



New Dog, New Home – What to expect the first few days

Congratulations on the adoption of your dog! The following hints should be useful to help transition your new adopted shelter dog into your home.

When you arrive home

Your new friend will be excited and most likely a little anxious about his new home. This stress can take the form of panting and pacing; housetraining accidents; excessive chewing; and/or gastric upset in the form of vomiting and diarrhea or loose stools. Don't worry if your dog suddenly seems a little "homesick" or nervous, he just isn't sure what is going to happen to him next. He is coming from a noisy kennel environment at the shelter and he is being uprooted again. He may feel like a guest in your home, asking himself am I allowed on the furniture? How do I tell them I need to go out (and which door)? Am I allowed to chew this? It is very confusing for him in the beginning.

In addition, before you bring your new dog inside, it is best to "dog proof" your home. Don't leave items out within his reach for him to chew. Pick up your leather shoes and move collectibles out of reach. Have plenty of appropriate toys available for him. Set him up for success. Until he has learned what behavior is appropriate, redirect him and show him what is appropriate rather than punishing him. You don't want to damage your relationship from the beginning. Remember, he doesn't know what your expectations are until you teach him.

When you bring your new dog home, be prepared to leash walk him (even in a fenced yard) outside for at least 10-15 minutes or until he relieves himself. Let him get the "lay of the land" by sniffing and becoming acquainted with all the smells associated with your yard. The combination of the car ride home, coupled with all the excitement of a new family and home, may cause him to have to relieve himself more often. So give him plenty of opportunities in the beginning. If you have a special place in your yard you wish him to use for urination and elimination, encourage him to go in that area and then praise him warmly when he does.

If your new family member is a male that was not neutered early, he will most likely want to mark his new territory, especially if he detects there have been dogs living here previously. This is his way of making himself at home. A male may still accidentally mark a doorway, plant, or chair when he first walks in your home. This is out of nervousness or he may smell remnants of another dog, so it is best to keep him on the leash when first bringing him inside. If he starts to lift his leg on something, take the leash and immediately walk him to his spot outside. Be sure to praise or reward appropriate outside potty behavior. Keep in mind that if your dog has a few accidents, it does not necessarily mean he is not housetrained. Nerves and excitement can cause uncharacteristic accidents the first few days or so. Once he begins to settle into a routine in your house and he learns what is acceptable behavior, he should relax and all of his manners will likely return!

Making introductions to other 2- and 4-legged family members

If your new dog met your resident dog at the shelter, things hopefully went pretty well between them, but now you are bringing him into your current dog's home. Your resident dog may not be comfortable with this initially and make his displeasure known in a number of ways, including excessive marking, housetraining accidents, and the sudden attachment to toys he used to not care about but doesn't want the new dog to have. In a nutshell, he is simply a little insecure about his place in your family's new structure. He will need reassurance as well during this time, but should not be permitted to misbehave or treat your new dog poorly. While it may be hard on you to watch either or both dogs being insecure during this transition period, don't be tempted to spoil either dog or otherwise encourage bad habits you will later have to break. This short-term transition will be over before you know it.

If you are bringing your new dog home to meet the rest of your canine and feline pack for the first time, be sure that your pets are in a secure place and unable to escape when the new dog arrives. Meeting outside, preferably in a fenced yard, can be less threatening for canine introductions. Introduce each dog one at a time while all on leash. Do not force an interaction and make sure all dogs are kept on a loose leash – don't let them pull at each other and you don't want any pressure on the leash. If there is any sign of hostility, walk them away from each other. Most times it is best to start them walking parallel rather than meeting face-to-face.

Don't be concerned if they don't warm up to each other immediately. The more socialized your dog and the new dog already are, the less time it will take for them to become friends and playmates, if ages allow. As hard as it may be, try not to be nervous yourself or your dogs will pick up on it. Your resident dog may feel you are in need of defending from the new dog or even vice versa. As each dog becomes comfortable with the other, you can drop the leashes if in a fenced environment. However, with the leashes still on, you can more easily grab one and separate them quickly, if needed. As the dogs come inside, you may find a tighter, more personal space will cause a squabble or two, so leave the leashes on for quick control if needed. You may also want to put all toys and especially all treats like rawhides or bones away until everyone is comfortable.

You will need a more controlled environment to introduce your dog to a new feline friend. Keep your dog on leash and have him meet the cat where she cannot run away and hide. You may need to hold or even leash your cat during these introductions. Some dogs will most likely only want to chase the cat if she runs, but occasionally a stronger prey drive may make the dog more cat-aggressive. Don't unleash your new dog around your cat until you feel comfortable with their interaction. Praise your new dog for positive interactions with the cat or ignoring it. Chances are once the cat can leave your "meeting room", you will not see her for several days or even weeks until SHE is ready to accept your new dog! She may also take a liking to sleeping on tall tables and perches until she feels comfortable around him. Be prepared for there to be some litterbox accidents, as cats can be even more routine-oriented and angry when their world is changed. You may need to also re-think how you feed your cat, so that your new dog will not get into her food.

You may have friends and neighbors anxious to come over and meet your new addition. Don't forget that he is already nervous and with too many people reaching out to touch him or crowding around him, he might panic a bit, especially in the beginning. He has no idea what their intentions are and has not yet become relaxed in his new environment. Put off introductions to outside people for at least 24-hours and after he has had a chance to settle in. Teach your children and any others that will come into contact with your new dog how to properly behave around the dog, and never allow them to mistreat or harass the dog. Do not let young or inexperienced children be left unsupervised around your new dog. New human introductions should also be one at a time, preferably on leash for extra control should it be needed. Let the dog take the initiative to greet the new person. He may want to sniff the person first, before any petting is done. Take your cues from your new dog--how comfortable does he appear with all of this extra attention? Many dogs are real hams and love to be engulfed by people and attention. For them, the more the merrier with new people, while others may be a bit more overwhelmed with their new situation.

Feeding time

Because of your new dog's nerves and excitement, it is best to withhold food and water for the first few hours or until he begins to relax. If it is a hot day or your dog is extremely thirsty, it is better to offer a few cracked/chipped ice cubes. Nervous dogs have a tendency to drink too much water too quickly, taking in too much air and causing them to throw it back up almost immediately.

Try to establish a feeding routine that will be as consistent as possible. I suggest two feedings, one in the morning and one in the evening. Most likely your new dog will be so overwhelmed with his new home that he may not be interested in eating at all the first day. Try hand feeding him and see if he will take any food. If he is interested in it, go ahead and continue to hand feed. He may or may not be interested in the full ration. Once he has stopped taking the food from you, do not offer food again until the next scheduled feeding time. This teaches your new dog when and where mealtime occurs. Free feeding (leaving food out at all times) encourages housetraining accidents since he may be nibbling constantly. If you have a dog that is used to nibbling, he can be retrained to eat at a scheduled time. In fact, until everyone is comfortable, other dogs should be fed away from the new dog to prevent fights over food.

I always suggest feeding premium foods since they generally have less by-products and result in less dog waste. They also tend to have less preservatives or other ingredients that can trigger food allergies. Please see my sheet on nutrition info and search www.dogaware.com for more information on diet and health issues for dogs.

Sleeping arrangements

There is a good chance that your new dog will show his insecurity by following you everywhere. This will include trying to go in the bathroom with you, watching TV with you, checking the garden with you, and undoubtedly wanting to sleep with you. You, or one of the members of your family, will become his new security blanket until he becomes comfortable in his new home. It is perfectly natural for both new family and new dog to be nervous, so don't be too concerned if he appears shy or withdrawn for the first few days.

The first few nights you may want to confine your new dog in the bedroom with you or in a crate. Age, behavior, and your preferences will dictate which you choose, but you will not want to give him too much freedom until you are sure he is trustworthy. Typically, a dog will not relieve himself where he sleeps. If you are confining the dog to your bedroom, close the door and be on the alert during the night for a signal or movement from him. You may wish to place a bell on your door knob that he can nudge with his nose to signal to you that he has to go out. Continue to keep your new dog confined until he sleeps through the night with no accidents and/or does not go on a destructive chewing frenzy.

Your new dog may bark or whine if confined to a crate to sleep, particularly if they have not been crate-trained. Even some dogs that are already crate trained will still often cry the first few nights in home, just because the new environment is so different from the shelter. If the dog needs to be crated at night, try to be as consistent as possible. If you can put the crate in your bedroom or someplace where he can see you, he may feel more secure. Placing safe chew toys in his crate will give him something to do until he falls asleep. Try to ignore any barking but if it persists for more than 15 minutes, take the dog outside for a final potty break. Bring the dog back into the home and give him a treat in his crate so he can associate good things with it. The faster you can establish a sleeping routine, the more sleep everyone will get! You may eventually want to wean him from his crate. Pick a day or weekend when you will be home all day and able to get him especially tired when trying this.

Develop a routine

Try to develop and use a consistent daily routine for feeding, exercising, and bathroom duties. Dogs are creatures of habit. If you do the same things in the same way and in the same order, he will settle in more quickly and learn what is expected of him and when.

For example, walk your new dog or let him out in the fenced yard as soon as you rise in the morning. If you will be feeding him in the morning, do so after a short walk or romp in the yard. Give him one more chance to relieve himself after breakfast and before you go to work. Upon return from work, he should get an immediate bathroom break and exercise. If he has exercised heavily, wait about an hour before you give him his evening feeding. He will need another bathroom break anywhere from 30 minutes to several hours later depending on his age. He should be given at least one more potty break right before you retire for the evening. To keep middle of the night bathroom breaks to a minimum, you may need to withhold water and dog biscuit snacks after a certain time in the evening.

Leaving your new dog alone during the day

Initially, your new dog may have varying degrees of anxiety when you leave him. Crating the dog in the beginning will eliminate accidents, chewing destruction, and any other mischievous activity that may be rooted in nervousness and insecurity. A crate can provide a place where the dog feels safe and secure in your absence. Please take the time to positively train your dog to a crate and never use it as a punishment.

If you prefer not to crate but still want to confine, you may want to try baby gates in the kitchen or hallway during the day. This allows your dog to be in a familiar place with familiar things without being totally confined. If the area of confinement is too large, however, you may begin to have problems with housetraining accidents. With larger dogs, you may need to piggyback a set of gates atop each other.

Each time you leave your dog confined, whether to an area or crate, make sure the dog knows he is a good boy. If the dog is particularly anxious or emotional, try making the goodbyes (and hellos) as nonchalant as possible. When you return, if all is in order, praise the dog for being good while you were away and take him out immediately. If you must be away from home longer than the dog's bladder (whatever his age) can comfortably hold it, you may want to consider hiring a dog walker for a mid-day walk.

Other questions and comments

1. Is it OK to change the dog's name? Feel free to change your new dog's name. Many times, a dog will come into the shelter as a stray and names are given at random. The dog usually learns the new name quickly, especially if you overuse it in the beginning. Many people believe changing the dog's name will help the dog to build a deeper bond with his new family.

2. When should we go to the veterinarian? A newly adopted dog should have a visit to a veterinarian as soon as possible, regardless of health. This ensures that new dog owners will find, select, and begin a relationship with a vet before needing one in a panic. Owners who already have vets will be able to introduce their new pet to their doctor while he is reasonably healthy. Make sure you take whatever medical records you were given to the vet with you so your vet can become familiar with your new dog's medical history (if available). Also be sure to have the phone numbers and hours of the emergency vet in your area.

3. How important is good manners training? It is extremely important!! One of the best ways for you to bond with your new dog is through positive reinforcement training. Even if you are not a new dog owner, training can be as valuable for you as it is for your dog. Positive reinforcement will get you and your dog off to a great start by teaching you to communicate effectively with your dog. In addition, the more socialized you can keep your dog, the more places you will feel comfortable taking him. You should involve all family members in the training so everyone can be consistent. Above all, be patient and consistent with your new dog.

For more information or help with transitioning your new dog to your home, please contact Heather at All 4 Paws Dog Training at 717-360-2106. In addition to good manners training, A4P can help with behavioral issues including jumping, crate training, and resource guarding.

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