



SPEAKING OF DOGS

Seminars, Outreach & Rescue

I'm Home

Adopting a shelter or rescue dog can be one of the most rewarding experiences of a lifetime. Now that you are ready and have done your homework, you feel that you've covered all the bases. You have selected a dog whose profile and description matches well with your lifestyle, researched the breed or mix as best you can, spoken at great length with the shelter/rescue personnel about your chosen dog, made arrangements for training, have a crate, called your veterinarian and groomer to give them the exciting news and triple checked your fence for any escape routes. Yep, you're good to go – off to finalize your adoption.

As you are driving to pick up your new bundle of unconditional love, reality hits you smack dab in the middle of the forehead. This is not your beloved old dog, Nina, who fit like a comfy slipper and knew intuitively what you were thinking and what you were going to do next. This is not a dog who knows and understands all your neighbours, their dogs, their kids and Mr. Schaffer who walks with a cane and insists on stopping for a visit (while looming over) with Nina each time you met at the park. Heck, this dog doesn't know your house, your routine – or YOU for that matter! Panic is beginning to set in, but you realize that although you are a bit rusty, after all it's been 14 years since you've been in this position, you are committed to make things work, and work to the best of your ability! At this moment you are thinking "I wish there had been an article in Dogs, Dogs, Dogs! about bringing home a rescue/shelter dog so I would have a better idea of what and what not to expect to make this transition as easy as possible – for both of us!"

Wish and you shall receive. I've made a list of do's and don'ts that I hope will give you a good starting point, but remember that all dogs and people are different and there will be variables and situations that will require you to use your good common sense as well as your good dog sense.

LIST OF DO'S

DO - Expect 'accidents' to happen. Whether your new dog is marking her new home (yes females do this too), she is uncertain of where to access "the bathroom door" or she is just overly excited and/or stimulated (we all know that feeling!) she may have a pee or poop in the home, especially the first few days. Don't assume she is not housetrained, trying to be alpha or is not happy in her new home. New environments, especially those that have had other dogs in

them, can trigger a dog to eliminate to communicate a message such as “I’m here now too” and, although we would prefer this not to happen, it does typically only last a few days. There are preventative steps you can take: baby gate off certain areas of the home, establish an elimination routine (in fact, I often suggest to our foster parents with their new charges to have a notebook handy and jot down the times of urination and defecation so they have a self-made schedule and can refer to it), take her in and out of the same door, make use of the crate, use the attached ‘leash to waist’ technique and/or offer outdoor opportunities and praise for desired results.

DO – Expect your new dog to be restless and anxious initially. She may whine or pace and it may seem that she is always “on the go” and not settling in. This is not uncommon and generally lasts a few days to a week. Your best reaction to this is – no reaction. Remain calm and, if she is wound up, you need to keep wound down. You may want to distract her by offering a walk, a game of ball, a stuffed Kong. Praise and reinforce when she is calm and relaxed. Don’t get discouraged or frustrated; it is part of the process and she just needs a little time to realize that this is home.

DO – have your house guidelines and schedules in place. It is not fair to keep switching the ‘rules’ from one day to the next. Your new dog doesn’t know what they are and it’s easier to plan for success rather than try and wait for a misstep. For example, if you don’t want her counter-surfing, ensure there are no tempting tasties within reach or if you really don’t want her in your newly broadloomed dining room, use baby gates to block access to that one room. Just try and think if you were on a tour of an historic castle and there were no signs or barriers to prevent you from entering certain areas. You decide to sit on an 18th century loveseat and eat your lunch – who knew this could possibly be a no-no?

DO – look into joining training classes which is great for bonding and communication. A good idea is to go and watch a class or two before signing up, talk to the trainers, observe the dogs and their handlers working together and get a grasp on the methods used and techniques. Do you see happy human faces and wagging dog tails? Is this a class you would enjoy participating in? If not, keep searching. Ask shelter or rescue you adopted from for a referral if you are uncertain.

DO – offer a quiet “getaway” area in the house, whether it’s the crate with door left open, or a cozy bed in an out of the way spot

DO – ensure identification and microchip tags are securely affixed to your dog’s collar before you leave to come home from finalizing your adoption. We often recommend using a martingale collar for walking purposes; these collars are designed in such a way that makes it difficult for the dog to back out of them unlike buckle and snap-together collars.

DO – walk around your immediate neighbourhood with your dog for a quiet, relaxing bonding experience. Try and avoid high traffic areas, children’s playgrounds, off-leash dog parks and houses with dogs who may tend to lunge and bark at their fence. Give the dog time to become accustomed to all the newness around her now forever home, before introducing her to these more challenging environments.

DO – remember to praise, reward and/or reinforce behaviour that you want repeated. Learning is happening, whether you are doing a formal training session or not. Positive feedback is not only a significant motivator, it’s also a relationship and confidence builder.

DO – obtain a city/municipal license for her which can be done in person, over the phone, or online

DO – make a point of knowing where the closest Emergency Veterinary Hospital is located

DO – contact the shelter or rescue if you have follow up questions about your newly adopted dog.

LIST OF DON'TS

DON'T – invite family, friend, neighbours and co-workers over for a “welcome to my life” party. You need quiet one-on-one time to get to know each other and although you know this relationship is going to be long term, your new dog doesn't – she doesn't even know you, never mind a house full of new people. You could create a great deal of unnecessary stress and an incident could occur. Try and liken this scenario with a first date – would you have the wedding reception party the first time you met the man of your dreams?

DON'T – take your new dog to the off-leash dog park right away. You do not know how she is going to react, the whole experience could be overwhelming and frightening as well as the simple fact that she could bolt from the park and become lost. Enjoy your quiet bonding walks for a while and save the off leash park for when you know she is ready and willing – remember that not all dogs are off leash park dogs and this knowledge comes as you get to know your dog, her likes and dislikes and what she can cope with.

DON'T – grab or pull on your dog's collar. Some dogs have a defensive reaction to collar grabbing and could try and get away (potentially backing out of the collar) or snap at the hand that holds the collar. This association is often from their previous home experience where they could have been mishandled, disciplined by being dragged by the collar to the “scene of the crime” or forced into a scary situation via the collar. If you need your dog to come to you think about using a food treat as a lure, or use the leash; either looped or fastened.

DON'T – decide to have a ‘kiss party’ and stick your face close to your dogs. Remembering once again – this dog doesn't know you. How would you feel if someone you have only met once or twice in your life stuck his face in yours and declared his undying love and devotion to you and then came in for the landing (big smooch)? I don't want to even go there! So, be respectful of your dog's space and give them time to get to know and trust you.

DON'T – become frustrated or annoyed with your new dog in an effort to communicate with them. There could be numerous reasons why they are not responding to you. First and foremost, they probably don't understand what you are saying or wanting – imagine yourself in a foreign land under the wing of a non-English speaking guide. He is trying to tell you to hurry and get your bags because the boat is leaving early. He is waving his hands around, pointing to his watch and his hands are in a fist (to try and reflect the carrying of a luggage bag). You don't have any idea what he is saying and you stare blankly at your guide. He tries again, this time a few volume levels higher than before (unfortunately this happens a lot and people forget you are having trouble interpreting, and that you're not deaf) than before so now he's shouting at you. You become scared and start backing away, but the tour guide comes toward you. This scenario plays out for dogs all the time, so be aware of what might be happening by putting yourself in your dog's paws.

DON'T – insist on having obedience commands complied with. For example some shelter/rescue dogs have negative associations with certain “commands” and/or gestures. “Come here” is often one of them. Perhaps the dog has been called over and then had her face put in feces, or various other atrocities so just because a dog doesn't respond does not mean

they can't be re-trained with either new words, different body posturing and/or reward based techniques.

DON'T – immediately bathe your newly adopted dog. Although you may feel it is necessary, a bath could be a very stressful, frightening experience with which your dog now associates with you. If you notice at the time of the meet and greet that a bath or grooming may be in order, ask the shelter/rescue if it could be done prior to adoption day. That way it is done before she comes home.

DON'T - worry too much if she doesn't eat or just 'picks' at her food. This is fairly common and generally resolves within a few days. Avoid leaving food out and have scheduled feedings, that way you can monitor intake more accurately as well as establish a feeding schedule. If you have some of the food she was being fed and the shelter or rescue transition to new food (if you are switching foods) by adding to previous food over the course of about a week.

DON'T – under any circumstances leave your dog unattended even in a fenced yard. Dogs have been stolen within seconds of “popping in to local store to get milk” or to “grab a coffee” while the dog is tied outside – I can't drive this point home enough! As well, dogs left alone in fenced yards even for a moment can dig out or climb over within minutes. Leave dogs at home safe and sound inside where there is no chance of putting them at risk!

DON'T – pester your new dog while she is eating or sleeping – let sleeping dogs lie!

Hopefully these tips will help make the transition from homeless to homebound a little easier on both human and canine and launch a lasting relationship!

