

Staged Introductions for Your New Dog

Tips for Introducing Your Foster or Adopted Dog Into Your Home

To be successful when fostering or adopting a rescue dog, time is needed to adjust to you, your family, your home, and other pets in the new environment. Your dog should be comfortable in the new environment before introducing him to new people, other dogs, new places, or taking him out on big adventures.

Every dog is unique and adjusts differently. We recommend the "Two-Week Introduction Method" which is a time frame that resonates in a dog's mind. It mimics the whelping box when first born; when the puppy's eyes are not open and he relies totally on the mother's ability to take care of him. By smelling, sensing, and listening, the puppy starts his journey into the new world. New adult dogs come into our homes the same way. This is a new journey. By giving the dog a "time out," the dog can learn his new world, his new people, and begin to relax and blossom. While we all want to run out with our new dog and show everyone our new pet. We can forget that everything is completely new to the dog and he is likely in a puppy-like state of mind. He needs to explore, learn the rules of his new life, and become comfortable with his new family and surroundings.

The voices in his new home may have different tones and pitches and maybe even accents. Cars might be new; leashes and handling might be new. The home environment might be new as well - single family home, townhome, apartment building. It can be overwhelming. The dog wonders, "Who are you? Where did you come from? Where are we going?"

What is expected of me?

It is essential to set up a stable and safe environment where we can teach the dog what is expected of him. This also gives the rescue dog a bit of time to heal; mentally and physically, in a safe and comfortable zone. He will then be better able to bond with his new family members.

When new dogs experience stress and are not given a calm environment with a period of adjustment, the only way they know how to get their point across is to act out or "misbehave." The dog may growl or become nippy out of confusion or fear. If the structure and rules of the home are not taught (ie – is he allowed on furniture or not? where does he sleep? etc...), the dog cannot be expected to know them immediately upon walking in the door.

How it works:

For the first weeks the dog will need to take in their new environment. By pushing a dog too fast and/or introducing too much to the dog, we look like we are not the leaders and the dog can feel he must defend itself. We coo, coddle, drag the dog from home to home, from person to person, and the dog has no idea who we are in relation to everyone else. To the dog, you are a stranger. This is the time for the dog to be in a calm atmosphere, getting to see YOU, meet YOU, hear and take in the new sounds and smells of your home.

- The best practice is to crate the dog in a separate room or limit him to one separate room. If this is not possible, use a baby gate to keep him in one area of the house. Doing this for a few days to a few weeks will allow the dog to get used to the sights, sounds and smells of your home without being immersed in daily life 24/7.
- Leashing is an option. This also teaches the new safe zone when the dog is around you and other humans in the home. You can leash the dog to your belt or under a piece of furniture. This also stops the dog from reacting if you have to get him off of something like the couch. You are not reaching in and grabbing onto him. Just tug gently on the leash, say "off" (or whatever command you choose to use) and there you go. No conflict!

- No intense obedience training should be done for the first two weeks -- just fun exercise. Maybe throw some toys for fun. Leash the dog if you don't have a fence outside. Use lunge lines if you have too big of a yard. If you have a large enough yard, do not leave the dog alone in the yard. Leash walking in the neighborhood works.
- No car rides – this can be too much change and stimulation. No pet stores or dog parks either. Only take the dog out if he needs to visit a veterinarian.
- No new buddies! Dog parks and meeting new friends for playdates can be overwhelming at first. Do not introduce the dog to other pets outside of your home for the first few days to a week. The time frame of this will depend on the dog.
- If you have a current dog, take things slowly. The dogs do not need to be together 24/7. For the first weeks, they can be side by side in the crates if you cannot totally separate. They should not be nose to nose for this can cause them to feel defensive. The current dog will also need time to adjust to having another dog in their territory. Allow the dogs short time periods together to play and get used to each other with breaks in between.
- Teach the dog by doing the slow introduction, that YOU are the one to look to, that you are now here for the dog! He can trust in you and look to you as his new leader. Consequently, on walks you will see the dog look to you when he identifies something that peaks his interest. He will see what your reaction is, decreasing his need to have to defend or control the environment. He has YOU. The dog now can relax and enjoy the walk more.
- Once exercise/yard time is finished, put the dog back in his crate. Let him absorb, think, and rest. If the dog goes to his crate on his own, he is telling you, "I need a time out." Allow him this time. By having the dog out for long periods of time, we are forcing the dog to keep accepting all new things. By putting the dog in his crate, we are asking him to accept a few things and then go think and absorb. When we let him out later, we can introduce a few more things so it is not overwhelming on the dog.
- Ignore bad behavior. Ignore crying and/or barking. If you run to the dog each time they bark, whine, or cry, you are teaching the dog that doing those things gets your attention. The dog must learn to be secure when you are not there. Use the leash to correct jumping, exploring counters, etc.
- Praise good behavior gently. For example, the dog is sitting nicely next to you. Touch or softly pet the dog "good boy/girl." Let them know that you appreciate GOOD behavior. This makes naughty behavior not so fun if you ignore THAT. Praise the good!

In about two weeks you will see a change in the dog and begin to see his honest and true personality. Keep in mind that every dog is an individual and may take more or less time. Giving them structure will give them the chance to be well behaved and "reboot" themselves these first few weeks. Once the adjustment time is over, dogs relax and their true personality begins to shine through! So, please, if nothing else for your new dog, give him the time to learn about you as you are learning who he is! This method works on shy dogs, confident dogs, abuse cases, dogs who were previously chained, rowdy dogs, all temperaments! He will look to you for guidance. You will gain his trust and show him, calmly and fairly, what this new world is like. He will relax and feel safe. There is no need to force the point that we are his leader. Slow easy guidance, patience, showing him what we want him to do in a new home is the best way to help the new dog adjust. We instill that we are worthy to the dog to be his leader!

So please for the sake of your new dog, slow down – WAY down. Give him a chance to show you who he can really be!

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