

Bringing Your New Best Friend Home



If you've never owned a dog before, or if it has been a really long time, you probably don't realize how much your life will change when you bring a dog into it. Sure, you'll have new messes to clean up and your schedule will be inconvenienced and you'll have to think about somebody else when deciding whether or not to make plans to do something. But you'll also find that your activity level will go up, you'll find yourself in a persistent good mood, and there will now always be somebody at home who is absolutely thrilled to see you.

When is the best time to bring your new dog home?

This is where the "right time" is a factor. Plan the adoption and homecoming for when you will be able to spend time acquainting your dog to your home and neighborhood and teaching him the rules.

- Expect your adult dog to need several weeks to several months or more to acclimate to his new home
 - Six months is critical for puppies
- Try not to travel without your dog during the first three months
 - If it is unavoidable, have a well-thought-out plan for where your dog will stay and who will be caring for him

Before You Bring Your New Best Friend Home

- Decide on "your rules"
 - Where the dog will sleep, eat, eliminate outside, stay when you are away, etc.
- Determine who will have what responsibilities: feeding, exercise, grooming, etc.
- Agree on training protocols that the whole family can support consistently
 - Source training classes or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT-KA), if needed
- Be sure you have a reliable containment system (fence, dog run, etc.) in your yard for your dog

The First Day

- The Ride Home
 - Put your new dog in the car after all other humans have gotten in
 - Put him in the place you will always want him to ride; give him plenty of room and don't let him be crowded by children; consider a barrier or crate or seat belt harness to keep him where you want him and to keep him safe
 - Go straight home—no stops along the way
- Arriving Home:
 - Other dogs, cats and humans should be inside the house on arrival
 - Leash walk your new dog outside for 10 to 15 minutes in the yard until he relieves himself in the place you want him to consistently go; praise him enthusiastically and reward him with a yummy food treat
 - Keep him on leash, even in a fenced yard
 - Let him lead you where he wants to explore so he can sniff around and become acquainted with your yard

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- The First Night:
 - If you've adopted a shelter dog, it is advisable for them to sleep in a crate at first
 - They have become accustomed to containment during their stay at the shelter
 - They shouldn't have total freedom for the first few days in your home (the weekend), only to be contained in a crate come Monday morning
- Introduce him to resident humans one at a time
 - Let him take the initiative to greet the new person
 - Introduce adults first; children last
 - Don't let people run up to the dog and force themselves on him
 - People should approach sideways with hand out, speaking softly, offering lots of yummy treats
 - Be prepared that the dog may want to jump up on the new person; ask the person to just step away until the dog sits—don't jerk the leash if he jumps; have a good treat ready for when he sits
 - Watch your new dog for signs of becoming overwhelmed by too many people or too much stimulus—don't push him and let him have "down time" as he needs it
 - When introducing children, an adult the dog has already met should take the child by the hand and walk them through the introduction process; give the children treats to offer to the dog
- Introduce him to resident dogs one at a time in a fenced area (if introduced previously, expect the interaction to be different than the meeting at the shelter)
 - Place both dogs on leashes; one dog at a time if there is more than one resident dog at home already
 - Allow them to approach each other on their own terms—do not force the confrontation
 - Keep pressure off the leash—be aware that any stress you are feeling will probably travel down the leash to your dog
 - Watch the dogs' body language and any change of mood; encourage good behavior and reward both dogs for courteous behavior with each other
 - If they begin to scuffle, *do not pull them apart*. Have a distraction ready—a horn, a water hose, an umbrella that you can open, or a blanket to throw over them so you can separate them without causing harm to yourself or the dogs. Do not put yourself in the middle of the scuffle
 - As they become comfortable with each other, drop the leashes (fenced area), but leave the leashes on so you can grab them easily if you need to gain control
 - When you come into the house, keep leashes on and expect that the tighter confines may cause a squabble or two
 - Confine your resident dog in another room while you continue to introduce your new dog to the house
- Introduce the resident cat(s) in a controlled environment (See our sheet on Introducing Cats to Dogs)
- Introduce your dog to where you will want him to sleep and reward him for going to that place
 - Take your dog out on a leash to relieve himself before going to bed for the evening; wait for as long as it takes and praise and reward him for going before coming in

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- Put him to bed before you go to bed the first night, if he is to sleep in another room or a crate; ignore all his protests and attempts to get your attention until he settles down
 - Think about this before bringing your dog home—where will he sleep that noise and scratching will not be a problem?
- If he gets up and makes a lot of noise in the middle of the night, he may have to go, so take him outside without speaking to him or fussing over him
 - Praise him if he goes and come back into the house and leave him alone the rest of the night

The First Weeks

- Introduce your new dog to “the rules”
 - Use positive reinforcement to show him what you DO want him to do; don’t reward unwanted behavior; and minimize the need to correct
 - Corrections should be calm, not angry, and in the form of “no” or “eh-eh” and then re-directed to the desired behavior
 - Do not scold for house soiling accidents; it may take him a few days to understand the routine. (See our sheet on Housetraining Your Dog)
 - Manage your dog’s new environment—prevention is more desirable than correction
 - Don’t let your new dog “learn” undesirable behavior that can be prevented
- Leaving your dog
 - While it’s great to be able to take a week or two off to help your dog adapt to your home, DO NOT become inseparable during that time—especially if that won’t be the dog’s usual routine
 - Gradually expose the dog to what will be your customary comings and goings, starting with short absences and progressively increase the time you’re away to what will be expected when you get back to your usual routine. This will minimize the development or worsening of separation anxiety
 - In the normal course of life:
 - Do not make a big deal of leaving or coming home
 - Start with short, frequent absences of 5 to 10 minutes
 - Build the duration of absences over the course of a few days
 - Consider using a crate initially when you leave, to increase your dog’s opportunity for success—ONLY if you have already introduced your dog to the crate
- Visitors to the house
 - Encourage visitors during your dog’s first week in your home
 - Children should visit one at a time starting in the second week, always introduced by familiar adults
 - Teach him to sit calmly at your side when visitors arrive
 - Visitors should walk away from the door if your dog jumps and barks
 - Visitors interact with your dog only when he stays calm and seated
 - Visitors should offer your dog treats when they enter if your dog does not seem to be afraid of the visitors
- Introduce your dog to the neighborhood by going on walks and meeting people and other dogs as your dog’s temperament permits

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The First Three Months

- Include your dog in as many of your activities as possible. It will help you build a great relationship with your dog
- Expect your new dog to adjust little by little over the course of several months
- Don't push your dog into new situations if he doesn't appear comfortable; work him up to new situations as he will tolerate
- Expose her to lots of new experiences with you, keeping the experiences positive and rewarding
 - Introduce your dog to other dogs away from your home
 - As they become accustomed to one another, invite that friend and their dog to your home for a visit

After the First Three Months

As you and your dog settle into your life together, you will find where adjustments to the routine and rules are necessary and desirable. Please try to be consistent in giving your new best friend the attention and affection, physical exercise, mental stimulation and veterinary/health care they require. It will ensure you a healthy, loving lifetime relationship with your dog.