

Every Dog is an Individual

HEY!!!!!!For everybody in the back !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Every Dog is an Individual

For [fearful dogs](#) or those stressed in the shelter environment, it could take a few weeks or months for them to start feeling comfortable. Robust puppies who are appropriately socialized with a reputable rescue might only take a few days. They're all unique, of course, but it's unrealistic to expect any dog to arrive instantly well-adjusted and impeccably behaved.

Set Your Dog up for Success and Take it Slow

It's tempting, [especially for excited kids](#), to try to hug and play with a new dog immediately. But, as Angilly explains, "while [owners] might have the best intentions, new dogs have no idea where they are, who they're with, or what is happening, and it takes time to build a positive relationship." She goes on to point out that, "the more patient a [owner] is, and the more choice a dog is given over seemingly simple things, the faster trust will build." This includes basic interactions, like petting. There are caveats, though, when it comes to decompression. For example, puppies have a [critical sensitive socialization period](#) from around three to 14 weeks of age. They're like little sponges, and the experiences they have during this time can greatly influence their future behavior. Gradual introductions to new people and stimuli are still important.

Stick to a Routine

Predictability is reassuring for dogs, particularly if they're nervous. "A routine and quiet atmosphere are essential when first taking a dog home, generally for at least a few weeks," explains Angilly. Even well-bred puppies will have gone through a major transition, leaving everything and everyone they've ever known. This period could be even more unsettling for rescue dogs. "Some have come from multiple shelters and foster homes, have had long transport rides, and have received necessary, but likely stressful, medical care and behavior evaluations," says Angilly. "This can understandably cause a great deal of stress for even the most well-adjusted dog."

A simple and [consistent schedule](#) can help prevent trigger stacking, which Angilly explains is “a harmful accumulation of stress from multiple stimuli that can result in difficulty coping and exaggerated stress responses.” Consider creating a routine for things like feeding times, toilet breaks.

How to Recognize the Signs of Stress

Understanding your dog’s body language, recognizing signs of stress, and listening to what they’re trying to tell you are all key. You can prevent anxiety-inducing situations and work on building positive associations instead.

Some [common signs of stress](#) include excessive panting, pacing, tucking the ears or tail, licking the lips, yawning, freezing, or crouching.

Growling is another common sign a dog is feeling uncomfortable or threatened. Owners often panic when this occurs and punish the behavior. But as Angilly points out, this should be considered a positive thing because it’s a dog’s way of communicating and trying not to bite.

“Punishing [this behavior] may create a dog that isn’t only more worried about the [owner] or the trigger that caused them to growl, but one that doesn’t give any warnings prior to biting,” she explains.

A simple and [consistent schedule](#) can help prevent trigger stacking, which Angilly explains is “a harmful accumulation of stress from multiple stimuli that can result in difficulty coping and exaggerated stress responses.” Consider creating a routine for things like feeding times, toilet breaks, naps, training sessions, and playtime.

Offer a Safe Space

Always provide a quiet space your dog can choose to retreat to. Angilly refers to this as a 'Zen Zone', and this is different for every dog. "Some dogs like enclosed spaces and crates, while others might prefer a spot under a table, or in a bedroom. It may take a few weeks for an [owner] to determine where their dog is most comfortable," says Angilly. She emphasizes a golden rule: "Their safe space should be honored as a place they can always retreat to when they want to get away from family activity and not be bothered, and [this includes petting](#)."

Tips for Building a Strong Bond

As well as ensuring interactions are on your dog's terms and not forced, there are lots of other simple ways you can help them to feel relaxed around you.

Begin with simply spending quiet time in each other's company. When they're ready and looking for it, offer them affection, food rewards, and calm play sessions.

When it comes to training, start things off indoors and keep sessions short, fun, and, above all, positive. Using food, toys, and praise are great ways to build confidence, maintain motivation, and [clearly reward desirable behaviors](#).

Studies show that environmental [enrichment can be an effective stress-reliever](#) and confidence booster for dogs. Treat-dispensing toys and nosework activities are often particularly beneficial.

Once your dog is comfortable, getting out on [slow, sniffy, quiet walks](#) is also often a beneficial decompression tool. You can use a long line attached to a well-fitting harness to allow some freedom to explore.

"Giving dogs more choices and a sense of [control] in their lives is one of the most important things we can do for their well-being," Angilly says. And this is especially true when supporting them through the decompression period.

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