

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

BRINGING YOUR SHELTER DOG HOME
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Having realistic expectations about your shelter dog is important. Adopting an adult shelter dog is very similar to bringing home a puppy. Being prepared will lower the stress for both you and your new dog.



RESTRICT ACCESS. Our instinct with a new dog is to shower them with love and freedom. Too much freedom and chaos can be overwhelming for your adoptive dog causing them to withdraw or become over aroused and be the catalyst for behavior issues. Give increased access to the house as your new dog begins to demonstrate understanding of basic cues, house etiquette and where to use the bathroom. This could take several weeks to months.



PROVIDE A SAFE PLACE free from people and other animals where your dog can eat meals and relax. It should also be free of cords or any other things you do not want chewed. A confinement area can keep your dog and your house safe when you cannot watch them.



CONSISTENCY. Shelter dogs spend long periods of time contained with set schedules. A predictable schedule eases stress when your new dog comes home. This is especially true if your dog is nervous. Having an idea of what is going to happen next is a powerful confidence booster.



PRACTICE ALONE TIME. Give your dog short periods of alone time even if you are home to help them build confidence and independence and prevent an unhealthy attachment to one owner. It is very important that your dog gain confidence being alone in your house and trusting that you are coming back. Food stuffed toys will help occupy them during these periods. Randomly returning and dropping them treats when they are quiet will also give value to this calm alone time.



LIMIT OUTINGS AND VISITORS for a few days to give your dog a chance to settle. The first people to invite over should be those the dog will interact with on a regular basis. All interactions should be calm with the guest allowing the dog to come to them and dropping the occasional tasty tidbit. Do not force physical contact. Relationships take time and it is important to let your dog move at their pace.



CALL THE SHELTER immediately if your dog is showing any stress signs like pacing, growling, high arousal and jumping up, or mouthing.



RESPECT BODY LANGUAGE and be prepared to step in for your dog if they are giving indications of needing space especially with children. Your dog needs to trust that you are 'listening' to them and respecting their body cues. Stepping in may involve redirecting a child onto a toy or game or giving your new dog some down time in their safe place with a food toy.



KEEP A LEAD ATTACHED for the first day so you can move your dog around without having to grab their collar.



ALLOW YOUR NEW DOG TO EXPLORE their environment at their pace providing praise and encouragement for shows of bravery. Let them take new experiences in at their pace, do not overwhelm or force them to interact before they are ready. Be your dog's advocate so they can trust that you 'have their back'.

Assume your new dog has had little socialization and that a majority of things you take for granted are new to them. Pairing vacuums, mixers, children, other animals, etc. with the arrival of food rewards can help your dog feel good about all the new things they are experiencing.



DISCUSS YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS for your new dog with your entire family before they come home. Make a list of cues and behaviours that you will teach your dog and post them where everyone can see it. Be aware of problem behaviours like jumping up, mouthing, pulling on lead and how they are inadvertently 'trained' and ensure everyone that is interacting with your dog know what to do if this happens. Consistency with all their trainers will help your dog learn the rules of the house quickly and reduce stress for you and your dog.



HOUSETRAINING: Bringing home a shelter dog is similar to getting a puppy. Being an adult does not mean a dog will automatically know your house etiquette or where the bathroom is located. Managing their access to different areas of the house and taking them out on a regular basis is imperative for the first few weeks to get them used to their new home.

When your dog first arrives, take them to the bathroom area and give them a chance to use it. Then walk them around the house on lead so you can interrupt if they go to urinate. Take them back outside every 10-15 minutes if they have not used the bathroom yet. This is especially important for male dogs that may want to lift their leg and mark inside the house.

You can start to put going to the bathroom on cue by quietly saying it as your dog is about to go or during (most of the SPCA dogs will already have some experience with this).

As with a puppy, reward after they eliminate the first few times. If you treat in the house after they do their business, they will get into the habit of going right back to the house. This is helpful during bad weather or if you need to go to work.

Keep your new dog contained in an area, preferably without rugs, while they learn bathroom routines.

After a few days, you can allow them have some freedom off lead in the house after they have gone to the bathroom. Stress and excitement can trigger an accident so after 15-20 minutes take them outside to use the bathroom again. This routine also helps them realize you will be taking them out on a regular basis so they can learn to hold it.



BEFORE YOUR DOG COMES HOME



TO DO:

1. Schedule time off to help your new dog settle in.
2. Walk your dog prior to the adoption and attend classes at the shelter to get your training relationship started.
3. Discuss getting a dog with your family and ensure everyone is in agreement.
4. Have everyone in the family meet the dog.
5. Decide who will be responsible on different days for feeding, walking, picking up after and training your new dog.
6. Confirm with your landlord that they are happy with you having a dog.
7. Ensure your fencing is complete and arrange a site visit with the SPCA and Dog Wardens if you are adopting a restricted breed.
8. Set up crating/pen area inside the house. Pick a spot where the family spends time but not a high traffic area where they cannot settle. Have a treat container ready and let all family members know to reward your dog for any calm behavior in their containment area.
9. Prepare a schedule of who will come home mid-day for a couple of weeks to check on your dog as they settle.
10. Pick a feeding area where your dog will receive their meals without being disturbed.
11. As training begins as soon as your dog arrives home, have a list of behaviours you will reward and ensure everyone is on the same page. Thinking about the behaviours you want will help you begin to rehearse proper behaviors with your dog as soon as they come home.
12. Start a list of cue words so all the 'trainers' in your house are consistent.



TO GET:

1. Food and bowls: Have a supply of the same food your dog is currently being fed to prevent belly upset. If you are planning to switch their food give them a few days to settle into their new home and do it slowly. The SPCA will provide you with a sample of the wet and dry food your dog has been receiving.
2. Bowls
3. Leash and harness
4. Vet records so you can have all of your dog's medical information and notes on upcoming vaccinations or checkups.
5. Support: SPCA Staff Contact for questions and concerns as your dog settles into your home. Contacts for trainers, veterinarian, and groomers.
6. Crate, pen and/or baby gates to help manage your dog's access to the house and other pets as they are settling into your family.
7. Food toys that you can stuff for times when they are practicing settling or spending time alone.
8. License, microchip and collar id tag.
9. Toys like long tug ropes, balls, and chew toys. The SPCA will include a towel or bed your dog has been using along with a toy.
10. Grooming tools such as shampoo, brush and nail trimmers
11. Poop bags and a poop scooper.
12. Enzymatic cleaner for housetraining accidents, cleaning solutions and extra dog towels.

TO LEARN:

1. Body Language: Have an understanding of dog body language so you can have insight into how your dog is feeling and preempt any behavior or training issues. Discuss body language with the children in the household stressing their need to understand and respect the 'give me space' cues your dog may show.
2. Classical Conditioning and how animals make associations to help you make all the new experiences your dog has positive.
3. How behaviours are formed and the importance of noticing good choices your dog makes, acknowledging them and rewarding them. The more you reward a behavior the more quickly it will become a habit.

