



Ask the trainer

When the trainer brain and dog mom brain collide

There is something very humbling about being a dog trainer with a new rescue dog.

People often assume that because I'm a trainer, bringing home a rescue dog must have been easier for me. That I would know exactly what to do and exactly how to help him settle in. But honestly? At times it was emotional, messy and eye-opening.

Duke came into my life unexpectedly. I had thought about adding another dog at some point and actually had given up on the idea of a second dog. Duke was a client's new rescue, and they decided to gift him to me. A two-year-old Border Collie/Australian Shepherd mix is not the ideal starter dog, so instead of being posted on Kijiji, he was suddenly standing in my kitchen.



That first night, neither of us slept. He paced, panted, cried, wandered the house and stared at me while I lay awake thinking, "What have I done?" And in that moment, I wasn't a trainer. I was just a person who had brought home a rescue dog and was suddenly questioning all of my life choices.

Although we were his third home, Duke is actually a really great dog. He's affectionate, social, goofy, eager to learn, great with dogs off leash and honestly just fun to live with. Most of the time, he's happy, relaxed and loving life. But like many rescue dogs, there are little "blips" that show up along the way. Little moments where you suddenly realize there's another layer underneath the surface. That's where the trainer hat versus dog mom hat really started showing up for me.

Because the trainer side of me already knew all of this. I teach decompression all the time. I talk constantly about overstimulation and how too much activity can actually create more barking, more reactivity and more difficulty settling. I already knew that less is often more.

But then the dog mom side of me would kick in.



Photo credit Arson Sefi (Mezmeriscenes) via canva.com

He's a young Border Collie mix! Surely he needs more exercise, more running, more stimulation. So I would do more.

And almost every single time, the exact opposite would happen. The barking out the windows increased. He became more hypervigilant. He had more difficulty settling and focusing. The panting would increase outside and he would start scanning more and more instead of actually engaging with me calmly.

What was interesting is that Duke wasn't outwardly reactive in the way many people picture. He wasn't lunging and barking at dogs or exploding at every trigger. In fact, most people probably would have thought he was fine.

But when my trainer hat was on, I could see it.

For the first couple of weeks, he couldn't even respond to his name outside because his brain was just trying to process everything around him. One of the clearest examples of this was the first time I brought him into a pet store. In my head, I thought, "This will be fine." Instead, it was a complete disaster. He completely lost his mind, grabbed a chew immediately and started wolfing it down right there in the store. I could see instantly that trying to take it away would likely create resource guarding, so I just let him have it, paid for it and left.

That moment told me a lot. Not that Duke was a "bad" dog, but that the outside world was still far too overwhelming for him in that moment.

Even play was interesting to watch. Duke will play with dogs and enjoys being around them, but there's often still this slight edge to him outdoors, like he's never fully able to exhale. Again, my dog mom brain would think, "But he loves to play," while my trainer brain quietly reminded me to actually look at the dog in front of me and he was a little socially awkward.

And every single time I slowed things down, things improved.

That has probably been the biggest thing Duke reinforced for me. Not taught me, because I already knew it intellectually, but solidified emotionally. Less really can be more.

I continue to focus more on helping him feel calm and regulated. We do lots of sniffing walks, exploring in calm areas and simply existing in the environment without constantly needing to accomplish something or see something new. Very early on, I started teaching him pattern games like 1-2-3 because predictability helps him tremendously. We use engage/disengage when he notices dogs, people or anything exciting in the environment. Those games help him know what to do when the world starts feeling too big.

When he stays under threshold and feels safe enough to think, everything changes. The barking decreases dramatically. Instead of spiraling at every noise outside, he might bark once and then come back to me. He settles more easily, focuses better and just seems more comfortable in the world.

That doesn't mean there aren't still things we work on. Duke is still a young herding mix and honestly, some days it feels like living with a caffeinated toddler.

For example, Duke is wonderful with dogs off leash, but I don't do leash greetings with him because I can see that close on-leash interactions create tension. We use distance instead. We move, observe and keep walking.

The same thing applies at home with Galaxy. Thankfully, she accepted Duke far more easily than I expected, but we still manage things carefully. They eat separately. Gates stay up. Bully sticks and Kongs are supervised or given separately. Could they probably handle those things together now? More than likely. But again, my trainer brain knows that management is not failure. Preventing conflict is easier than repairing it and it's only been six months.

Another interesting piece of all of this is that I had never actually lived with two dogs before. As a trainer, I help dogs coexist all the time. But emotionally living inside of it is completely different. There are moments where my dog mom brain wants them to instantly become best friends, and then my trainer brain steps back in and reminds me not to push the relationship. To let it happen organically while still providing guidance and structure.

And honestly, that approach has worked really well.

The other thing Duke has reminded me is that rescue dogs continue unfolding over time. Even months later, new little things can still pop up. Recently, we've started working on people coming through the door — specifically men entering the house, which Duke finds difficult.

I think that's important for people with rescue dogs to hear because sometimes behaviours don't appear immediately. Sometimes dogs need weeks or months before they feel safe enough to fully communicate how they feel about certain situations.

But what Duke continues to show me is that progress usually comes in very small moments. A dog settling a little sooner. One bark instead of twenty. Looking out the window and then walking away. Choosing to come back to you instead of staying stuck in the environment.

Those moments add up.

And suddenly, without even realizing it, the dog who once felt overwhelmed by everything starts looking a little more comfortable, a little safer and a little more at home.

And honestly, that's the hope I want people with rescue dogs to hold onto. It doesn't have to be perfect overnight. Sometimes the biggest transformations happen quietly, slowly and almost without you noticing.

Written by
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Andrea Dinan is a Certified Dog Behaviour Consultant and an award-winning Certified Dog Trainer.

Dogs looking for homes

Without a doubt, a dog is a real friend. Our dogs come in all shapes and sizes and they all have one thing in common — they all need loving forever homes.

Open your heart and home to a rescue dog. You'll be glad you did.

[Learn more about our adoption process](#)

Meet July's featured dog – Milo



Milo is a 10-year-old male Pekingese mix who came to us as an owner surrender due to allergies in the family. He's got a gorgeous copper and white coat. At 11 pounds, he's a little underweight, so will need some TLC to reach his ideal weight. Milo has recently been neutered and has had a dental cleaning and some tooth extractions.

Like most rescue dogs, Milo needs a bit of time and space to get used to changes. Once he feels comfortable, he's quite affectionate. And he even knows a few tricks! He's happy to show off his famous spin moves.

Milo is good with other dogs and indifferent to cats. He enjoys walking on leash and being outside. He travels well in the car, can be left for several hours on his own in the house and is not destructive. Milo is housetrained and will ask at the door to go out. He does mark a bit in new surroundings, so belly bands are recommended in the beginning.

Milo sleeps on his dog bed during the day. Occasionally he asks to be picked up to sleep on his foster's bed overnight. He can't jump onto furniture but can use stairs. He would be



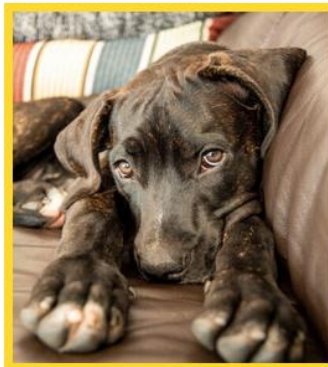
happy being the only dog or sharing a home with another dog of similar size and age. He is protective of treats or toys, so an adult home would be best for him. Milo's preferred home would have a fenced backyard or someone available for regular walks. Milo is looking forward to finding his perfect forever family to call his own.

If you're looking for an affectionate, funny and no-fuss dog, Milo may be the perfect match for you!

[Complete our adoption application](#)



Honey
Poodle (Miniature)
Small, Adult, Female



India
Mastiff/Rottweiler mix
X-Large, Adult, Female



Dream
Poodle (Toy)
Small, Senior, Female



Mona
Shepherd/Rottweiler mix
Large, Adult, Female



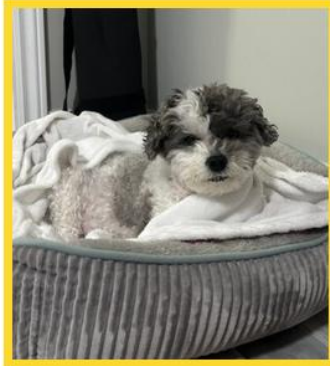
Leo
Poodle (Miniature)
Small, Adult, Male



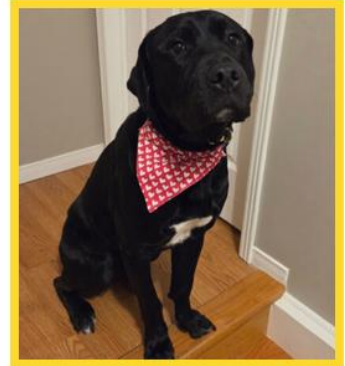
Ruby
German Shepherd
Large, Adult, Female



Sophie
Catahoula Leopard Dog mix
Medium, Adult, Female



Ivy
Shih Tzu/Poodle mix
Small, Senior, Female



Chance
Labrador Retriever/Bulldog mix
Large, Adult, Male



April
Shih Tzu
Small, Senior, Female



Cody
Jack Russell Terrier mix
Medium, Senior, Male



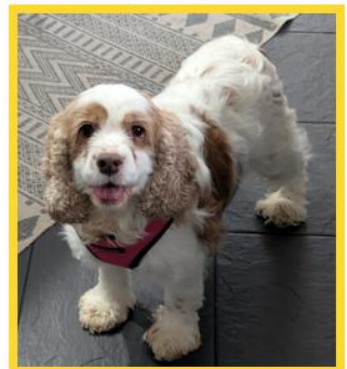
Ricky
Corgi/Hound mix
Medium, Senior, Male



Bella
Terrier/Shih Tzu mix
Small, Senior, Female



Piper
Labrador Retriever/Greyhound mix
Large, Adult, Female



Misty
Cocker Spaniel
Medium, Adult, Female

Happy tails (recent adoptions)



Aria



Jim



Leo and Millie



Polar



Poutchie

amazon wish lists

Want to help our dogs?

Consider making a donation from our Amazon wish list of priority dog supplies.

[Click here to view list](#)

Adoption update



Dear Speaking of Dogs Rescue,

Today is the three-month anniversary of when Gracie (formerly Valerie) joined her forever home. You saved this little girl from a puppy mill and she's simply amazing! Though still quite fearful, she shows a new level of confidence each day.

In her short time home, she has learned to do stairs, potty outside, stay home alone for up to four hours and respond to her new name. She loves her safe bed, blankets and pillows. She's walking on a leash now but hypervigilant of the big world around her. We are taking it slow and letting her lead the way.

This little girl is such a treasure. We celebrate little breakthroughs almost daily. A small tail wag, a soft stare directly into our eyes, the courage to explore her new world... small things to us but huge for her.

She is teaching us patience, calmness and appreciation for the many things in life we all take for granted: a home, good food, safety and a family that loves you just the way you are.

Thank you to Speaking of Dogs for rescuing her for us. And thank you to her foster mom Kathy who welcomed her into her home and got her started on this journey.

This is where she is meant to be. She's our Amazing Gracie!

Sincerely,

Cindy and Dennis Parkin

Volunteer spotlight



I am fortunate to have shared most of my adult life with dogs who once belonged to someone else. My first two dogs came from Toronto Animal Services and the OSPCA, respectively. My third dog Riley was originally someone's impulse puppy purchase when we found each other.

I am proud to say that together Riley and I have successfully fostered 35 dogs for Speaking of Dogs Rescue (SOD) over 15 years. Riley taught me a great deal about dog communication, the importance of being patient and how to help dogs socialize appropriately.

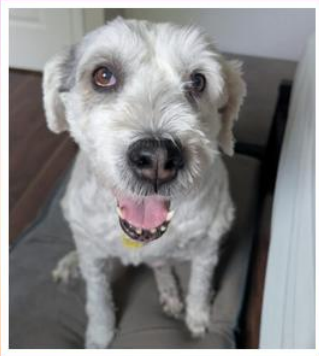
My time with Speaking of Dogs has been an important part of my life for over 20 years. During my time with SOD, I have worn multiple hats and enjoyed each new challenge from helping with events over the years (seminars, pet expos, Scotia Bank Walkathon, Woofstock, garage sales, euchre tournaments and Step Up for the Pups Walkathons) to the honour of working as a former Director for Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program.

It has been my privilege to work with the SOD team and see so many dogs receive outstanding medical care before being placed in loving forever homes. I have made many friends with people I have met during the adoption process and have been able to keep in touch with some of my former foster dogs for many years. It is wonderful to see dogs who were once trapped in puppy mills or senior dogs abandoned at shelters find loving, responsible families.

“Rescuing a dog won’t change the world, but the world will change for the dog you rescue.”

Lindsay Bauckham

In memoriam



Emma

Forever in Foster
Loved by Lisa Richter



Pappy

Adopted November 2020
Loved by Kelly and Ryley



Edward

Loved by Speaking of Dogs Rescue



Mika

Adopted May 2025
Loved by Judy Scott



Penny

Adopted December 2025
Loved by Clive and Ashley

About Speaking of Dogs

Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program is a Canadian registered charity established in the Greater Toronto area with foster homes across Ontario. Launched in 2001, we are a foster-based, all breed rescue with a focus on senior dogs. We are run solely by volunteers with a mission to help homeless dogs in need by providing shelter or sanctuary, necessary medical care, adoption and education.

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