



# Adopting a Shelter Dog

## HOW TO HELP YOUR NEW PET ADJUST TO YOUR HOME

Congratulations on adopting a new member to your family! Your new pet is likely very excited to go to his forever home, but keep in mind he has been through a major life change in the preceding days, weeks, months, maybe even years. **Life at the shelter is extremely stressful for dogs.** Each dog at the Nebraska Humane Society is provided excellent medical and behavioral care. They have opportunity for walks and interaction with staff and volunteers several times daily. However, living at a shelter is not like being home.

This handout will provide you with information about how to help your new dog adjust to its new home. **The first few weeks following adoption can be challenging** as both your dog and you figure things out. By referencing this handout, we can help you prevent or work through some common issues that arise after bringing home a shelter dog. You will see that **patience is the key** to getting through this transition, and the payoff is a companion that will be by your side for years to come.

A few of the **most important points** to remember to get through the first few weeks are:

- ✓ Keep a collar and leash on your dog at all times while he is supervised for the first few weeks.
- ✓ Avoid having visitors in the home or taking your new dog to public places.
- ✓ Feed your dog on a set schedule in a separate space away from children and other animals.
- ✓ Use rewards to train your new dog rather than punishment.
- ✓ Expect the dog to have a few accidents in the home regardless if their previous home stated they were house trained.
- ✓ Help get your dog acclimated to a crate by feeding him in their crate.
- ✓ If you have other dogs, pick up high-value items like bones, chews, toys, and other objects that could trigger a fight
- ✓ Keep your new dog separated from other pets when unsupervised.
- ✓ Make sure all interactions with children are supervised by an attentive adult.
- ✓ Pay attention to your dog's body language so you can determine when he is becoming stressed or scared.
- ✓ If your dog is having behavioral issues, contact the behavior helpline!

## Animal behavior questions?

## Contact our FREE Behavior Helpline!

402-905-3421 | [bhelp@nehumanesociety.org](mailto:bhelp@nehumanesociety.org) | [www.nehumanesociety.org/behaviorhelp](http://www.nehumanesociety.org/behaviorhelp)

## THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

### Getting home safely

Ideally, you should have at least two people to bring your dog home, one who can drive and another who can attend to the dog. If you have other dogs that came with you to the shelter, consider taking them home and coming back to pick up your newly adopted dog.

A crate is the safest way to transport your dog. If that is not an option, the safest spot is the back seat rather than the front. When getting in the car, you may need some tasty treats to lure your dog into the car, as many do not like car rides. If possible, let your dog jump into the car rather than picking him up or forcing him in.

### Keep the leash on!

Keep a collar and light weight leash on your dog while he is supervised. If you need to direct your dog to a different activity, for instance if your newly adopted dog is pestering your other dog to play, or you need to guide your new dog off furniture, you will be able to interrupt and guide the dog in a non-threatening way. If you need to gain control of your dog, take hold of the leash rather than grabbing the dog. For dogs that get into mischief when unattended, you can also fasten a long leash to the belt loop of your pants so they're always nearby.



Be cautious when your dog goes outside; "secure" fences are not always as secure as you think. Always accompany your dog outside for the first few weeks. Also use caution when people come and go, as many dogs will bolt out the door when they get a chance. Dragging their leash will also help capture a runaway dog.

### Setting up your home

Good management of the environment will allow your new dog to explore and become accustomed to his new home without getting himself into trouble. Demands on the dog should be few during this transition period, and good management will allow few demands with few problems.

"Baby proof" your home for the new dog or puppy as you would for a toddler. Look for anything that the dog might be able to chew on, pull off, or knock over. Dogs are very curious and their explorations could lead to injury or death. Keep kitchen counters and tables clear of food items that might tempt the dog to help himself. If you forget and the dog scores the goodies, make a mental note to do better next time.

Use physical barriers to keep the dog from areas you do not want him to access. Even if an introduction to your children or resident pet has gone well, it is advisable to supervise them to prevent squabbles. Use of crates and baby gates will allow your pets and children to share the same space, but allow them some time away as they get to know each other.

Once your dog has acclimated and is comfortable with you and you are comfortable with him, you can start teaching rules and expectations. Slowly reduce the management that you have in place and teach him what you expect of him.

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### **Should we have a welcome party or take my new dog on outings?**

NOPE! Though you are probably excited to show off your new pup to friends and family, the first few weeks should be relatively low key so your dog is not overwhelmed by all of the new changes in his life. Keep the number of visitors to a minimum in the first week following adoption, and only have one or two visitors at a time. Also avoid taking him to new places (e.g., dog parks, friends' and family members' homes, stores, restaurants, etc.). This will allow him time to decompress and learn his new routine. A walk around the neighborhood should suffice in the meantime.

### **Keep interactions low key**

Allow the dog to initiate interactions and keep the interactions low key. Many human ways of showing affection are intimidating to dogs, especially dogs under stress. As you get to know each other and can better read each other he may be less likely to misinterpret your affectionate behavior as threatening or scary.

Monitor interactions between your new dog and other pets until you are sure everyone is comfortable with the new living situation. Don't leave your new dog and your resident pet(s) alone together; separate them for several weeks when they are not being supervised.

### **Establishing routines**

Because animals feel more secure when they have a predictable routine in place, keep the schedule of the new dog and the established pets as consistent as possible, especially in the beginning of your new relationship. Remember to give the established pets more attention and exercise when the new dog comes into the house.

Provide a quiet place for your dog(s) to eat meals. Ask your dog for a "sit" before setting down the dog bowl. Don't bother him while he is eating, and let him come to recognize that he does not have to compete to eat. It is best if all members of the family, including children with adult supervision, take turns feeding the dog.

Feed your dog meals instead of allowing them to graze throughout the day. Simply allow your dog 10 minutes to eat and then pick the food up until the dog's next feeding time. If you have multiple dogs, be sure to feed them in separate spaces with a barrier such as a door in between them.

### **Provide outlets for stress**

Provide a quiet place for the dog to relax and get away. If you have a busy household with children, the dog needs a place he can go to avoid chaos. If your dog gives you signs that he is uncomfortable or unwilling, don't insist on lavishing love and attention. Give him time to get to know you and you time to get to know him.

Exercise is a good thing, but too much of a good thing can keep the level of stress up. When you go for a walk, let your dog take time to sniff and explore. Mental exercise is at least as important as physical exercise. Searching games, like searching out kibble tossed on the floor, patio, or even in the grass, provides good mental exercise. Many puzzle feeders and interactive toys are available for purchase, or you can make items like snuffle mats, pictured above, yourself.



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# DAYS

In the first few days, your new pet will probably be overwhelmed with such a big change in environment and routine. Common behaviors for newly adopted pets may include the following related to stress...

- Hiding and/or retreating
- Pacing
- Hyperarousal and/or hyperactivity
- No desire to play
- Panting and/or hypersalivation
- Excessive vocalization
- Chewing or scratching
- Jumping
- Mouthing
- Inappropriate elimination
- Not wanting to eat

To help alleviate any anxiety during this initial period, it is best to minimize stressors by creating their own space that they can retreat to, and let them come to you on their own time. Try not to introduce them to new people coming into the home or take them on outings. Dog/cat proof, and provide plenty of appropriate toys. Never yell at your pet or use punishment as this can exacerbate their behaviors and create new behavior problems in the future.

# The Stages of Adjustment With Your New Pet

## A Guide to What You Can Expect in the First 3 Days, 3 Weeks and 3 Months of Bringing Home Your New Pet



# WEEKS

At three weeks, your pet should be starting to feel much more comfortable, and their true self should start to shine through. They will start to get used to the day-to-day routine and expectations. Behaviors that were related to stress should be improving, and any true behavior problems that are not related to the shock of a new home will become apparent. These problems should be worked through with positive reinforcement training methods. Contact us for information about our dog training classes or free behavior help with dogs, cats or other pets.



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# MONTHS

At three months, your new pet should be feeling like one of the family and fully settled in. It is important to consider that all pets are unique and may react differently. If you have any questions or concerns during any stage in the transition process, don't hesitate to contact our Free Behavior Helpline at 402-905-3421/ bhelp@nehumanesociety.org.