

TLC's Companion Paws New Adoption Expectations and Preparation for your New Adult Rescue

Congratulations on your new adoption! This guide will provide you with some information on what to expect, and what is expected of you, as you welcome your new dog into your home. Please review this guide before picking up your dog.

Adopters should expect that their new dog would need time to adjust to its new family including resident pets, new schedule, new home environment and new communication style. Major life changes impose significant stress on dogs whether they are rescue dogs or not. This can include anytime the dog's routine is significantly changed, such as a change in home, addition of a new family member or pet, change in family dynamics, etc. During this adjustment period, the new dog may exhibit behavior that it will not otherwise exhibit after it adjusts to its new life. This may include having housetraining accidents, making serious efforts to escape including bolting out the door, jumping fences, digging under fences, attempting to avoid interactions with its new owners, among others. They may also have decreased appetite or an upset stomach or similar.

Your new dog does not know that you are its new home. All it knows is that once again it is in a different environment, with different smells, different noises, different people who treat it in different way, including giving it different commands and allowing different behaviors, feed it differently and maybe have other animals or children for it to adjust to. Your dog needs TIME to do just that, adjust to everything new in its life. All these new things and your expectations may cause your dog some initial stress until it adjusts to its new life.

Welcoming your new dog home – the first days

- When you first bring your dog home – before bringing them inside, take them outside to where you would like them to learn to go potty, and if possible take them for a long walk
- For the first week or two, keep things uneventful – resist the temptation to invite others over to meet the dog just yet. Keep the dog's new environment calm and relaxed, and allow them some space to decompress
- Your dog may take time to warm up to their new environment, and to you (and other members of your household) – allow the dog to come to you, and if you have children, ask them not to hug the dog, put their face in the dogs face, etc. until the dog is comfortable with such things
- Give the dog love and attention on their terms. When they come to you, reinforce and encourage with love, but allow them to walk away when they want space. Let them know they can trust you, and that you trust them
- Set up the dogs crate in a quiet space where they can retreat and rest as needed – no need to close the door during the day, this should be a comfortable space that they can come and go from
- At night, it is best to have the dog sleep in a family member's bedroom on a doggie bed on the floor or on the bed. A crate can be used during the adjustment period, until fully housetrained.
- Your adult dog may be potty-trained before adoption, but in a new and unfamiliar environment there may still be accidents at first - don't be alarmed. Consistently show the dog where you would like them to be going potty, both after an accident and at regular intervals throughout the day such as after meals or before bed
- For some dogs it may be best to restrict their access throughout your house to a couple of rooms (depending on your layout), or just the room you are in, especially if they are having accidents. Slowly introduce them to more areas of the house that they are allowed in. You can use a leash or baby gates if needed

Food & Water

- Show your dog where their food and water bowls are as soon as they enter your home
- Make sure to always have plenty of clean and fresh drinking water available for your dog! Best practice is to clean and refill the bowl daily, as well as throughout the day as needed

- Follow feeding guides described on the bag of food you are using, unless otherwise directed by a veterinarian. Dogs will need to eat twice per day, so the total amount of food required per day should be split in to two meals (morning and evening)
- Your dog may or may not have a reduced appetite in their first few days at home. If at all possible, keep the dog on the same food they were eating at their previous shelter/foster. This will help prevent digestive issues and encourage them to eat
- If you choose to wean the dog on to a new food, give them at least a week at your house on their old food. Then, gradually switch to the new food by mixing less and less old with more and more new (over the course of a week or so) until they are eating entirely the new food
- Keep an eye on the dogs bowel movements at first, as this can be an important indication of health. Watch out for visible parasites (they should have a clean bill of health when adopted, but it is important to keep an eye out), loose or discoloured stools, or difficulty with going to the bathroom. Contact your veterinarian if you have concerns, or if loose stools don't resolve within a couple of days

Exercise, Play, & Routines

- All dogs need daily exercise; the amount and type will vary by dog and by your availability and needs. Most adult dogs do well with at least 2 x 30-45 minute walks a day, but some breeds will need more or less exercise
- Try to keep a regular routine – find a time of day that works for you to walk, or a day of the week that you can take your dog to the park or beach to play. Start slow and keep your dog on leash until you are training and used to each other and you have practiced commands like “come” and “sit” in a safe environment
- You can play indoors too! Depending on the size of the dog and the space you have available, you can toss toys or practice commands indoors if the weather is bad
- Wait to start off-leash activities (in designated or fenced-in parks/beaches) until you have begun training classes with them
- Mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise for many dogs – they can be just as tired out by learning some new tricks or playing hide and seek as they can by going on a walk

Other

- Learn to read your dog's body language – when are they bored, anxious, needing space, or needing some attention?
- If you don't have a fenced yard, always take the dog out on a leash to go potty
- Dogs can get sunburns and heat stroke – especially in the summer, avoid walking or playing outside during the hottest hours of the day, and ensure they have fresh water when they come back from a walk
- Your adult dog should be healthy and up to date on vaccinations when you adopt them, but you can make an appointment with the veterinarian you will be using once the dog has adjusted to you and your home, to make sure there is nothing else they need and to check over the dog

When you are ready to introduce your new dog to other household pets:

- Another dog – take the dogs on a walk together, outdoors and on leash, or allow them to meet first in a neutral outdoor space such as a fenced yard. This will help prevent territorial behaviour at their first meeting. Then, bring them both back in to the home
- Cats – it is best to make the introduction on the cat's terms – you know your cat best! If possible give the cat space to escape, such as with a baby gate. Keep the dog on a leash when introducing the dog to the cat. Do not let the dog chase the cat!

Dog Introduction

Proper introduction between dogs is a VERY important step when adopting. It can spell success or failure in introducing a new dog to your home. We are going to keep it simple! There is plenty of research out there explaining the reasons for all of this and you are encouraged to read up on that. To ensure people read what is most important here, we are going to list the steps for a proper introduction.

1. Find a friend/Family member to join you. Have both dogs on leash at heel if possible.

2. Walk the dogs for at least a block together next to each other but not within reach of each other. Even though to us, this is not an interaction, to them it is.
3. After the walk is complete stand face to face with the other person. Again, dogs still at heel if possible. If not shorten up on the leash so the dogs cannot lunge forward to each other.
4. Shake the person's hand. Show the dog this is a friendly interaction. Continue once that is successful, if not try again until successful, reward if necessary to encourage this interaction is positive to both dogs
5. Now ask to pet the other dog. Lean in and tickle the other dog under the chin briefly. Keep the other dog back at a safe distance again not within reach of the other dog.
6. Once successful, reward both dogs and repeat on the other side.
7. When this is successful, you can then release the dogs (still on leash just not at heel then have 5-6 feet) to say hello to one another, hopefully with success. If not, repeat entire process keeping all of it positive, lots of rewards. This could potentially be enough. If you feel like you want to do more and I encourage you to as it can't hurt.
8. Let the dogs both off leash in your backyard. All of this seems small to you but it can make a huge difference to an animal knowing it can trust another. It will go a long way.

If you have a cat:

- Wait at least a few days before introducing your new foster dog to your cat(s).
- As you allow the dog to explore more of your house, keep the cat in another room (do this for short periods each day). This will allow the animals to pick up each other's scents before interacting
- After a few days, allow the animals to interact while keeping the dog on a leash. Keep a close eye on the dog's behaviour. If the dog is relatively calm (not growling, snarling, or barking at the cat), walk the dog around the room while keeping it on leash. Ensure there is a way for your cat to leave the room if they choose
- Allow the animals to interact for around 30 minutes if all is going well, then return the cat to their "safe haven" and bring the dog back to their crate or bed. Give lots of praise!
- Discourage the dog from intimidating the cat (such as by barking or trying to chase), and redirect their energy elsewhere if needed
- If the cat bops the dog on the nose, do not discourage this! They are setting up their own boundaries, and developing a working relationship
- As the dog and cat adjust to each other, you can drop the dog's leash (but keep it on just in case) during their interactions. Use your judgement as to when they can start off-leash, supervised interactions

The First Few Weeks...

For an adult dog, **the first few weeks in a new home are a critical transition period**. How well you manage the dog's behavior during this time will determine whether s/he develops into a well-behaved, loving pet. This information will help you know what to expect from a new dog.

Adoptive owners view a dog's new life in their home as a wonderful change, but the transition presents some problems for the dog. The transition brings a change in the dog's daily routine and caretakers. In the new home, the dog suddenly faces a new set of social companions in a new environment filled with unfamiliar sights, smells and sounds. S/He will be confused, stimulated and a little frightened. S/He faces a big adjustment as they learn their way around and develop relationships with his/her new family. Some undesirable behavior may result. Don't panic! By modifying or redirecting his/her actions, you can help the dog become a solid citizen in a few weeks.

What to Expect

- Jumping up (which you can discourage by ignoring the behaviour and making sure you don't reward it)
- Exploratory behaviour, including sniffing, mouthing and chewing new things
- Stealing food

- Accidents in the house (shelter and foster home rules differ from the new home's rules, which will take time for the dog to learn)
- Wild running and play in the house (frequently children, and even adults, encourage this behaviour - the new dog cannot yet distinguish between indoor and outdoor behaviour)

Managing your Dog during the Transition

The first few days are critical for learning rules and breaking bad habits. Dogs are particularly impressionable in a new environment, especially the first time they try a new behavior. Therefore, plan to invest time during this period to socialize, teach and get acquainted with your dog. Plan and prepare for the dog in advance:

- Read about basic training
- Get food, bowls, collar, leash, brush and comb, toys, and dog gate or crate
- Decide where the dog will be confined when you're not home and arrange a bed or crate in that area
- Decide what particular area outdoors will be the dog's bathroom
- Prepare yourself mentally – not all things will go smoothly at first. As soon as you get the new dog home, **begin managing his behavior and supervising him closely. Do not give him the run of your house.**

The most important thing s/he needs for the first few weeks is **STRUCTURE** -- enforced rules for living in your house. Freedom comes later as s/he develops the responsibility to handle it.

Rules to Teach

Housebreaking. Take the dog out on a long leash at one-to-two hour intervals to the area designated as the bathroom. Allow him/her to explore and get used to the area. When s/he poops or pees, praise effusively and then reward him/her with a treat, a few minutes of play, sniffing or a walk. The dog should be kept near you in the house so that if s/he begins to potty inside, you can say "nah-ah-ah" and take him/her out immediately. Redirecting a dog after the fact is ineffective and confusing to the animal.

Jumping up should never be permitted. When dogs jump at you, all they want is your attention and can easily learn they will not get it if/when they are jumping. If your dog jumps up at you, just turn around with your back towards him/her. When s/he stops, turn to face him/her and praise.

Chewing and mouthing is permitted only on dog toys. As you introduce your dog to each area of your house, take him/her there on a long leash. Bring along some toys and chewing items, and make they are available on the floor. Do not leave electrical wires where the dog might chew on them. Always monitor the dog with a new chew toy and remove immediately if the dog is breaking the toy apart as it could become a choking hazard or cause intestinal blockage.

Stealing food is an important reason not to feed the dog table scraps. It may lead to food stealing and the dog may eat something that is harmful to him/her. Read up on what people-food can safely be given to dogs, and always use their food dish away from the table.

Running, wrestling and other rough play should not be allowed in the house. Make toys and chews available. There are also many fun and stimulating dog games you can try.

Some Management Rules That Owners Must Learn

Correct, praise and re-direct. If the dog ignores corrections, work to improve your communication skills. Pay attention and **be consistent.** Don't send mixed messages. If you correct a behavior sometimes, and ignore (or even inadvertently reward) it other times, the dog will be confused and never behave reliably. **Keep the rules simple** and enforce them, but **always remember to praise.**

Dogs look for authority and guidance in their lives. If none is forthcoming from people, they begin to act as their own bosses and may even try to push around their human companions. Leadership with a dog is a **positive relationship**, not based on punishment or abuse.

A new dog should not roam when no one is home. A new dog that is free to wander in the home in the owner's absence is almost certain to get into trouble or practice bad habits. In most cases, the damage is not done out of spite, but because the animal is nervous, stressed, frightened, stimulated to escape, bored or just exploring. Restrict the dog's access when you are out until s/he has comfortably adjusted to your home. To do otherwise jeopardizes your possessions, the dog's safety and your new relationship.

