



Bringing Home a New Dog

Bringing a new dog into your home is a very exciting time, but remember that your dog is going through a transitional period. He has been separated from everything he knows and is familiar with; his new life is bound to be confusing to him at first. No matter how caring the shelter staff is, being in a shelter environment is hard on an animal and it may take him a while to feel comfortable and secure enough to relax. Some animals adapt readily to new places while others need a good deal of reassurance and understanding. As your dog becomes more settled, you will be able to watch his personality come alive and enjoy his exploration of his new home.

The Honeymoon Period

The first two to three weeks after you take your new dog home can be called the “honeymoon” period. It takes this long for most dogs to settle into a new routine, especially if there are other pets or children in the home.

One of the best ways to prepare for a new dog’s arrival in your home is to make sure that you are as prepared as possible.

Some topics to make sure that you have taken into consideration include:

Exercise Requirements. How much exercise will this dog need every day? Can you realistically fit time for this into your schedule?

Most dogs need at least sixty minutes of exercise EACH day. While this can be broken up into segments, it can be hard to find an extra hour EVERY day in an already busy schedule.

Compatibility with Children. If you have children, or if you are planning to have children, your dog must be comfortable around kids. There are many different types of dog behaviors that may not be appropriate for a home with children.

Housebreaking Status. Puppies, and some more mature dogs, need help with housebreaking. Make sure that your daily schedule will accommodate the number of outings per day that your new dog requires.

Your Neighborhood. Single-family neighborhoods, townhouse communities and apartment or condo living can all factor differently into how well a dog fits into where you are living. For example, an apartment complex usually has tight spaces (such as an elevator or stairwell). Can the dog you want to adopt handle such situations? Townhomes and some single-family homes share fence lines. Will it be important for this dog be compatible with your neighbors, their dog and/or their children?

Training Needs. If the dog you are adopting needs training (and most shelter dogs do), you should consider if the price of an obedience class or behavior consultation fits into your budget.

Some of the items on your “to-do” list before you bring your new dog home might include:

Deciding what the rules are. Can the dog get on the furniture? Whose room will he sleep in? What will his bathroom and exercise schedule be? Where will he be fed? At what time will he be fed? Dogs usually accept the new rules as part of their new environment. It is also much easier to teach a rule than to break a bad habit a few months later. The combination of praise and consistency on your part will help your dog learn the rules of his new home.

Doggie-proofing your home. This is definitely a worthwhile investment of your time. A safe environment will help to keep your dog safe as well as protect your belongings. Even the most well behaved dog will want to explore his new home. Anything on the floor should be considered fair game — be sure to put away socks, shoes, purses, kids’ toys, etc. Breakable items should be removed for the time being; some dogs’ tails can unintentionally clear off a coffee table in a matter of seconds. Keep electrical cords out of reach. Cigarette butts in an ashtray can lead to nicotine poisoning. Some plants, when eaten, can be hazardous to your dog’s health. Keep cleaning products out of reach or in a secure cabinet. Secure trash cans or put them in a locked cabinet — they are irresistible to some dogs.

Giving him a name. Most dogs will readily accept a new name, provided enough treats and good things happen when you call him by that new name. For young dogs (or dogs found as a stray), just pick a name, call your dog, and then either give him a treat or praise him or throw a toy to reward him for coming when called. Don’t call him by his new name and then discipline him or tell him “No”.

With older dogs, you may find that there are benefits to keeping the dog’s original name. It may help the pet settle in faster and help him to respond to his new family members more readily. It might give you some additional control when teaching the animal his new house rules. If you really want to change a dog’s name, we recommend finding a name which sounds similar, and following the steps for changing a younger dog’s name.

Doggie Do's (and Dont's)

By taking control and managing your dog's environment, you can set him up to be successful.

- **Teach the house rules.** You must teach your new pet what is acceptable behavior in his new home. Your idea of what acceptable behavior is may differ greatly from what your dog thinks it is, depending on what he learned in his previous home.
- **Establish a vocabulary list.** Sit down with your household members and decide what word means what. For example, will you say "sit" to your dog, or will you say "sit down?"
- **Take responsibility for your own belongings.** If you do not want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses and television remote controls out of your dog's reach.
- **Set a schedule** for housebreaking, feeding, walking, playtime and cuddling. A schedule will help your dog know what to expect and when to expect it.
- **Don't confuse your dog** by offering him shoes and socks as toys and then expect him to distinguish between his shoe and yours. Your dog's toys should be obviously different from household goods.
- **He needs to earn the right to have free run of the house.** This may be a few days (in the case of the well-behaved mature dog) or many months (if he is an adolescent or a puppy). Until he learns the house rules, confine him when you are unable to keep an eye on him.
- **Choose a "safe place"** that is dog-proof with fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also crate him as appropriate.
- **Give your dog plenty of people-time.** Your dog will not know how to behave if you do not teach him alternatives to inappropriate behavior and he cannot learn these when he is in the yard by himself.
- **If, and only if, you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior** with a loud noise, offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- **Have realistic expectations.** It is virtually inevitable that your dog at some point will chew up something you value. This is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of his reach.