



Successful Dog Adoptions- How to Live Happily Ever After with Your Newly Adopted Dog or Puppy

It would be so nice if every dog came with his or her own operation manual—an instruction guide where you could go to a specific page and find out how to troubleshoot all the potential problems as they present themselves. The need for this manual seems even more desirable when it comes to adopting dogs that have come from rescues or shelters since you don't have any idea about how much longer the "warranty" will be in effect or how the dog was "maintained" before he or she came into your home.

The funny thing is, if you could ask your newly adopted dog, he or she would probably request the "Operation Manual for Humans" since we seem to be "malfunctioning" all the time, at least from the dog's perspective.

To live happily with your newly adopted dog, you will have to assume that even if your dog had the "book" on human behavior; it would most likely be in a different language since dogs do not understand English. This puts the ball back in your court to make the relationship work for you and your new addition.

The good news is, following some simple guidelines you will be able to translate that "manual" for your dog and communicate in a way that will make your new addition a wonderful, fulfilling experience for all concerned.

Important must haves for your new puppy or dog:

- A clean bill of health from the vet.
- Identification and a nice buckle or limited slip collar—(choke chains are not only cruel, but also dangerous for puppies and dogs, and are known to cause long-term damage to the trachea!). Even if your puppy is microchipped, have identification on him in case he is lost and there is no scanner available to check on his "chip."

- Food and water dishes that can be washed and sanitized thoroughly.

- A six-foot leash-- Flexi-leashes are fun for things like camping and hiking, but dangerous to use in the city. Many laws says you must have your dog under control at all time, and anything over six foot is not considered "under control." Besides, these leashes teach your dog to pull. It is far better to work with a trainer to teach your puppy or dog

how to walk calmly with you at your side.

- A crate that can be adjusted for puppies as they grow, or one large enough for your adult dog to stretch out and stand up comfortably. Crates help with housetraining and provide a means to secure your dog when you are not home to supervise.
- Some sort of long-term confinement area if your dog is going to be left for longer periods of time—doggie doors are wonderful for this. If you plan to leave your dog in the yard when you are not home, be sure he has proper shelter and plenty of water. In addition, practice leaving him there a few times before a long separation. Be careful of leaving dogs unsupervised in areas where wildlife might come into the yard. Skunks, or coyotes pose their own respective problems for dogs.



- A snuggle bed (or two) of some sort—especially if you do not want your dog on furniture! You will want a nice soft bed that can be near you when you are sitting on your couch so your dog learns that he can be close and comfortable to you without being on the furniture.
- 2-3 Kongs to use as food puzzles—great for puppy teething, and a wonderful way to offer your dog mental exercise to keep him busy when you leave, or when you would like some time without the dog. Rather than feed your puppy or dog all of his meals in a bowl, use food carrier toys to make “earning” his meal fun, and to relieve any need to chew. Chewing on Kongs is the ultimate reward: your dog or puppy gets a great workout, (both mentally and physically) and he is rewarded for chewing on the correct thing via the food that falls out as he works on the Kong.
- A Buster Cube or Treat Ball also provides a great way for your pooch to earn his meals! These are designed to hold dry food, and your puppy or dog will have to push and nose the toy around to get the food to fall out. Again, this is a grand way to give dogs the ultimate workout—both mentally and physically.
- A taste deterrent such as Bitter Apple or “Fooley,” to spray on surfaces that you do not want your dog to chew. You will need to apply these daily since the strength will fade after sitting for a time.
- A super premium food like Solid Gold, Natural Balance, Wellness, Paul Newman’s Own, Blue Buffalo, California Natural, Prairie, Innova, or one of the many Freeze-dried raw diets, such as The Honest Kitchen’s brand—these are a few favorites (there are many others). You will have a healthier and calmer dog if you feed good food without all the junk carbohydrates, chemicals and other unnatural additives that take years from your dog’s life, not to mention all the food-associated behavior problems. Look for a food without corn, wheat or soy, and meat as the first ingredient.

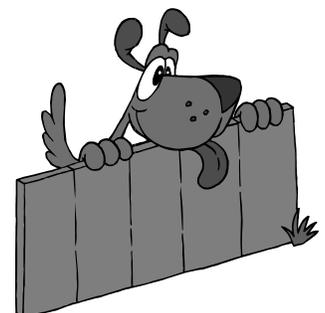
- Grooming equipment, such as brushes or combs. Talk to a local groomer about the types of equipment that is best for your dog’s type of coat.
- All natural shampoos and rinses to keep your dog clean but safe from toxins that are sometimes used in grooming products.
- And, a good positive reinforcement trainer along with your commitment to train your dog or puppy.

After you have the equipment, plan ahead:

Think about the basics before you bring your new pooch home. As often happens, many people bring their new dog home to discover that they really hadn’t thought out all of the details. It’s important to have some firm boundaries and limits for your new dog in the early stages. These limits can be expanded and lifted as your dog settles in, but it is far harder to go back and try to corral him after you find out that you are not happy with some of the choices your dog made with all that freedom.

Consider the following:

- Where will he sleep at night?
- Will your dog be allowed on the furniture?
- Will you be using a crate, and if so, do you have the proper information about crate training?
- Do you understand all the principles of proper housetraining? Your new dog might have been housetrained in his previous home, but that doesn’t mean he will be reliable in yours.
- Will you be able to devote a few days to help your dog adjust to your home so you can learn more about his mannerisms?
- Have you checked your fencing for cracks or holes? Also, plan to be in the yard with your dog the first few



times he is allowed out there. You will want to insure that he doesn't try to dig out or jump over, and this will also give you the opportunity to reward and praise any successful bathroom breaks.

- If you have adopted a puppy, get down low to see what your puppy sees. Are there things that would be fun for a puppy to chew, but dangerous; such as electrical cords?
- If you have other pets, have you thought about how you will introduce them, or keep them separated?

Give a dog a break

Understanding the signs of stress and knowing what to do to help your new arrival is another way to make the transition easier.

What is stress?

Stress comes in two forms; good stress, like when your heart feels all aflutter at the thought of seeing a new boyfriend or girlfriend, and bad stress that is brought on by fear, worry, overly-aroused states, or anger.

Either way, the sympathetic nervous system releases adrenaline and other chemicals into the bloodstream, which then compel many important organs in the body into high-gear. This rush of chemicals forces the heart, lungs and blood pressure to "step on the gas," so to speak. This process is often referred to as the Limbic System. When the Limbic System gets going, other things start to shut down. Digestion is slowed or inhibited, (that's why when dogs don't eat when they are in public places you should be concerned), the immune system is depressed, and even growth, as in a puppy, can be stymied to conserve energy just in case one needs to flee, freeze or fight!



Of course, the Limbic System was never intended to keep running for days on end; it was designed for animals to protect themselves or to flee from danger, then move on from there. This is not always

an option when dogs are confined by leashes, doors and fences, nor when the same stressors keep presenting themselves, day-after-day, such as being in a shelter.



There is more and more evidence pointing to the fact that continual states of stress, as seen in dogs in kennels and shelters, may cause such an upsurge of chemicals from the sympathetic nervous system, that even once the stressors are removed, it can take days, and even weeks for the "good chemicals" to return to normal. This can also take place during pain, exercise excess, high states of arousing play, and reactive displays of behavior during fear or aggression. Of course, the re-homing process for dogs certainly falls into the category of stress—just think about the last time you moved!

So how do you know?

Common signs of stress often include covert physical indicators such as:

- Red eyes
- Panting
- Diarrhea
- Dilated pupils
- Sweaty paws
- Muscle tightness
- Drooling, and shivering
- Vomiting
- Drinking excessive amounts of water

Dogs also display many physical behaviors to express their stress, including, but not limited to:

- Biting the leash
- Jumping on people
- Mouthing on people
- Reactivity toward people or other dogs
- Pacing
- Digging,
- Barking
- Excessive tail wagging
- Escape or hiding

With that, it's easy to see how people could mistake many of these signs for misbehavior and, unchecked, they do become learned behaviors that require behavior modification and training along with a good stress reduction plan that would include some life-style and environmental changes if people are going to be able to help their dogs "wind down."

Stress reduction program

There are a number of simple ways to reduce stress in your dog's life, but the first and foremost is to reduce your own stress! Lead by example and learn to breathe deeply around your dog and allow him to actually hear your breath. This will not only help him relax, it will help you as well.

Dogs communicate with each other using many different methods, including the rhythm of their breathing. Fast, short breaths from the back of the mouth, and with the mouth open can indicate that your dog is on the verge of play or arousal. Tight, closed-mouthed, shallow breaths through the nose are signs of anxiety for dogs, and your dog will get the message, loud and clear, when you are taking shallow, anxious breaths around him- "something must be wrong!"

Even if your dog just ate your favorite pillow, the solution calls for calmness- respond, don't react! Dog trainers know better than anyone that you will get more of the same behavior if you give attention to mistakes, so better to take a deep breath and do some future goal setting to prevent these situations in the first place.

Dos and Don'ts

To forego even more stress it is important to avoid some of the common pitfalls of bringing home your new dog. These 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 taking a training class right away. Your new dog needs some time to settle in

and allow the stress chemicals a chance to calm down. It can take 2-3 weeks for this process to happen, so do your dog a favor and give him a couple weeks vacation before introducing all the activity. 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 tolerance levels, 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, so don't let that happen, build a connection with your new dog.
2. If your dog came from a shelter environment, he is surely in a physically stressed state. Under very few circumstance are dogs exposed to the amount of noise, smells and levels of stress as at 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, the dog still suffered a loss of his family. Make the first couple of weeks at home with you as comfortable and relaxing as possible so your new dog is able to relax in his new surroundings.
3. If you *really* need to bath your dog, hire a professional so it can be done quickly and by someone other than you. Many dogs dislike baths, and if that is your new dog's first experience with you, your relationship starts off in the negative.
4. The vet can also wait if your dog is healthy and not showing any signs of illness. Of course, if your dog needs medical



attention take care of those needs, otherwise, wait for a couple of weeks.

5. 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 their 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.
6. Taking your newly adopted dog to a dog park would add undue stress to an already stressed animal. Again, there is plenty of time for that later if your goal is to have your dog socialize with other dogs. By waiting, it will make it much easier to introduce your dog to other dogs because you will know your dog better by then and be able to recognize if he is overwhelmed by meeting new dogs.

Realistic Expectations

If your dog makes mistakes, be patient and respond, don't react. Redirect him or provide him with alternatives such as stuffed Kongs for chewing, turning your back away for jumping, providing a place to dig for dogs that like to dig, and the like.

Lead by example

Your calmness will teach your dog to be calm. Learn to breathe and not bottle up your feelings. 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 the good behaviors, 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. It is time to start putting all of that energy into "catching" dogs 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 decide 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. Leadership, in short, is the ability to guide, direct or influence. Nowhere in the definition does it say "dominate," intimidate, or control, so use kindness and teach your dog the rules.

Respect your dog's boundaries

You want your dog to respect your space and boundaries. In return, you should do the same. If your dog just settled down to rest by your feet, it is not an invitation to reach down and touch him. If your dog shows his belly to you, it is not necessarily an invitation for a belly rub; it may be his way to say he is worried or concerned. If you watch how dogs interact with one another you would not see a dog start to rub or pound on a submissive dog's belly. He would simply sniff and move away—anything else would be considered rude in the dog world.

If you would not like something done to you in the context of what you might be doing to your dog, respect your dog—don't do it to your dog! Body pounding, constant patting on the head, strangers in your face, are all good example of how humans might invade a dog's personal space, and though he might tolerate it, doesn't mean he enjoys it.

Prevent Separation Distress

Have time for your new dog, but do plan for him to be alone as well. Be sure you don't lavish love and attention for days on end (not that you wouldn't want to!) and then leave your dog alone all day when you have to go back to work. This can cause separation distress since your dog will not have had any practice with you leaving. Get lots of small periods of alone time and make your exits and entries a non event. You want your new dog to believe that people come and go as part of the routine and that it is no big deal.

Laugh with your dog

Humor is the cement of all good relationships and dogs are truly the comics of the world. Enjoy your dog for what he is—a dog! There is poetry, music, and laughter in every moment of living with dogs (some messier than others) but dogs offer life lessons to each and every human that takes the time to look and not judge them for being dogs, and to respect them for being so tolerant of living with us.

