, Travels, & More

Once you're 18, there are a number of activities that - as a minor - you were supposed to have your parents' permission for. Tattoos, piercings, skydiving, and more! You CAN do all of these things without someone signing off, but should you rush into it all at once?

Fireworks and Felonies

Fireworks aren't exactly something that most people count down the days until they can access. But they can serve as a reminder about responsibility. As an adult, if you purchase fireworks that are illegal to own in a community, you can face criminal charges. Even if you use those fireworks in a place where it's legal, you can still end up in trouble.

If the fireworks you play with somehow result in an out of control fire - regardless of if they were legal - you can end up being held criminally and civilly liable. This might not sound like that big a deal, but far too many college students have found themselves having long conversations with expensive lawyers after some attempt to show off at a party got out of hand. The point is, if you're going to play with fire, at least try to be an adult about it - if something goes wrong, you'll quickly recognize that split-second decisions can have lifelong consequences.

My Body My Choice =Your Employer, Their Choice

Maybe you've been dreaming of getting some sweet ink when you finally turn 18. And we're not saying you shouldn't - most of the people who worked on this publication have ink or piercings in places other than our ears. All we want to do is invite you to consider how visible body modification can affect your job prospects.

While the world seems to have grown more accepting of tattoos and piercings since the turn of the century, there's no federal law protecting job applicants from being discriminated against because of their appearance (other than in clear and court-recognized religious circumstances).

Given that, we simply encourage you to think carefully before making any cosmetic decisions that might be difficult to cover up as you get ready to head off to college or enter the workforce.





Travel

Planning, Passports, & You: Travel as an Adult

Now that you're an adult, you're free to experience the world... well, kind of. While there are some common-sense considerations to travel, some of the things you need to know may not be as obvious.

In the United States, you are able to move between states without restriction. However you will need an acceptable form of identification: current laws state that after March 2023, all passengers traveling **domestically** (within the borders of the United States) will be required to use a REAL ID-compliant driver's license, state-issued enhanced driver's license, or another acceptable form of ID to fly within the United States.

If you want to go to another country, things are a bit more complicated. First, you'll need to get a passport. A **passport** is a form of identification that records where you've traveled while acting as evidence of the nation that legally claims responsibility for you. As alluded to in Section 5, a passport is considered an acceptable form of photo identification in the US.

With some countries, citizens of the United States only need a passport. They can show up on a flight, pass through a screening process for foreign travelers known as **going through customs**, and then begin their visit to that foreign nation. In other circumstances, countries have an extra step foreign visitors are required to take - they may require visitors to get a visa.

A **visa** is permission given to a person by a country that allows them to visit. Australia, Brazil, China, and India are a few nations that require Americans to obtain a visa before travel. Some will allow you to apply for visas online, but be prepared for the process to ask you for a lot of documents that prove your identity and your reason for going to the country.

Once you get there, you are responsible for knowing that country's laws and abiding by them. It is extremely unlikely that the United States government will be able to get you out of trouble if you accidentally break a law in a foreign country. That is why it is important to know the local laws and customs of places you intend to visit before you go.

Some nations may require you to have vaccinations against certain diseases. If you can't prove your vaccination status, some will just turn you around and send you home the same day you arrived - and they won't reimburse you for the cost of your flight to their country!

What happens if you do get into trouble though? Perhaps a friend you are traveling with gets arrested and you don't know what to do, or your passport gets stolen and you don't have any identification. In those circumstances, it's good to know how to get in touch with your country's embassy.

An **embassy** is an extension of a national government that operates inside the borders of a foreign nation. Embassies exist for a number of political reasons, but one of their purposes is to assist citizens of the nations they represent. If you'll be in a country for more than a few days or if you're visiting a place that is known to be dangerous for some reason, you should probably notify your nation's embassy of your travel plans.

There's always more you can learn. Consider checking the TSA website before booking a trip, and immediately before leaving on a trip outside of the United States: <http://tsa.gov>.



Local, National, & International Service

Volunteering

You may have had to volunteer as part of a class in school. Some college programs will require you to complete a certain amount of volunteer hours in order to receive your degree. While that's a great way to get students to serve the community, there are more benefits to volunteering than just being able to complete some requirement.

One of the most surprising benefits to volunteering is that you will be more physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy than people who do not volunteer. Research conducted on behalf of the Corporation for National & Community Service discovered that "those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer."

A survey conducted by United Healthcare and Volunteermatch.com (a website where you can find opportunities to volunteer in your community) reported even more interesting findings, including:

- More than 68% of those who volunteered in the past year report that volunteering made them feel physically healthier.
- 29% of volunteers who suffer from a chronic condition say that volunteering has helped them manage their chronic illness.
- 89% of volunteers agree that volunteering improved their sense of well-being.
- 73% of volunteers feel that volunteering lowered their stress levels.
- 92% of volunteers agree that volunteering enriches their sense of purpose in life.
- More than three-quarters of volunteers who participate in service activities through work report that they feel better about their employer because of the employer's involvement in their volunteer activities.

Those are just the health benefits you'll receive from volunteering. Another benefit you may not have known about is that volunteering can help your career. Employers view prospective employees with volunteer service on resumes and job applications as likely to be reliable and committed. The professional benefits go well beyond appearances though. If you'd like to be paid for working in a position you're not yet qualified for, finding a volunteer opportunity with similar duties is an excellent way to get the required experience. This can make the difference between getting a job you want and taking one you simply need to make enough money to survive.

Of course the greatest benefit to volunteering isn't what you get out of it, it's how the community you're serving benefits from your service and generosity. If you grew up enjoying superheroes as a kid, you probably imagined being one someday. As you've gotten older, you've come to realize that you'll never fly, turn invisible, or have the super strength to throw a car through the air or take down an evil spaceship. That doesn't mean you can't be super-heroic and help save the world though!

The narrative for most popular superheroes is that they do more than just fight villains; they inspire those around them. Don't be shy about sharing your volunteer service with the people around you. You may help them realize that if you can give your time to improve the community, perhaps they can do a little more as well. The world can already be an amazing place, but imagine living in one where everyone did something to make it better each day. Better yet, don't imagine that- get started by volunteering in your community now.

AmeriCorps

Perhaps you don't need to be 'sold' on the idea of volunteering, maybe you already give your time to causes you believe in. However, are you familiar with national service? AmeriCorps is a program that places Americans in professional positions that might otherwise be filled by staff or volunteers at organizations that serve a public benefit (like schools, government offices, or community nonprofit agencies). Participation in AmeriCorps can last a few months, a year, or two years depending on the program.

When it comes to the 'workforce', service with AmeriCorps is in a category of its own. An AmeriCorps participant is referred to as a service member: that person is not considered an employee, a volunteer, or an intern. Even though they aren't employees, they aren't left on their own financially during their service either. AmeriCorps members may spend anywhere from 20-50 hours a week in service. Obviously it would be difficult for anyone to give that kind of time and still be able to afford to live. That's why AmeriCorps members receive **stipends** - an allowance that lets them survive during their time spent serving communities.

Most AmeriCorps stipends are for an amount just at or below minimum wage (stipend amounts are determined by the area a member is serving in), but there are other ways to survive financially if you join (some are even explained in AmeriCorps training). Beyond getting to spend a year being funded by the program to improve a community, there are many benefits to serving in an AmeriCorps program (especially for young adults).

These include:

- Relocation expenses will be reimbursed for eligible members that relocate in order to serve in a position they've been accepted for.
- If you want to attend college in a state different from the one you graduated in, joining an AmeriCorps program is an excellent way to relocate and spend a year establishing residency so that you'll begin to qualify for in-state tuition!
- An end-of-service education award worth roughly \$5,000 for each full time year of service (full-time meaning at least 35 hours were served each week). This award acts as a scholarship and can be used to cover expenses like tuition and books for college. Members who serve for 2 years are eligible for one education award each year.
- While it's not true for all of them, many AmeriCorps members will end up with careers in the public benefit sector. In that case, they'll qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness to help with student debt.
- If members start serving in AmeriCorps after they've earned their degree, any eligible payments they make can be applied to the Public Service Loan forgiveness program! These members may pay as little as \$11 a month for two years on an income based repayment plan and be just 8 years away from having their student loan debt forgiven by the time they leave AmeriCorps.
- If you don't want your first job to be an entry-level position, consider that many AmeriCorps members are able to find great jobs after they complete their service terms thanks to the professional experience they gain in their programs.
- If you don't want to leave your home-state but want to take a year off to clear your head before starting college or before joining the workforce, you have one more reason to consider AmeriCorps!
- If a year or two of service sounds like too much or if you're highly motivated by travel and variety, AmeriCorps' NCCC program may be for you! NCCC has 18-24 year olds serve for 10-month service terms during which the member moves to a new site and project every few weeks. An NCC member might plant trees in a California park, build low-income housing in Washington, and conduct a homeless population count in Nevada - all over the course of just 10 months!

If you are interested in learning more about AmeriCorps, you may find links to their website in the Project REAL app, or simply <http://my.americorps.gov> to start looking for program openings.





Peace Corps

The Peace Corps is a bit like AmeriCorps, but the members are referred to as volunteers and most young adults in the program serve for 2 year commitments. The biggest difference of all is that Peace Corps members serve abroad instead of in America!

The application process is a bit more extensive for the Peace Corps. For the primary volunteer program, applicants should be ready to depart 9-12 months after they've submitted their paperwork. While many Peace Corps positions require a 4-year degree, a number of them consider other experience and a candidate's individual qualifications.

Peace Corps and AmeriCorps share the idea of improving communities by developing new programs and resources and expanding upon existing ones. With Peace Corps programs though, these can take place in communities with levels of poverty unfamiliar to most Americans. The Peace Corps requires a commitment to the mission and the ability to leave your country of origin for two years, but if you can do that, the experience and rewards are vast.

To learn more about Peace Corps, visit our app to be connected to their site or find them online at <http://peacecorps.gov>

Political Action & Civil Service

Perhaps you have a very specific goal in mind: making your community a better place through the law. While you could technically attend a protest as a toddler, once you turn 18 a world of new possibilities opens up before you. Most visible among those possibilities is the right to serve in most **public offices** - positions of authority that manage public needs. Many public offices are filled by election, so depending on what position you're interested in you may end up needing to run an election campaign! There are some restrictions for public office like Nevada's state senate candidates needing to be at least 21 years old or certain judicial positions requiring candidates to be licensed to practice law in the state. Don't let these exceptions stop you though: most local government offices filled via election allow for candidates that are 18 years old. Stories about young candidates can make national headlines, so it could be an excellent way to launch your career in politics!

American government at all levels - local, state, and federal - is meant to be representative. That means if you were to be elected to public office, your duty would be to represent the people's interest. If you want to change a law because you disagree with your community's current views on a matter, public office might not be for you. Instead, you might want to consider volunteering as an **activist** - someone who campaigns to bring about political or social change. That would involve educating the public on the issue you're passionate about in order to change minds and gain support. What if the public is on your side but you just care about the one issue? There's a political action opportunity for you, too! **Lobbying** is the act of seeking influence on an issue. Lobbying can be a volunteer activity or a career in which you focus on changing policies about a particular issue.

These are a number of other ways you might shape the world once you reach the age of majority. Donating, actively protesting, or volunteering with a political campaign are a few other ways you can create a world you wish to live in as an independent adult.

Pets

Pet Ownership

Congratulations, It's a boy, girl, fur-baby ... or maybe lizard-creature of some kind?! No matter what it turns out to be, upon turning 18 you can take on the responsibility of pet ownership. There's more to being a pet owner than 'sit, stay, go, fetch!' There's quite a bit to consider when it comes to bringing an animal into your life, including legal responsibilities.

The Benefits of Pet Ownership:*

The following statistics may sound like click-bait from Cat Fancy or Doggy Daily, but they come to you straight from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some of the following benefits are apparent once you give them a bit of thought. Others are still being studied. You don't need to know *how* pet ownership benefits you to know *that* it benefits you in these ways, though:

- Lower blood pressure
- Lower levels of anxiety
- Improved & increased immunity functions
- Reductions in reported depression levels
- Lower rates of heart disease among pet owners
- Increased levels of satisfaction in social lives
- Higher likelihood of being engaged in regular exercise
- Bigger, happier, furrier/ scallier/ more feathered family!

The Financial Costs of Pet Ownership:

If you're going to decide to become a pet owner, the first thing you should do is prepare a budget. If you're uncertain what kind of animal you'll be getting (big or small, dog or cat, high-maintenance or low-maintenance), prepare multiple budgets. Don't get lazy! Pet ownership is a lifetime investment, not a hobby you pick-up for a few weeks and then get to put away when you get bored. So, be prepared to build these costs into any budget you'll be living on for many years to come:

- Pet food
- Pet insurance premiums + copays
- Grooming expenses
- Pet-sitter/ dog-walker
- Boarding costs
- Pet deposits for homes & apartments
- Annual vaccinations and vet visits
- Medications
- Kitty litter, shavings, or poop bags
- Fines related to improper care
- Local licensing / registration fees
- Microchipping (legally required in most cities now)
- Other unexpected emergency costs

The Time & Attention Costs of Pet Ownership

When taking on a pet, you have to be ready to meet its needs. The idea of playing with a new pet certainly sounds fun, but it will need daily engagement and not just attention when you have some to spare. Cats that don't get enough attention and exercise can start to scratch and meow for hours like furry little alarm clocks. Dogs that aren't properly exercised may bark, become aggressive towards other animals or people, run in circles in confined spaces (breaking things), chew up items, show other destructive habits, and use the bathroom in inappropriate places.

These may seem like small annoyances to you, but they are also signs that your pet is unhappy, or even suffering. You might mean well, but improper pet care is cruel, even if you don't mean for it to be. Animals require time and attention in order to be not just adorable, but happy and healthy as well. Even if you just want to be an 'ok' pet owner instead of an amazing one, you'll still want to plan to set aside time for a few things:

- Training your pet
- Walking/ exercising your pet
- Playing with & socializing your pet
- Exercising your pet
- Cleaning up after your pet
- Dealing with your pet when they want to wake you up at 2:00 AM and you just got to sleep an hour ago (it will happen... a lot).





The Legal Responsibilities of Pet Ownership

Unfortunately the law is needed to ensure the safety of animals. Animals cannot speak for themselves, so the law works to represent them as best it can. The most basic of these laws affect everyone:

Registration: most pets will require some kind of local licensing or registration as well as a 'tracking' microchip. These microchips *DO NOT* have GPS in them, so there's no government conspiracy. They give off a very weak signal that can provide an identification code if the animal ever happens to get lost or stolen.

Spaying & Neutering: Laws about **spaying** and **neutering** pets (the sterilization of an animal so it cannot reproduce) are something animal owners need to be familiar with. Animal welfare agencies have been forced to **euthanize** (the painless termination of life through medical means) homeless animals each year. Euthanasia of these homeless animals is only necessary because of irresponsible pet owners. To address this problem, state and local laws prevent nearly all Nevada pets from being **unaltered** (meaning they haven't been spayed or neutered). If your pet is unaltered, you may face expensive fines and your pet may even be removed from your home.

Additional Medical Requirements: Certain vaccinations are required for household pets to prevent the spread of disease. If your pet does not have up-to-date shots, you may be fined and your pet may be removed from your home.

Neglect & Cruelty: You may really love the newest member of your family, but if your pet's needs aren't being met you could be charged with animal cruelty. In Nevada, animal cruelty charges stemming from a failure to provide basic necessities start at the misdemeanor level but can be elevated to a category C felony. You may also face additional fines and have your pet taken away temporarily or even permanently by local animal agencies. You may even be charged for housing the animal after it is taken away by authorities.

Civil & Criminal Liability: If your pet hurts someone, they may be euthanized. That's just your first problem. You may also face civil or criminal penalties depending on how injured the person was in the incident. Even if your pet hurts another animal, that pet's owner can sue you for the costs of medical care as well as for damages, pain, and suffering they experienced in whatever incident occurred.

Hoarding: Some people have the space, money, and time to have lots of different pets. Others may have the heart for many animals, but not the resources needed to allow them to live cruelty-free lives. **Animal Hoarding** is when someone takes on more pets than they have the resources or ability to care for. Hoarders are not intentionally cruel, and many suffer from forms of mental illness. They tend to think they're helping animals by taking them off the streets or out of a shelter. Unfortunately with hoarding cases, the animals may be better off with animal control. Hoarding situations can start off innocently enough with all the animals properly attended to, but over time pets can become so ill they need to be euthanized anyway. Cat hoarders may be the worst offenders, as most cats are perfectly capable of surviving outdoors in their communities. Being kept inside by hoarders is more likely to get them killed than spending a few hours wandering the neighborhood. Pro-tip: if you see a cat, leave it where it's at!

Abandoning an animal: If hoarding is one far end of the spectrum for homeless animals, abandonment is the other. An animal is **abandoned** when its former owner leaves it to find its own food, shelter, and care; and in most states it is illegal. In Nevada, a charge for abandonment of an animal can range from a misdemeanor to a felony. There are plenty of community resources where animals can be safely and legally **surrendered** (the transfer of pet ownership rights to an agent or agency) by their former owners, making abandonment of animals a completely avoidable and preventable crime. While not all of these options are ideal, the immediate removal of a domesticated pet from a predictable environment to an unpredictable one is cruel, dangerous, and more likely to result in the animal's death than anything else.

Fear Not: Animal Laws & Amnesty-Don't be afraid!

With so many laws about animals, it might seem scary to become a pet owner! If you've been saving up to get Woofie spayed and you're two months past the lawful deadline, will she be taken away when you bring her in? You haven't even begun to worry about paying the registration renewal fee for Mrs. Whiskers - does that mean you're going to get a ticket?

The reality is that animal agencies and the people that work with them want pets and their people to stay together. If you post to Facebook that you cannot afford food for your bird, that doesn't mean someone is going to show up and take away Cara The Cockatoo tomorrow. If you bring Mr. Bojangles to the local shelter that's run by the animal authorities on 'Free Spay & Neuter Day' and he is 11 months old instead of 6, that's okay. They are not going to report you, they will not take Mr. Bojangles away (except for when it's time to get him 'snipped'), and they certainly aren't going to issue you a ticket for having an unaltered animal. If your animal runs away and ends up at the local shelter, they will not accuse you of abandoning it - they might charge a fee for having housed it and fed it, but they're not going to fine you. In all cases, they will just be happy you're doing the right thing.

If you need help addressing an issue with your pet, you'll find it in many places. Sometimes that will be your local vet, other times it may be the local shelter or an animal welfare nonprofit. You might luck out and have friends or family provide assistance. The lesson to be learned here is that you shouldn't let penalties related to pet laws stop you from getting your pet 'up to code'. The laws will be enforced if you're clearly flaunting them, like if you get a notice to file proof your pet is vaccinated and ignore it for months on end. So long as you play by the rules, your love for your pet will be prioritized over any kind of penalty or fine.

Surrendering an Animal

If you realize you absolutely one-hundred percent cannot continue to care for an animal, you should certainly surrender it to an agency or rehome it (the official transfer of responsibility for a pet to a new human). That being said, you need to know that animals can have adverse reactions to being surrendered or even rehomed. A few rare lucky ones will be totally oblivious (mostly Labradors, because that's just how they are - big furry doofuses that shed, swim, bark, drool, and wag their tails like their lives depend on it).

For less fortunate pets, their reaction to a shelter environment can be problematic. If an animal becomes aggressive enough, the shelter may fear it will be a danger to the community. There are a number of circumstances where euthanasia could be the end result. And if you manage to rehome an animal instead of surrendering it to a shelter, the animal can still face a lifetime of depression and behavioral problems. Those behavioral problems may lead the animal to be passed from owner to owner until it arrives at a shelter and faces the same problems as the pets that were surrendered to the shelter directly.

Struggles and Love: Pet Ownership Resources

Life happens, and sometimes pet owners face situations where they love their pet and do not want to give it up but they cannot provide it the things it needs to live a happy and healthy life. Surrendering or rehoming a pet should always be a last resort.

Depending on the community you live in, there may be resources available. Domestic violence shelters may have access to special programs with local shelters, so that their clients can temporarily have their pets housed while they escape abusive relationships. People facing serious financial struggles might be able to access free vet care and pet food through local and national charity programs. One example of a program like that is Pets for Life, which works to keep pets with their owners by providing supplies to qualifying households.

Responsible Pet Ownership: Reflection & Review

You are taking on the responsibility of another life when you bring a pet into your home: a responsibility not to be taken lightly. Sometimes, with great responsibility comes irreplaceable benefits and unconditional love. There's a lot to think about, but plenty to gain if you're ready and able to be a responsible pet owner! Get started by running down this checklist of to-do items before you start your search:

- Budget finances for your future pet
- Budget time for your future pet
- Plan for the 'day one' medical needs of your pet
- Find a reasonable pet provider (Adopt, Don't Shop!)
- Prepare to take your pet to all appointments
- Know your local laws / ordinances about pet registration
- Notify your landlord (if renting) you'll be getting a pet
- Don't go from heartfelt to hoarder
- Be ready for a lifetime of commitment
- Be ready for a lifetime of love!

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Getting a Pet

Maybe you can spend the time but can you spend the money?

While low cost medical services are available, what happens if your new tiny kitten breaks its tiny leg by falling from the top of your refrigerator which it somehow managed to reach?

Can you afford pet-insurance and the copay, or the sudden unexpected bill?

What about food?

Forget the fancy things like *medical care* - you need to be able to afford to feed your new friend on a regular basis *and* yourself. And in case you were wondering: no, cats don't always land on their feet. And no, you cannot claim your pet as a dependent - that's tax fraud!







PROJECT REAL WILL HELP YOU... AND YOU CAN HELP US TOO!

HELPING YOU

Project REAL will not provide direct guidance or legal advice, but we will keep this guide up-to-date. As this project grows, we will also offer resources to help you navigate the topics we cover. You can find that and more at the link below.

HELPING US

If you appreciate the content in this guide (and even if you don't), we would *really* appreciate you letting us know! We've set up a survey at the same site we're providing the digital version of this guide and our updated resources. Our hope is that you'll come back every few years (between the ages of 18-25) and fill that survey out. We want to see where you are now, and where you go over the next few years! Help us find out by using the survey at the *Independence & You* page.

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