

New Dog, Lots of Energy... Ask a Trainer

By Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP

Dear Trainer,

I just adopted a new dog from a shelter. He is a pit bull mix that is about a year old. I've only had him a week, but I'm already feeling overwhelmed by his energy. I walk him twice a day for about 45 minutes to an hour, (or should I say, he walks me), but he never seems to run out of energy. I also take him to the dog park each night and let him run for about an hour but I can't seem to wear him out. What am I doing wrong!

Signed,

New Dog in the House

Dear New Dog,

Congratulations on rescuing a dog, and I'm sorry you are feeling so overwhelmed by your dog's energy level.

It sounds like you might actually be overdoing the exercise, and, as you will read, you will have a calmer dog by understanding that your dog needs some time to settle in and recover from living at the shelter. It can also take 3-4 weeks for the stress chemicals that accumulate in just a couple of days of living in a shelter to process and recover to normal hormone levels.

The state of stress from the shelter, along with the excess exercise, and the dog park can be the very things that are causing your dog's excited state. There is more research being done on this subject and it is finding that when there is a balance of physical exercise with mental exercise (like using Kong's to feed dogs, other food carrier toys, training, and providing things to chew, such as rawhides, or raw marrow bones) that dogs are much calmer.

In addition, depending on how long your dog was in the shelter, your dog's muscles will have gone through major changes because of the stressful environment and the lack of regular exercise. You really need to go slowly when working your dog up to a higher level of fitness—just like when we haven't exercised in a while—it takes time. 20-minute walks, twice a day are good for conditioning, and a place to start.

Next, consider how moving is stressful for us humans, and it goes without saying that the same goes for your dog, so it is important to avoid some of the common pitfalls of having a new dog in your home. These pitfalls include inviting everyone over to meet the new dog, taking the dog to a dog park right away, giving the dog a bath, going to the vet and even taking a training classes right away. Your new dog needs some time to settle in first! He needs time to get to know you and your routines before adding all the extras.

Consider the following:

1. There will be plenty of time for friends and family to meet your dog, but for now, just let your dog relax and unwind until you get to know him better. This will help you get a better idea of his levels of tolerance, and you will have had some

time to build a bond with him. Many dogs run away or escape from their new homes during the first few weeks because they have not had time to bond and consider their new place home.

2. Since your dog came from a shelter environment, he is surely in a physically stressed state. In no other circumstance are dogs exposed to the amount of noise, smells and levels of stress as in an animal shelter. Even the most elaborate shelters can't offer the benefits of a home with humans, and regardless of the comforts of a shelter, your dog still suffered a loss of his previous family. Taking your newly adopted dog to the dog park adds undue stress to an already stressed animal. (Remember it can take a weeks to calm down completely) Again, there is plenty of time for that later if your goal is to have your dog socialize with other dogs.
3. Training is one of the most important gifts you can offer your dog, but, again, give your dog a chance to settle in first. Get to know your dog, by starting slow with some simple training in your home. (You are training your dog all the time with how you respond to his actions, so be careful what you teach!) After the adjustment period, defiantly work with a positive reinforcement trainer or sign up with a group class that offers positive methods of training.
4. Feed a high-end food without corn, wheat or soy products—all of which can add to higher energy and unstable behaviors.

Lead by example

Since your dog is displaying a lot of energy, it's important to keep in mind that your calmness will teach your dog to be calm. Learn to breathe; the more you display calmness, the calmer your dog will be when he needs it the most.

It's also very important that you reward, and don't ignore all the calm behaviors your dog is offering rather than giving so much focus on the behaviors you don't like.

Humans tend to focus on the things they do not like their dogs to do; spending way too much time saying, "No," and expending far too much energy trying to make them stop what they are doing. Put all of that energy into "catching" your dog doing the correct things and rewarding those behaviors. If your dog has finally settled down and is quietly chewing a bone, do not ignore that behavior—reward it. Walk by your dog and quietly drop a treat by him and move along. If you don't have a treat, a single, "Good dog," will do.

If good behaviors are ignored and unwanted behaviors are the ones that get all of the attention, your dog may very well decided that good behaviors aren't' worth very much, but those "bad" ones sure do get everyone to pay attention to him.

Keep in mind that your dog is new in your home and doesn't necessarily know what you would like. Be a good leader by guiding, directing and teaching your dog with kindness

and patience as you show your dog the rules. If you still have problems, contact a positive reinforcement trainer in your area to help you in your home.

Good luck,
Nan Arthur, CDDBC, CPDT, KPACTP
www.wholedogtraining.com