

Dog Decompression: Setting Your Dog up for Success

The key to helping your new dog make a successful adjustment to your home is being prepared and being patient. It can take anywhere from two days to two months for you and your pet to adjust to each other.

Before you Come Home

Gather supplies: The basics are crate, collar, leash, harness, food, food and water bowls, toys and bedding.

Get smart: Educate yourself about the value of crate training, how to house train a dog using a routine and positive reinforcement, how to introduce your dog to existing pets, use of hard rubber chew toys to relieve stress and how to gradually allow the dog access to your home to avoid destructive behavior. Educate your children on how to properly interact with the dog to avoid bites (the American Veterinary Medical Association website has good information).

Establish house rules: Determine your dog-care regimen in advance for walking, feeding, going outside for bathroom breaks, gradual access to rooms and access to furniture (if any).

Dog proofing: Dog proof the area inside your house where your dog will spend most of his time during the first few months: tape loose electrical cords to baseboards, store household chemicals on high shelves, remove plants, rugs, and breakables and move small items you normally keep on the floor like shoes.

Determine how to contain your dog during brief periods outside: If you plan to have your dog outside for short periods of time during the day, use a fence or pen which is large enough to achieve a running stride. You should not leave your dog unattended in a fenced area without first establishing if he will be able to jump out or dig out so you can take appropriate steps to prevent that. Outside areas should include housing which protects your dog from the elements and constant access to clean water. Do not leave your dog outside all the time.

Plan the arrival: Try to arrange the arrival of your new dog for a weekend or when you can be home for a few days to get to know each other. Plan to take your dog outside to relieve himself as soon as you get home and go on a long walk as soon as you get home to establish your pack dynamic. If you have other pets in your home already, make a plan for introductions; there is a lot of good information on the internet like the information found at www.PreventiveVet.com.

Make future plans: Having a dog comes with costs and may involve unexpected veterinary care. Consider purchasing pet insurance or saving a certain amount of money just in case of emergency. Make a plan to rehome your dog with a family member, friend or co-worker in the event of your death or serious illness so the life of your dog is not at risk.

Once You Get Home

Go for a pack walk: Do not take your dog inside when you get home; take your new dog for a long walk as soon as you get home to introduce him to your property, give him an opportunity to relieve himself and to establish that you are in charge. Your dog may have never been walked on a leash and it may help to use a harness to maintain better control.

Limit outside stimulation: As tempting as it may be to bring people over to meet your dog or take your dog to a pet supply store or dog park, that amount of stimulation can be too much for your new dog. Keep the first few weeks calm and quiet as you work out your routine and you learn each other's language.

Give them a crate: Dogs instinctively like dens which are their safe space; using a crate makes it easier to house train a dog and allows you to slowly provide your dog with more access to your home; introduce your dog to the crate in a positive way using a toy or treat and do not crate your dog all day.

Establish a routine: Dogs need structure and routine to help them know what you want and expect. Feed and walk your dog on a schedule. When leaving your dog or coming home, don't make a production out of the process; this will help reduce separation anxiety.

Exercise and play: All dogs need an active life regardless of size. Plan daily walks and time for exercise and games to provide mental stimulation. Much like small children, an exercised dog is less apt to get in trouble due to boredom; it is not enough to just your dog outside to run around themselves, the walk is key to showing you are the leader of your pack.

Use training and discipline to create a happy home: Dogs need order. Let your dog know from the start who is the boss. When you catch him doing something he shouldn't, don't lose your cool; stay calm and let him know immediately, in a loud and disapproving voice, that he has misbehaved. Reward him with praise when he does well. Use simple commands to train him like "good sit" or "leave it." Consider signing up for a dog obedience class which will help train both of you.

Go to the vet: Take your dog to the veterinarian within a week after adoption for a health check to make sure the shelter or rescue did not miss anything; being an established patient with a veterinarian will allow him or her to provide better care moving forward. If your dog was not microchipped by the shelter or rescue, get this done without delay. Talk to your vet about how much to feed your dog; most commercially manufactured dog food bags have feeding recommendations which will cause your dog to gain too much weight which will limit his life span.

Patience is key: Your home is a totally new experience for your dog who may be confused or anxious for a number of weeks. Remember to temper your expectations and give your dog time to adjust, decompress and become part of your family.