

## **Welcoming a new family member!**

Everyone is so excited to give lots of love and attention to their new rescue dog or young puppy! But it's important to give them some space to settle in at their own pace. Let them ask for attention rather than thinking that they automatically want it. Too much close interaction in their brand-new environment can be overwhelming and fear inducing, despite the best intentions.

A good rule of thumb for happy interactions for everyone is to pet and stroke just three times and then pause. If they nudge your hand or step in more closely indicating interest, then you can resume. Still, do try to not get too excited when petting - especially with puppies who may still be in their mouthy stage and want to grab at you in excitement. Do your best to avoid petting right on the top of the head as many dogs find this difficult and will duck away. Stroking down the back, on their neck or chest are ways to give calm attention without triggering too much excitement or withdrawal from you.

Moving to their new home can be stressful overall, so it's important to give your new dog space and not ask too much of them in those first few days to weeks. Puppies may be leaving littermates and a familiar family setting, and this can make being a 'singleton' hard. Observe your dog for a week to several weeks - which varies by dog - and avoid actively training or expecting too much.

We often don't have a full history of the rescues we're giving a new start to. They may have been in a loving home with a family or person they were fully bonded with, but who can no longer care for them. This can mean a sad and mournful transition where they need time to "choose" us. Some rescue dogs have left a highly negative environment, and we might expect them to be happy in a good home, but they might have learned to fear situations, people or sounds. That will take time to overcome. Patience is key - it takes time to rebuild trust and confidence - it can't be rushed.

Some keys to success in transitions include providing safe spaces for your new dog that they can retreat to in order to settle. When they've gone to settle, it's important that no one, especially children, disturbs them. A crate, pen or bed in a corner are good options, letting their "people" know that they don't want to be interacted with at that time.

Managing their freedom in the home is important to avoid developing unwanted behaviours. Nervous or puppy energy can trigger digging, chewing or other unwanted behaviours. Baby gates are ideal to help keep them in an area that can be fully dog proofed - no small toys, no shoes or slippers on the ground and cords tucked safely away. Impulse control for a stressed or over excited dog can be tough for them, so managing the environment is important and will help them be successful in their new home.

Avoiding inside accidents when house training will be far simpler if your dog or pup can't wander to a far room or have easy access to rugs that can feel like grass, feeling like a safe place to do their business. By having them near family, it is easier to keep an eye on them. Sniffing, going to the exit door and restless movements may indicate the need to go outside. Keeping an eye on these cues will help avoid accidents. Set up a schedule so that they get outside frequently and reward them with praise and random treats outside when they go, so that it's clear what's expected. Praising and giving the treat inside makes it seem like it's better to come in quickly, rather than finish their business! Successful house training comes when the family anticipates and reads the dog's signals and provides frequent opportunities to be out.

Puppies need to go out quickly after waking up, eating and stimulating play. They're not as clear on the idea of housetraining, so keeping an eye on them and a schedule will reduce accidents. While most mature dogs generally don't need to go so often, they may still need to learn the new schedule. Stress might also make them need to go more often. Older dogs may be losing continence and in need of more frequent outings. If marking is a concern with male dogs, a belly band can help prevent them from leaving their scent (which is why they want to do it). A neutered dog is far less likely to 'mark', but it's also a learned behaviour which may take some time to extinguish. Distract them when they're sniffing at corners of furniture, hanging curtains and new items on the ground and then praise them for leaving them. Sometimes it can be a guest's shoes or purse that are novel and need to be marked, so keep them off the floor! This is not for life but until they've settled in the new routine.

To help reduce excitement, stress or boredom, it's good to provide chewing and licking outlets. Toys that can be stuffed with treats, chew toys, snuffle and lick mats provide acceptable and necessary stimulation. Lick mats have a calming effect and can be used with Kong stuffing, peanut butter (test in small amounts) or canned food smeared on. Snuffle mats are calming by encouraging deep breathing to find the piece of food.

Rotate toys and other interactive objects to keep them novel and more interesting – when they haven't played with something for a day or two it's far more stimulating. Squeaky and crinkly toys are often of great interest to dogs in tug or fetch games, and are good family bonding toys, but when left out for the dog all the time will often result in them being destroyed and possibly swallowed. Keep some toys in reach and others away in a basket and switch them up every couple of days to keep them novel!

The most common concern that I encounter with new dogs and pups in the home is when they are startled when sleeping or physically being moved. Please respect their space as you would other family members, so that they don't feel the need to protect themselves.

Say their name as you approach, gently pet down their back and, if you need them to move, ask them to fetch a toy or toss a small treat on the ground. This can go such a long way to building a positive and trusting relationship and is especially important to teach young children who may feel that the new puppy or dog is their play buddy like their favorite stuffed animal.



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