

Tips for a Successful Shelter Dog Adoption

You're adopting a shelter dog – congratulations! Bringing a dog into your home will change your family – hopefully for the better. It will also mean changes in routine and adjustments in your budget. You may be asking yourself – what will my new dog be like at home? Is this dog right for me? How can I make this a successful adoption?



Plan and Prepare

Being prepared is a large part of making a new dog's transition into your home successful. Make sure you have everything you'll need to meet your new dog's basic needs – nutritious food, bowls, a comfortable place to sleep, toys, grooming supplies and a collar and leash. A crate should also be on your shopping list.

Take some time to decide where you are planning to keep the dog when you are away. Using a baby gate to isolate the dog to a smaller area (bathroom, kitchen, laundry room, etc) while you are away may also be a solution for you. You'll also need to decide on the "house rules" for your new dog. Will the dog be allowed on the furniture? Who will be responsible for feeding the dog? Walking the dog? Training the dog? Ideally, all of these things should be decided before the dog comes home, not after. Dogs and pups are learning all the time – planning ahead will help the dog learn GOOD habits right from the start instead of developing BAD habits.

Realistic Expectations



How a dog acts in the shelter and how he acts in a new home can be quite different. Occasionally, the shelter will have information from a previous owner to share with you. But with a new family and a new environment, your new dog may act different. It is reasonable to expect some issues in the first few weeks of adoption. The dog may have accidents in the house, even if the shelter considered him housetrained. Taking him out regularly and praising him when he eliminates outside, and confining him or her to a crate or dog safe room when you are away will speed up this process.

Animals experience stress just like people, and in order to diffuse this stress they often resort to undesirable behavior. Destructive behaviors like excessive barking, chewing and digging may indicate the dog has some degree of separation anxiety, but often this behavior is just a temporary response to feelings of stress. Some dogs may even chose to hide or become unresponsive the first few days in a new place, even if they seemed outgoing at the shelter. Understanding that this all may be part of the dog's adjustment period, and finding ways to focus the dog's energy, will make the transition easier.

De-Stress and Training

You dog will probably need more time than you anticipated to adjust to his new life with you. Dog's have stress hormones, just like humans, and it can take weeks for these hormones to return to normal. During this time it is



not advisable to take your new dog to a lot of different places or force him to meet lots of new people. Too many new experiences will only make the stress hormones take longer to return to normal. Spend time getting to know your new dog at home, in your yard or on walks around the neighborhood. Avoid dog parks, crowds or other places where the dog may encounter a lot of new and different people or dogs.

It's never too early to begin training! Even the first day home you can begin teaching your dog to "sit" on command. Consistent and positive training will help build a bond with your new dog. Training also helps dogs de-stress as it gives them the security of knowing they have a trustworthy leader. Training your dog and rewarding them with treats will help the dog learn to trust you and feel safe in your care. Depending on what sort of care and treatment the dog has experienced before he found you will determine the amount of time it takes the dog to bond with you and begin to trust you. While the shelter always advises you take a quality training class with your new dog, give the dog a few weeks to a month to settle in to his life with you before starting a formal training class.

Socialization

After you and your new dog have gotten into some consistent routines, have become bonded and you feel your dog will be able to handle new experiences, it's time to begin socializing. Socializing is exposing your new dog to different places, people, animals and experiences. A poorly socialized dog - one who perhaps lived exclusively in someone's backyard and was rarely walked or taken places - will be very nervous and shy in new environments. They may never have been walked on a leash, taken for a car ride, taken to a dog park or even be used to being indoors. A shelter dog may not have been exposed to people of different colors and ages, other animals, people on bicycles or in wheelchairs, stairs, or even a vet clinic. If you had never encountered a vacuum cleaner, a cat or a telephone ringing, all of these things would be very scary!



It is now your job as a responsible dog owner to encourage and reward your new dog for dealing with new experiences with confidence and calm behavior. Take him everywhere you can. If your dog is nervous or scared, don't soothe or coddle her, just back off from the stimulus and gradually get closer while praising your dog when she is relaxed. Use treats, toys and praise to associate the new experiences and calm behavior with GOOD THINGS!

And remember – the shelter wants you and your dog to have a successful and positive relationship. If you have questions or problems, don't hesitate to call the shelter! We are here to help! 830-629-5287