

The Animal Guardian Society

# **The Animal Guardian Society (TAGS)**

## **Extended Visit**

## **Behaviour Troubleshooting Guide**

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## Introduction

Congratulations on the decision to add a TAGS rescue dog to your family. We want to offer you continued support as you continue the adoption process. This troubleshooting guide is meant to be a resource for you to help welcome your new pet into our home and to offer some advice on some of the common behaviours that many rescue dogs have. That is not to say that your new companion will display all or any of these behaviours. The information here is just a starting point. If you have any questions about your dog's behaviour, or if you need more help than this guide provides, please feel free to contact us at **905-263-8247**. We are here to help make the transition easier for both you and your new pet because we care.

## What to Expect the First Night

It is so exciting to have your new dog come into your home, and you just know that it's going to be a perfect fit, right? The excitement of a new home can be a big adjustment for your new dog, and this excitement can cause a lot of stress for the dog. A little patience and the right tools can help your dog adjust to its new environment. Many dogs will show some of the following behaviours if they are feeling stressed:

**Not be interested in food or treats** – don't worry if the dog goes for a couple of days without eating when it first comes to its new home, just as long as it is still drinking water regularly.

**Accidents in the house** – make sure to give your dog lots of opportunity to do its business outside. Take it out frequently. Realize that accidents do happen and all you can really do is clean it up quickly with a pet stain specific product (a mixture of water and white vinegar can work as well) to get rid of the odour. Scolding the dog may only increase its stress.

**Loose stool or diarrhea** – this is a common sign of stress that should get better in a couple of days. Don't make any sudden changes to the dog's diet.

Although some stress is normal while the dog gets used to its new surroundings, it can also be helpful to be able to recognize some of these signs of stress in your dog that can indicate that the dog is uncomfortable in any particular situation. Any behaviour that seems “out of place” can indicate anxiety.

- Yawning when not tired
- Licking its lips when there isn't any food around
- Scratching when not itchy
- Excessive shedding
- Barking, howling, or whining
- Excessive panting
- Shaking (like it's trying to shake off water after a bath or swim)

Identifying these signs can help you know when your dog has had too much, and it would be best to remove the dog from the situation or find other ways to help reduce the dog's stress.

## Calming Signals

When dogs communicate with each other, they use what are called *Calming Signals* to tell other dogs to relax. We, as humans, can also use these signals to communicate with our dogs to help them relax in stressful situations.

- Turning your head to the side
- Turning your body to the side or turning your back on the dog
- Yawning
- Freezing
- Walking slowly or using slow movements

## Leadership

So now you've brought home your new best friend, and you want to let him take it easy for a couple of days and not worry about the ground rules for now. That's not a problem, right? Wrong! Some people call it being a “pack leader” or being “alpha”, but what it comes down to is *leadership*. It is important that everyone in the house establishes their leadership right away. This doesn't mean being mean or harsh with your dog. It just means that you need to decide on what

the house rules are and then stick to them. Believe it or not, your dog will be happier if it knows who the boss is from the start of your relationship – they’re genetically programmed that way.

One of the easiest ways to start establishing your leadership is *hand feeding* your dog. Take part of the dog’s meal and make him work for it – just something simple like a sit, or not being grabby is all it takes. It’s good to involve kids with the hand feeding too (always supervised by an adult, of course). Controlling the food gives you a lot of power.

Another way that you can practice your leadership with your dog is to be the one who decides both when a game starts and ends. Don’t just start playing fetch because ‘Fido’ keeps dropping the ball at your feet.

## **Crate Training**

**Crating** the first night is important, but don’t be surprised if your dog whines, cries, howls, or barks. Have patience and wait it out as difficult as it might be. What usually happens is that the duration of the crying will become less and less each night. If you give in on that first night, it will be more difficult later on. Making the crate nice and comfortable for your dog can help. Put down either a nice soft blanket or a dog bed on the floor of the crate. You can even try covering the crate with a sheet to further block out visual stimulation. This makes the crate more den-like and comfortable for the dog.

Try giving the dog a treat to go into its den while you give it a command. You can even try feeding your dog in the crate so that your dog sees the crate as always a really good place to be. While crate training your dog, it is best to crate it for short periods of time while you are at home and not just when you go out or go to bed. This way, the dog will learn that the crate doesn’t always mean it is being left alone.

Keep the crate in an area of the house where the dog won’t be completely isolated from the family but that does allow for a certain amount of “quiet time”. Always wait until the dog is quiet before you let it out of the crate. If you let it out because it is barking, your dog will learn quickly that all it has to do to be let out of the crate is start barking. If you are using the crate for houstraining, make sure to get the dog outside immediately after coming out of the crate.

## Separation Anxiety

Our dogs love us, so they want to be with us all the time. Most of us, however, go off to work everyday and leave our dogs home alone. This can be a recipe for **separation anxiety**. Not all dogs experience this, but it is common in dogs that have been re-homed. Different dogs will display separation anxiety in different ways that may include the following:

- Whining, howling, barking
- Destructive chewing
- Urinating or defecating in the house
- Licking or chewing their own paws

There are some things you can do to help alleviate separation anxiety for your dog.

- ***Don't make a fuss:*** come and go from the house without making a big fuss over your dog, and don't say things like, "Mommy's going to work now, but I'll be home soon, so be a good dog," before you leave. Leaving your house should just be regular everyday behaviour that is no big deal. This is the hard part because your dog will be so happy to see you, but you need to ignore your dog for 5-10 minutes when you get home. When your dog has calmed down, you can greet him and say hello. Practice leaving for short periods of time, and build up to longer absences.
- ***Exercise:*** it sounds easy because it is. If your dog is good and tired, he'll just rest until you get home instead of releasing all of his pent up energy by being destructive.
- ***Crate train your dog:*** this can be an important step especially if your dog is a destructive chewer when left alone. Not only will the dog cause damage to your belongings, but more importantly, your dog could hurt itself or swallow something dangerous. When used properly, the crate will feel like a safe place where your dog will be comfortable awaiting your return.
- ***Distractions:*** Try leaving the TV or radio on for your dog. It can be comforting to hear human voices throughout the day. Classical music usually works well. Toys can be another good distraction for your dog. You can try stuffing a bone or a Kong with treats and peanut

butter or cheese whiz and giving this to the dog before you leave. (Put them in the freezer before hand and it will last even longer.) Also, there are a lot of toys on the market that are designed to make your dog work to get at the treats inside. These are good because they keep the dog busy and distracted from your absence. You can try other games as well such as hiding treats and toys around the house so your dog has to spend time looking around to find them. The idea is that the dog is tired after his search and will be more relaxed until you get home.

- ***Bach flower remedies:*** a mixture of these herbal remedies made from flower extracts can be helpful for some dogs to help ease their anxiety. These are usually more successful when some of the other techniques are used in conjunction with them.

## **Walking on Leash**

Everyone wants to be able to take their dog out for a walk around the neighbourhood, but walking on leash is one area where a lot of dogs need extra work. One of the most important things to remember is to not give the dog the full length of the leash because your dog only needs enough leash to be able to walk comfortably at your side. It's important to understand some of the reasons why many dogs will lunge when on leash, whether it is at people, other dogs, or other small animals like squirrels or cats.

**Prey Drive:** dogs have a natural instinct to chase small animals.

**Excitement:** some dogs will lunge and bark in an excited and playful manner because they want to play with the other dog or person it sees.

**Fear / Insecurity:** a dog that is fearful or insecure of itself has only 2 options when faced with something it views as scary: either run away from it or fight it off. If the dog is on leash, it can't run away, so the only option left is to fight, so the dog will lunge and bark.

These are all things that will need work but that can get better with proper training. In the mean time, be aware of what sets the dog off and try to make sure you aren't adding to the tension by tightening up on the leash, pulling back on the dog, or getting nervous when you pass people or

dogs on your walks. You're better off trying to distract your dog with a faster pace, a happy tone in your voice as you talk to him, or a yummy treat or toy. Your dog will have more confidence if it's clear that you're in control.

The best kind of leash to use is a 6 foot nylon or leather leash (this will be best for training classes too). Retractable leashes, while great for exercising your dog and letting him run or sniff around in the park, don't offer any control during a walk, so keep these for runs in the park, not for leash walks or training classes.

For strong pullers, we recommend the use of a **Gentle Leader**, which is a head collar. The great thing about the Gentle Leader is that it makes it so the dog *can't* pull because you now control the dog's head. To put on the Gentle Leader, hold the nose loop so that the loop is above the neck straps. Slip the loop over the dog's muzzle with the ring hanging down under the dog's chin. Take the neck straps and clasp them around the dog's neck. The neck strap should fit snugly up high on the neck just behind the ears. You shouldn't be able to fit more than 2 fingers under the neck strap. If you can, then it is too loose and it should be tightened. Don't worry, it won't choke your dog because it is sitting up high. The nose loop should be able to slide along the muzzle without being loose enough that it can slide right over the nose. It is very normal for your dog to paw at the Gentle Leader initially to try to get it off, so let your dog wear it around the house while playing or eating to help him get used to it. Make sure you take it off though if you're not there to watch him. If your dog gets it off, he may chew it.

## **Resource Guarding**

This is another issue that can be common in re-homed dogs. There is any number of things that a dog can get a hold of and decide it wants to keep. Some of the most commonly guarded items are food, bones, treats, and toys. You might be surprised at some things a dog will guard – water bottles, used tissues, socks, even people. The mentality is the same. The dog is thinking, “This is mine, and you can't have it!”

When a dog is guarding something, there are some physical signs you can learn to recognize. Usually the dog's body will be stiff, the head will be low, and the eyes will be wide. This can progress to growling, baring teeth, snapping, barking, or even biting.

Dogs will guard things from other dogs, but they will also guard things from people. It is usually best to let two dogs settle things if they are guarding things from each other. Your intervention may only make things worse. These squabbles over treats, toys, or attention, while

they can be loud and look scary, rarely escalate to a full blown fight. Guarding from people is another story. If the dog has something it shouldn't or something you want to take away from it, the best idea is to offer the dog a trade. For example, trade a treat for the ball you want to take away. The key is that what you are offering needs to be better than what the dog has. When the dog releases his precious item, pick it up, give him the trade, and tell him he's a good dog. Other steps to take include always making the dog work for anything good it's going to get. Make the dog sit or lie down before getting a cookie or an ear scratch. **Hand feeding** is an especially useful technique for dogs that guard their food because if you control the food, you are the boss in the dog's mind. Hand feeding is something that everyone in the family should be doing with the dog, including the kids (always supervise children and dogs, and use your best judgment). This will take some time, but it is something most dogs are able to work through.

## **Jumping up**

This is actually one of the easiest behaviours to correct. Dogs jump up on us because they are excited and they want our attention. Most of us want to push the dog down or tell it to get down, but for many dogs, even this negative attention from you is enough of a "reward" that the dog will only jump up again. The best way to handle a dog that jumps up is to turn your back on the dog and ignore it. Tell your guests to do the same thing. Children should be taught not to run from the dog but to also turn their back on the dog and to tuck in their hands or arms. When the dog has all four feet on the floor, you can reward the good behaviour with a treat or praise. The dog should learn quickly that he only gets the attention he wants when he doesn't jump up.

## **House Training**

Most rescue dogs are older and are already house trained, but this doesn't mean that there won't be any accidents in the house initially. Your new dog may not be sure about where to ask to go out and you may not be reading the dog's signals (every dog asks differently). The best thing to do is to treat the dog like a puppy and take it out frequently until you learn the dog's schedule, and the dog learns where it is supposed to go. Go out with the dog and make sure it has done its business. Offer a lot of praise for a job well done. Eventually you will figure out when your dog is letting you know he needs to go out.

If you are using a crate to help you train your dog, then make sure the dog goes out immediately after coming out of the crate. Again, offer lots of praise (even a treat) when the dog relieves itself in an appropriate place. The crate you use should only be big enough for the dog to stand up, turn around and lie down in. It should not be so big that the dog could mess in one end of the crate and then lie down at the other end.

If your new dog is a puppy then you should be using a crate that it can grow into and have one part of it blocked off so that it is not too big an area. A general rule of thumb for housetraining a puppy is that the dog's bladder is usually strong enough to hold it for the number of hours for the age of the puppy in months plus one. For example, a four month old puppy should be able to hold its bladder for 5 hours.

When accidents do happen, clean the spot with a pet stain specific product (a mixture of water and white vinegar can work as well) to get rid of the odour. Scolding the dog will do nothing to teach it if you don't catch the dog in the act. You can also take the cloth you use to clean the mess out to the yard and leave it in an appropriate place. Then the next time you take the dog out, take it to that spot. The smell should tell the dog that is where it should go.

## **Barking**

Dogs bark for several different reasons, and it can be a challenge to figure out just exactly *why* your dog is barking. The reason for the barking will determine what steps to take to try to control it.

**Attention** – dogs bark to try to get your attention. If you give it to them when they are barking, then they have just achieved their goal. Barking has proved an effective way to get what they want so they will do it again. To stop this kind of barking, ignore your dog while he is barking (not as easy as it sounds) and then give him attention as soon as he is quiet. This way you are not reinforcing the bad behaviour.

**Alarm** – this is the kind of barking that occurs when someone comes to the door, the dog hears a sound, or the dog sees someone walking down the street. Effectively, your dog is trying to alert you to this very important change in its environment. This is also the kind of barking that gets other dogs in the house barking. They may not know why they are barking, but they join in and bark anyway. Most people will try yelling at the dog to be

quiet, but if you do this, in your dog's mind, you have just joined in the barking as well (what joy!). To stop this kind of barking, you need to take control of the situation and let the dog know that you are in control of the situation. You can teach the dog a quiet command by rewarding quiet behaviour. Wait for the dog to be quiet then offer a reward and say "quiet."

**Boredom** – dogs will sometimes bark because they don't have anything better to do. If your dog is barking out in the yard, bring it inside. If your dog is barking out of boredom, you need to provide it with more activities and stimulation. Try going for a nice long walk or playing a game of fetch in the yard. For indoor fun, try providing a toy that will keep the dog occupied.

**Stress** – dogs can bark if they are stressed out. What you have to do is try to determine the source of the stress before you can remedy the situation. *(see section on separation anxiety)*

## **Chewing**

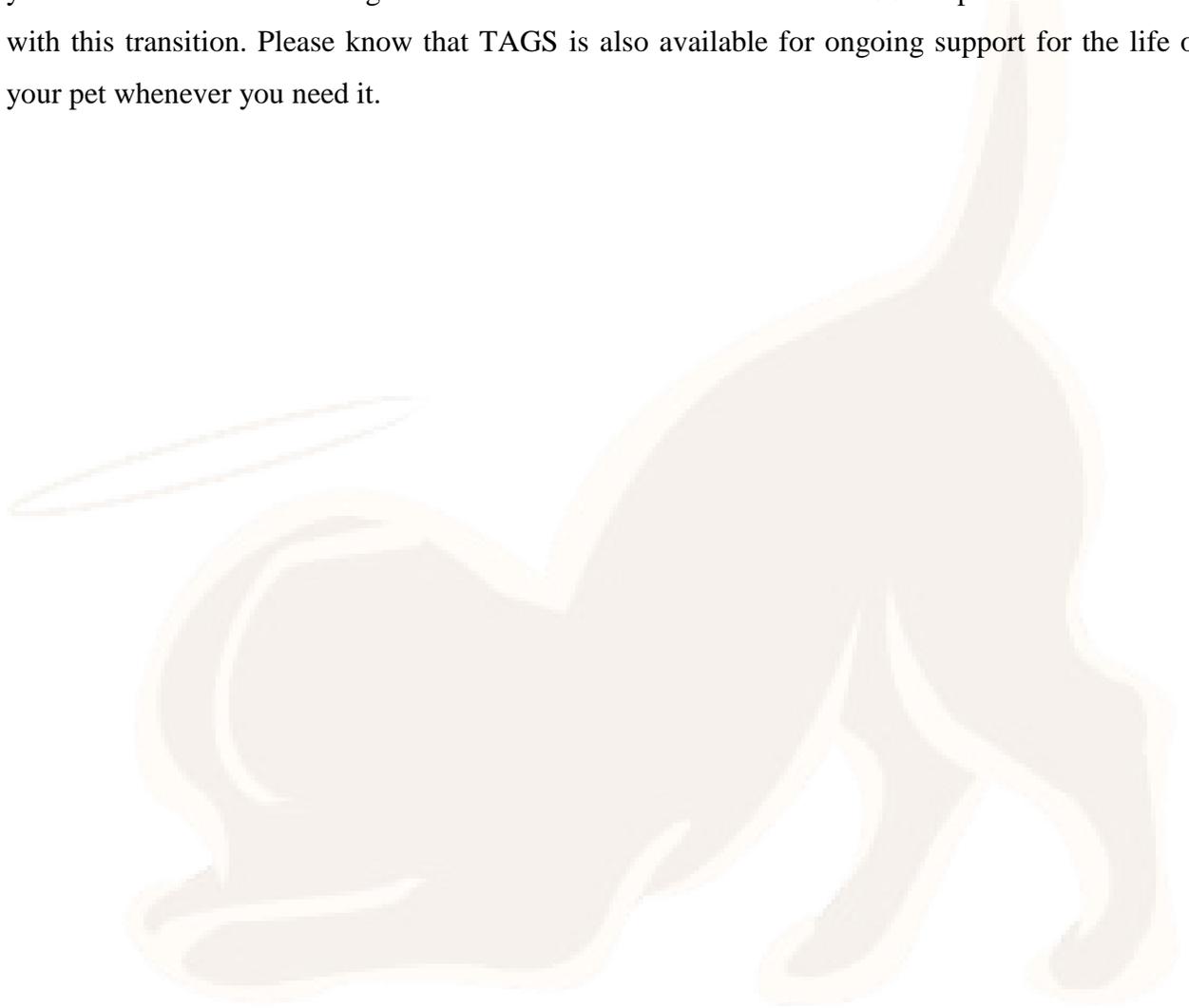
Most dogs will need to chew something. If your dog takes to chewing inappropriate items such as shoes, furniture, or the remote control for the TV, then that is a behaviour you want to stop as quickly as possible, not only for the safety of your possessions, but also for the safety of your dog. When you catch the dog chewing on something it shouldn't, quickly replace the item with something more appropriate like a nice bone or a doggy chew toy. There is any number of toys available on the market. When your dog starts chewing on his own toys, give him lots of praise.

If you come home to find something chewed, there is no point in scolding the dog because he won't know why you are so angry. Clean up the mess and vow to be more careful about what you leave out next time.

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## Contact information

If you have questions about anything covered in this guide book, or if you require more help than is included here, please call the TAGS line at **905-263-8247** or send us an e-mail at [tagsinfo@animalguardian.org](mailto:tagsinfo@animalguardian.org). We are here to help. Our goal is to help make your new pet a welcome and forever part of your family, so we want to give you whatever support we can to help you achieve this. The training classes that come included with all TAGS adoptions will also help with this transition. Please know that TAGS is also available for ongoing support for the life of your pet whenever you need it.



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