

## How to Help an Adult Dog Adjust to a New Home

For the first three days, dogs are often in a bit of shock, and don't show you too much about who they are until they've been there a few days. After three weeks, many dogs have settled and behave as though they feel like they are home now, but they really don't fit into your routine until about three months have gone by.

### Day One

- You won't know how your dog will act in the car, so confining him with a crate or a seatbelt harness is a good idea. Take someone else along to allow you to ride near the dog.
- As soon as you get home, take the dog to the area where you want him to relieve himself – always on a leash. If he does go, give him a treat and praise.
- Next, **show them the most important areas of their new home.**
- Where's the **door** to go outside to go pee? Show them the door, then take them outside on leash and give them a treat when they do their business to reward them (their house training starts today!).
- Where's their **water and food**? Give them a little bit of food when you take them there, and make sure to always have clean water available.
- Where's their **bed**? Show them their crate or dog bed. This should be a calm place where your pet can go to relax without being bothered.
- Where are their **toys**? Show them the fun things they can play with when they're bored.
- After you show them all of the coolest parts about their new home, take them to their bed and finally let them off their leash. By showing them and releasing them there, you're letting them know that that spot is "theirs!" Don't be surprised if they lay right down and ignore you, it's just them settling in and making that space their own.
- Take him out regularly for **bathroom breaks** – don't forget to reward him with a treat after he goes.
- Take him for a walk – bring treats and let him sniff the neighborhood.
- Put his bed and some toys from his previous home out.
- Your goal during his first day is to help him learn about your home and have good experiences.
- In the house, confine his space. Gate or pen him in the room where you'll be, or use a leash or long-line to keep him close. Give him some quiet time to rest and feel secure.

- Introduce the dog to household members calmly, one at a time. Wait to allow other people to visit. Supervise carefully when your dog meets children.
- Start him off where you want him to be later – put his crate or dog bed in your bedroom. Put his food and water dish someplace he'll feel safe, so you don't stimulate guarding behavior.
- Keep your new dog separate from other pets. You can introduce them outside on neutral ground while on leashes – for just a few minutes. In the house, use crates, pens, and gates to keep them apart.
- Arrange for your dog to arrive during a weekend or when you can be home for a few days. Get to know each other and spend some quality time together. For the first few weeks, you'll want to make sure you establish a routine with your dog so they know what to expect and grow to trust you, but don't rush your new dog into unfamiliar situations. It can be tempting to take them to a busy park or dog park or to bring them to the pet supply store to pick out toys, but most dogs will be overwhelmed simply by the transition to your home. So keep things as quiet and consistent as possible for the first week or more. Feed and walk your dog, and come and go from work around the same times each day.
- Assume your new dog is not house-trained and work from there. Be consistent and maintain a routine. Bear in mind that many house-trained dogs might initially eliminate in your home while they get used to a new environment and routine; you can prevent this by taking them out every few hours.

### **Orientation Period**

- Continue a daily routine. Dogs are creatures of habit, and they're most relaxed when they know what to expect of you and what you expect of them.
- Keep the dog on the same diet for at least two weeks. If you want to switch foods, do it gradually, mixing the old food with the new one.
- Reinforce positive behaviors. When your new dog does something you approve of, reward with praise and treats.
- Be patient with housetraining, and treat the dog the way you would a puppy – keeping an eye on him whenever he's not confined and giving him frequent walks outside. Just because he was housetrained somewhere else doesn't mean he understands how that works at your house.
- Visit your veterinarian. The first visit should be a greet and treat to get him comfortable.
- Stay calm and patient, warm and welcoming. A dog who's anxious and insecure in a new environment can take months to show trust and affection.

- Continue introducing your new dog to your other dog gradually. Take them on a walk together. Keep their food dishes, toys, and treats separate.
- Don't take your dog many other places until he's had a chance to adjust to the new surroundings. If you have to go out, leave and return calmly to prevent separation anxiety.

### **Keep It Intimate**

Let's not have a welcome party, okay? As much as you want to introduce them to all of your family and friends, this can be super overwhelming for a new pup, who's now in a new place with new people. **Give them a couple of days to settle** and see how they're doing before introducing them to anyone else.

When you do introduce them to your friends and family, **have the greeting space be outdoors**. It gives them room to get excited and wander around, plus there's less crowding. They'll have a chance to approach, sniff and initiate the interaction with them, which puts less stress on your pup and helps eliminate any anxiety.

### **Remember To Give Them Down-Time!**

It's been an exciting day for your new dog: new people, new places, pretty much new everything! They'll need time to **rest and recharge**, so give them the opportunity to do so. Let them settle and continue to keep an eye on them while they get used to their new surroundings.

### **Can I let my dog sleep in my bed with me?**

Did you know that about one half of pet parents share the bed or bedroom with their pet?

I get it, of course you want to snuggle up with your new best friend. But it might be a good idea to hold off on having them sleep in bed with you right away.

While they're settling in, you want **clear boundaries** on which spaces are theirs, and which spaces are yours (and they need an invitation to enter). Having them sleep in their bed for the first little while will help them learn that their bed is their safe space, and that your bed is your safe space. Once they're comfortable in their new home and have started to learn the rules and boundaries, you can start inviting them up onto the bed for a cuddle if you'd like.

## **What if I have other pets already? How do I introduce a my new dog to them?**

You want to make this **as stress-free as possible**, so first, make sure you have at least a weekend free so you can supervise them. When you're first introducing them to a current dog, choose a **neutral location** (somewhere that's not your house or backyard). You want to have an adult for each dog and to keep them on their leashes so you still have control (but not too tightly, so they don't feel restrained).

I'd recommend having one person walk your current dog and have the other person slowly catch up to them with the new dog. Then walk together (giving the dogs room between them) until you get somewhere where they can get to know each other a bit more. If they start giving off positive vibes (wiggling, tail wagging, any friendly cues), let them off their leashes so they can interact with each other more fully. Always look for body language that shows the dogs are uncomfortable (tail between the legs, cowering down with ears back, rigid body, etc). If any of those signs show up, separate the dogs and give them some space.

Once that's gone well, you can bring them inside, but make sure you do it in a quick manner, so that one dog doesn't react to the other dog entering. Make sure there's plenty of toys, space and a separate food and water bowl for them both (I'd recommend feeding them separately at first). Then keep supervising them!

Try not to give any high reward treats right away (bones, rawhide, pigs' ears) and if your current dog isn't allowed them because they get possessive, that should be a rule for your new dog as well.

It's really all about **keeping things as calm as possible**, and not changing any of the normal activities of your current dog. The new dog doesn't know what the rules and habits are in your household, so they can adapt to what your current dog is used to.

For cats, it's about making sure your cat has a place to escape and can get to everywhere they normally would (food, water, litter box and relaxation spots). Keep the door to the cat's space closed, so the dog and cat can't see each other but can sniff each other under the door. If that goes ok, open up the door but block it off with a baby gate. If that goes ok, remove the baby gate. The cat will most likely observe the dog and then interact with them when they feel like it, but just keep an eye on the new dog so that your cat doesn't get too stressed. If you're finding your new dog won't leave the cat alone (they're probably really excited!), take the dog out for a walk so they can burn off some energy, put the baby gate back up, and then relax at home.

If the dog displays behavior issues you're not sure how to deal with, check with an animal behaviorist.

Beware of the escapists who rush the door whenever someone enters. Keep the dog attached to you, confined, or supervised at all times. Register your contact information with his microchip number.

## **Bottom Line**

Give it time. Remember, even if you're doing everything right, a new adult dog may take a while to feel at home. But it's worth the wait.

Be patient, and use the following tips to help your pet adjust to the "new normal" and build a trusting bond with you.

When you do leave home, consider leaving your dog with an enrichment item, such as a stuffed treat toy or puzzle food bowl.

## **Consider a crate**

A crate may look to you like the canine equivalent of a jail cell, but to your dog, who instinctively likes to den, it can be a room of their own and can make crate training easier in some cases. The crate should be roomy enough to allow your dog to stand up, turn around and sit comfortably in normal posture.

## **Join a training class**

Dogs want to make you happy! Use calm, firm, clear cues (a single, strong "no," for example) immediately after they do something you'd like to correct or, better yet, reward them with praise, pets or treats immediately after they do something you like! It's much easier to encourage your dog to do things you like than to stop them from doing things you don't. Positive reinforcement training will also help you and your pet form a positive relationship. Consider signing up for an in-person or virtual dog obedience class or learning about positive dog training through online videos or books from your local library.

## **Let the games begin**

Dogs need plenty of playtime and exercise for their mental and physical health. That means you should plan games and exercise for your pet, from long runs, walks or hikes with larger dogs to a game of fetch with even the smallest dogs. Consider working with your dog to learn tricks—no dog is too old for new tricks!—and turning mealtimes into games by spreading wet food on a licking mat or spreading kibble on a snuffle mat (see below). Remember that a tired dog is a good dog: Dogs who are mentally and physically tired are much less likely to engage in boredom behaviors such as chewing or barking.

### Create a movable feast

Make mealtimes a (supervised) puzzle for animals' mental and physical enrichment.



#### HIDE AND SEEK FEEDER

Supplies: Toilet paper roll; newspaper.

Instructions: Stuff toilet paper roll with kibble. Close off each side with a ball of newspaper.



#### SNUFFLE MAT

Supplies: Rubber sink or door mat with holes; old, clean fabric; scissors.

Instructions: Cut fabric into strips 1-inch wide and 8- to 10-inches long. Push each fabric strip through adjacent holes in the back of the mat until the holes are filled. Flip the mat over and tie each fabric strip into a knot. Hide kibble in the mat's folds.



#### ROLLING PUZZLE FEEDER

Supplies: Old tennis ball or plastic water bottle with cap; utility knife.

Instructions: Cut a half-inch hole in the side of the tennis ball or water bottle. Fill with kibble or, for dogs, a mix of kibble, frozen peas or chopped apple and a few small, high-value training treats.

### **How long will it take for my rescue dog to settle in?**

When you're bringing home a new dog, there's the **3-3-3 rule**. The **first 3 days** is almost a "detox period" where they get used to their surroundings and living with new people. They're figuring things out and may not be fully comfortable being themselves. It can really be overwhelming!

The **first 3 weeks** are where they start to settle in and feel more comfortable. Here's where they start getting into a routine, let their guard down a little and show their personality! After **3 months**, they'll finally be comfortable in their new home and will have gained a new trust with their family.

This is quite general (as all pups are different), but it's a good timeline to go off of when introducing a new dog to your home. Some take longer, and some get comfortable more quickly! So long as you try to make the transition as **relaxing and stress-free** as possible, after a few months, you'll have a happy new member of your family!

Also remember, rescue dogs will often start to become a bit rebellious as they settle in. This isn't a bad sign though, as it means they're starting to feel comfortable and are testing their boundaries. Just keep implementing the rules you've set and they'll soon learn their place!

### **Patience is key**

Finally, remember to temper your expectations. Life with you is a different experience for your new companion, so give them time to adjust. You'll soon find out that you've made a friend for life. Don't forget to reach out for help if you're struggling with a behavior. The shelter or rescue where you adopted or the responsible breeder you purchased from can offer tips on basic behavioral challenges or refer you to a certified trainer if necessary.

No one will ever greet you with as much enthusiasm or provide you with as much unqualified love and loyalty as your dog will. Be patient, and you will be amply rewarded.