



# Foster Care Guide

## Jack Jack's Pack Foster Care Guide

First things first – **thank you**. What you're doing matters more than we can put into words. These dogs came off the streets of Central Texas, many of them dumped, injured, or starving. Some of them have never known a safe place to sleep. You're giving them that. And because of you, we can save more of them.

This guide will walk you through everything you need to know to care for your foster dog. Read it, save it, refer back to it. And when in doubt, reach out – we're always here.

### Before They Come Home

#### Set Up a Space First

Street dogs have lived in chaos. Your home – even a quiet one – is going to be overwhelming at first. Before your foster arrives, set up a dedicated space just for them. A small room or sectioned-off area works great. It should have their crate, food and water, and a soft place to rest. Think of it as a decompression zone. They don't need the run of the house right away – they need a corner of the world that feels predictable and safe.

Foster dogs must live indoors. A backyard or garage is not an option. These babies have already been outside long enough.

#### Dog-Proof Your Space

Street dogs are resourceful – they've had to be. Before they arrive, do a sweep of wherever they'll be spending time:

- Trash cans need lids or need to be tucked away entirely (including bathroom bins)
- Keep all food, medications, and chemicals out of reach
- Move anything valuable or fragile
- Toilet lids closed, always

- **Houseplants out of reach – some are toxic**

Don't underestimate them. A dog who survived on the streets has figured out how to get into things.

## **What You'll Need**

We'll do our best to supply what we can, but here's the basic list:

- **Food and water bowls (stainless steel or ceramic)**
  - **Quality dry dog food**
  - **A properly fitted collar with an ID tag and a leash – even microchipped dogs need tags**
  - **A crate (big enough to stand and turn around in, not much bigger)**
  - **Soft bedding – old towels and blankets work perfectly**
  - **Dog treats for training and bonding**
  - **Durable toys appropriate for the dog's size**
  - **A baby gate to block off areas of your home**
  - **Enzymatic cleaner like Nature's Miracle (trust us on this one)**
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## **Bringing Them Home**

### **The First Few Days Are the Hardest**

Some of our street dogs will walk into your home and immediately start exploring like they own the place. Others will flatten themselves under the bed and not come out for two days. Both are completely normal. Don't force it. Don't flood them with guests or new experiences. Just let them breathe.

Keep introductions to your immediate family only for the first couple of weeks. The smells, sounds, and sights of a home are a lot to take in when you've been living outside.

### **If You Have Dogs at Home**

Introduce your personal dogs to your foster one at a time in the backyard, with everyone on leash. Let them sniff and get acquainted with enough space between them to feel comfortable – don't rush the first meeting. We don't take our foster dogs out for walks beyond a fenced yard for the first several weeks. Street dogs are unpredictable in new environments and many haven't been leash trained, so keeping introductions close to home protects everyone.

Once inside, keep high-value items like food bowls, chews, and favorite toys separated so there's nothing to fight over. Always feed them in separate spaces.

Don't leave your foster unsupervised with your personal dogs until you're confident they're comfortable together.

## If You Have Cats

*We will cat test our dogs before placing them in a home with a cat.* Start introductions by keeping them completely separated. Let them smell each other under a door for a week or two before any face-to-face introduction. When you do introduce them, keep the foster on leash and let the cat set the pace. Never leave them unsupervised together.

## If You Have Kids

Supervise all interactions between your children and your foster dog. Remind kids to leave the dog alone while eating, sleeping, or chewing. No teasing, no chasing, no taking toys away. Some of these dogs have been through trauma and even the gentlest dog can react if startled. Young children should not walk the foster dog alone.

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## Daily Care

### Feeding

Feed quality dry dog food twice a day based on the dog's size and age. Fresh water should always be available. Feel free to add dog-safe fresh fruit and vegetable toppers right from the start – things like blueberries, carrots, or cucumber are a healthy and tasty addition that most dogs love.

That said – don't be surprised if your foster dog turns their nose up at kibble entirely. A lot of our street dogs have been surviving on whatever they could find: old hamburgers, scraps, whatever was available. A bowl of dry dog food can be genuinely confusing to them at first.

If they're refusing to eat, don't panic and don't force it – reach out to us. We'll problem solve together. We might have to start simple, with roasted or broiled chicken, but we'll meet them where they are.

If your foster is dealing with an upset stomach or loose stool, a spoonful of plain canned pumpkin mixed into their food works wonders for settling things down.

Treats are great for bonding and training. Just give them in the foster dog's own space, away from other animals.

### Building a Routine

These dogs have had no routine. No predictable meals, no reliable shelter, no one they could count on. The most powerful thing you can do early on is simply be consistent. Same feeding times. Same walk times. Same potty schedule. Routine tells a dog: *this place is safe, this person is safe, I know what's coming next.* That's everything to a dog who's had nothing.

Pay attention to their appetite and energy levels daily. If something seems off, write it down. Changes in eating or activity are often the first signs that something's medically wrong.

## House Training

Most of our dogs haven't been inside a home consistently, or at all, so don't expect perfection. Take them outside to potty, especially first thing in the morning, after meals, and before bed. Watch for cues – sniffing the ground, circling, heading toward the door.

If there's an accident inside, clean it up and move on. Don't punish them. Punishment doesn't teach a dog where to go – it just teaches them to fear you. These dogs need to trust you.

## Giving Them Their Own Space

Street dogs often don't do well with crates – and that makes sense. A dog who's lived outside and fought for their freedom doesn't always take kindly to being enclosed. We don't require crate training, and we'd never want you to force something that causes a dog more stress.

What we do ask is that your foster has a dedicated space that's theirs. A corner of a room, a dog bed tucked away from the household traffic, a spot behind a baby gate – anything that gives them somewhere to land that feels predictable and safe. Their own space, their own smell, their own little piece of the world.

For a dog who's never had that before, it's more powerful than you might think.

## Exercise and Mental Stimulation

For the first several weeks, keep exercise close to home – your backyard is your best friend right now. Walk them around the yard on leash, let them sniff and explore at their own pace, and get in some free play out there together. For a dog who's been surviving on the streets, a safe enclosed yard is genuinely enriching – there's so much to smell and discover.

**Never leave your foster dog unattended in the backyard.** Even a fenced yard is not a guarantee. These dogs are resourceful survivors – they will find a way under a fence, over a fence, or through a gap you didn't even know was there. All outdoor time should have eyes on them, always.

Once they've settled in and you have a better read on them, we'll talk through next steps for getting them out into the wider world. But there's no rush. The backyard is plenty for now.

Aim for at least two 30-minute walks or play sessions per day, adjusted for the dog's age and energy level. Try different toys to see what they respond to – balls, rope toys, squeaky toys. Food-dispensing puzzle toys like Kongs are great for burning mental energy and keeping them busy when you can't be right there with them.

Discourage mouthing and rough play with your hands – it's a hard habit for adopters to undo later.

## Grooming

Bathe your foster as needed, brush regularly if they have longer coats, and keep an eye on their nails. Reach out to us if you think they need professional grooming.

## Safety

- **Foster dogs live indoors only**
  - **Prevent door darting with baby gates and using the garage if you have one**
  - **Always supervise them outside, even in a fenced yard**
  - **Don't take our foster dogs out for walks beyond a fenced yard for the first several weeks. Many haven't been leash trained, so keeping introductions close to home protects everyone.**
  - **Keep them on leash at all times during walks — no off-leash dog parks**
  - **No riding in the bed of a pickup truck**
  - **If you travel and can't take them, contact us in advance so we can arrange care — you cannot leave them with an unsanctioned pet sitter**
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## Medical Care

When you get your foster dog, we'll go over their medical records and give you a rundown on any upcoming vaccine dates or known health needs. All vet care goes through us — please don't take your foster to a vet without contacting us first, or you may be responsible for the cost.

If your foster dog needs medication, we'll walk you through how to give it. Don't stop medications early, even if they seem fine.

### Signs to Watch For

Street dogs are tough — they've learned to hide when they're hurting. Keep a close eye on:

**Not eating** — Stress can cause a dog to skip a meal, but if they haven't eaten after 24 hours, contact us.

**Diarrhea** — Soft stool in the first couple of days is normal (stress + diet change). Liquid or bloody stool needs to be reported right away.

**Coughing or nasal discharge** — Common in dogs who've been in the shelter system. Let us know and we'll determine if a vet visit is needed.

**Eye discharge** — A little crust in the morning is normal. Yellow or green discharge, swelling, or difficulty opening the eyes needs attention.

**Lethargy** — A tired dog is normal. A dog who can't be roused or is too weak to stand is an emergency.

**Hair loss** — Patchy hair loss can indicate mange, ringworm, or skin infections. Let us know right away.

**Vomiting** – Once or twice might be nothing. Two or more times in a day, contact us.

**Straining to urinate** – If they haven't urinated in 24 hours or are crying when they try to go, that's urgent.

## What Counts as an Emergency

Apply the same standard you'd use for a person – if you'd call 911, treat it as an emergency:

- Labored or stopped breathing
- Bloody diarrhea and vomiting together (possible parvovirus)
- Unconscious or can't be woken
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones or severe trauma
- Bleeding that won't stop
- Extreme weakness or unable to stand

Contact us immediately in any of these situations.

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## Training

### Positive Reinforcement Only

These dogs have already been through enough. What works – the only thing that works long-term – is positive reinforcement. Reward what you want to see more of. Redirect or ignore what you don't. Punishment doesn't eliminate bad behavior; it just creates fear, and a fearful street dog is a much harder dog to rehabilitate.

Every person in your household needs to be on the same page about the house rules. Consistency is everything.

### If It's Not Working Out

If a placement isn't working, tell us. We'd rather know early so we can support you and find a solution than have you suffer through it alone. We'll figure it out together.

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## Helping Them Find Their Home

As you get to know your foster dog, share everything with us – their quirks, what makes them light up, how they are with other dogs, what toys they love. That information goes into their bio and helps the right family find them faster.

Photos help enormously. Candid shots of them living their life in your home – sleeping on their bed, playing in the yard, just being a dog – are worth more than any posed photo. When you can, shoot in portrait mode on your phone and take advantage of natural light. A spot by a window or outside in soft outdoor light can make even a scruffy street dog look like the

superstar they are. Good photos tell a story and help the right family fall in love before they've even met them. Send them our way.

## **The Goodbye**

Yes, it's hard. It might be the hardest part. But every time you say goodbye to a foster dog who found their family, you free up a spot for the next one still out there on the streets of Central Texas. That's the job. And you're doing it because you believe, like we do, that every single one of these babies deserves a chance.

Jack-Jack led us to this. And now every dog we save is a piece of that legacy.

**Thank you for being part of the Pack. 🐾**

— *The Jack Jack's Pack Team*

*Questions? Concerns? A dog doing something weird at 2am? Reach out. We're here.*