WELCOMING HOME YOUR NEW DOG

Congratulations on your new family member!

We’re excited to help you welcome your new dog into your home. Below are some things for you to consider and think about while your new friend and family member is settling in.

THE INITIAL ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

The First Week

During the first few days of having your new dog home he or she will be in a heightened state of stress. Even if your home is an improvement over your dog’s previous surroundings, it is still unfamiliar, and therefore, will be stressful. During this adjustment period cortisol levels, or stress hormones in the body, will be high. In most cases, these stress levels can take days to weeks to level out. Opportunities to make choices, positive interactions, and predictability are key to helping your new dog feel comfortable in his or her new home.

One of the most important things to help your dog adjust during this period is to reduce stress as much as possible and focus on creating trusting relationships with you and others living in your home. This is also the time to help your new buddy figure out the routine and basic need-to-knows like where to go to the bathroom.

With so much to adjust to being in a new environment, saving non-essential experiences, such as introducing new people or animals outside of the family, or taking trips to places like pet stores, dog parks and grooming facilities is a great way to minimize unnecessary stress. Even though you may want to show off your new family member, they will thank you for waiting until after they are settled in!

Introduction to Current Pets

It is easy for animals who don’t know each other to become overwhelmed or overstimulated by initial interactions. Keeping experiences light, positive and always ending on a good note sets all animals up for successful life-long relationships.

Keeping your current animal’s routine as consistent as possible will be helpful when bringing home your new dog. Using things such as crates and baby gates to separate pets during the first few days will give everyone a chance to get to know one another before having to spend extended amounts of time together or share valuable resources, such as: water bowls, toys, human attention; and beds or resting areas. Remember that building relationships takes time so slow and steady is the key to success here.

The First Month

The first month should be spent adjusting, getting into a routine and bonding with your new family member. Make each new experience with you positive and low stress and your dog will soon learn that you are a stable, safe, predictable partner in his or her world.

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Initial Adjustment Tips

✦ Try to keep your dog on a leash when outside until you know how your dog will react to new situations and experiences.

✦ Mental enrichment will help your dog to decompress. Food puzzles are a fun and relaxing activity which can make the adjustment period less stressful. Puzzles such as Kongs, Kong Wobblers, or homemade PVC pipe puzzles are a few we love.

✦ Digestive upset due to new foods and/or stress is common. This may have a disruptive effect on your dog’s eating habits, potty habits, and general sense of comfort and well-being. If you’re concerned, consult with your veterinarian.

✦ If you see any reactivity or aggression, contact a Certified, force-free trainer as soon as possible.

TRAINING AND BEHAVIOR TIPS

Potty Training
Dogs do not generalize well, so even if your dog was potty trained in their previous home, they will likely need some additional help learning how, when, and where they go to the bathroom in their new home. Make sure that they are being monitored at all times to help them navigate around how and where to ask for potty breaks. Your dog should either be supervised, on leash, or, in a confinement area until they are potty trained to help avoid accidents. Sniffing around, inability to settle or focus, and looking for exits are all signs the dog has to go to the bathroom. Be sure to go out with your dog during the first week and give them a treat immediately once they go, then you can even follow up with playtime. Calmly interrupt any accidents, redirect them immediately outside, and clean accidents with an enzymatic cleaner, such as Nature’s Miracle.

Separation Anxiety
Remember that for the first few days your dog will be in a heightened state of stress. Be sure to give him a lot of things to do while you are gone to reduce any stress while you are away. Filling a Kong with wet/dry food mix, offering bully sticks, antler and/or long lasting chews are all great ideas. This helps your new dog associate you being gone with positive, fun activities and will help him be confident and calm when you are gone in the future.

Behavior Change
Dogs who experience stress over an extended period of time can become physically and mentally exhausted by it. This is hard to avoid in even the best shelter and foster environments, because the dog’s lives may have been suddenly altered. That exhaustion results in an overall decrease in behavior causing some dogs to appear calm in situations that they may later react to differently. A dog who didn’t make a sound on the drive home from the shelter might bark or whine on future car trips, and a dog who was previously described as low-key may become excitable on walks. As the dog begins to feel more comfortable with their new surroundings they also begin to feel more comfortable with expressing when they are afraid or upset. For now, listen to what your dog is trying to tell you, and help them out by removing them from situations which are causing fear or anxiety. Consult with a trainer to learn more about how to work through these behaviors long-term, should they come up for you.

Fear of New People/Places/Objects
It is very common for dogs to show signs of fear in a variety of scenarios from barking at people entering the front door to avoiding stairs or hardwood. Although some of these dogs may have had negative past experiences, this is not always the case. Your dog is going through so many changes all at once that something they are simply unfamiliar with may become frightening. Patience, understanding, and strong management plans are essential to helping your dog overcome these fears. When you notice that your dog has shown fear toward something, plan to pair it with something good next time they encounter it. This could mean receiving a treat, away from the door, when people enter the house or every time they choose to go near the stairs.

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LIFELONG SUCCESS

Classes
Training classes are a great way to bond with your new dog and learn new, fun behaviors and tricks together as a team. K9 Turbo Training has a host of amazing training classes available for all breeds, ages, and temperaments. Training is a great way to bond with your new dog and learn how best to communicate and work with them. If K9 Turbo Training is too far for you or you’d prefer training elsewhere, just be sure your trainer or training facility is a positive reinforcement, force-free, or science-based facility. For help choosing a trainer that’s right for you, shoot us an email. We’d be happy to help! You can also find certified trainers by searching the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers directory.

Checklist

❖ Obtain personal identification for your new dog. If your new dog gets out, they are unlikely to know how to get back home. An ID tag and microchip drastically increase the likelihood that you will be reunited.

❖ Determine dog’s long term veterinarian: Most dogs coming from breeders or rescues are fully up-to-date on veterinary care when adopted out, but it’s beneficial to get their records on file with a vet right away. This can make an emergency situation easier to deal with, and you can begin making brief “happy visits” to meet staff and get treats. Check out the directory at fearfreespots.com to see if you have a Fear Free Certified Practice near you, or ask us for a referral and we’d be happy to help!

❖ Create your dog’s safe space: Determine where your dog will be spending their time during decompression, before being introduced to other animals, or while home alone. Make this space as comfortable as possible with beds, blankets, and safe chew toys. Check that crates, gates, and doors are secure and that everything is properly sized for your dog. Remove potentially dangerous items, or anything you don’t want your dog to get into from this space.

❖ Buy or build enrichment projects: Take some time to set up mentally enriching activities for your dog to work on independently. Stuff several Kongs with wet dog food and put them in the freezer. Wrap small bunches of dry dog food in newspaper then stuff these into an empty cardboard box. By preparing these in advance you can keep your dog calm and ensure that they have appropriate outlets to decrease boredom.

❖ Introduction Plans: Create a plan and go slow with introductions to new pets, children, and first time experiences

❖ Sign up for basic training class: Help your dog to settle into their new routine by improving your communication skills and learning how to prevent and address challenges.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Need help with a behavior issue and want a quick reference guide? We’ve got loads of free resources that we’re happy to share, even if you don’t decide to train with us. If you are in need of free resources, please feel free to reach out. We’re here to support you every step of the way.