



BAPBR



Your New Dog: The First Three Weeks

Born Again Pit Bull Rescue



HOW TO SAVE YOUR DOG'S LIFE

1. Crate your dog.

When the cable guy comes to your home, put your dog in a crate or closed bedroom. Do the same when friends and family visit. If your dog enjoys people, let him join the party after the excitement of people entering the home has died down.

2. Ignore other dogs.

When you're out with your dog, don't interact with other dogs. Most dogs are dog-tolerant or dog-selective, but that doesn't mean they'll be comfortable with your attention to others. An uncomfortable dog can quickly become a dangerous dog.

*This is not an exaggeration—beloved family dogs are euthanized because their owners didn't know these simple steps. These are preventable situations. Please set your dog up for success!

THE BASICS

The transition into a new home is hard—for people and dogs alike! It can be frightening and overwhelming for many dogs. You can make this transition easier by taking things slowly and simplifying the introduction process. We call this the “Three-Week Decompression Period.” During these first weeks, avoid unnecessary stressors while the dog settles in, keep the environment calm, and take it slowly.

Naturally, the first thing you want to do with your new dog is ... everything! After all, isn't positive socialization one of the most important aspects of dog ownership? Yes! But before all of that, the bond between new dog and new guardian must be developed.

Imagine it from the dog's point of view. He might like you, but he doesn't know you yet. He's facing new people, new routines, and new rules all at once. He's stressed, and every additional change adds another stressor. Just like a human, your dog may react to stress by becoming defensive and reactive, or fearful and shy.

Here are a few tips:

- Limit introductions to immediate family and caregivers. He doesn't need to meet your neighbors, friends, or other animals right away.
- Avoid long, over-stimulating walks. If you have a yard, use that for outside time for the first few days.
- Set up a simple, clear, and consistent routine from day one. Regular mealtimes, calm energy, and fair rules will help your new dog adjust.

Two wonderful books we recommend are “Do Over Dogs” by Pat Miller and “Love Has No Age Limit” by Patricia McConnell and Karen London. If you'd like a free copy of either of these books, please email us.

THE SPECIFICS

Potty training:

We want your new rescue dog to always have a positive association with you. Our natural instinct is to yell and get angry when our dog makes a mistake in the house, but our goal is to remain calm. Calmly move your dog outside if you catch your dog making a mistake.

Most dogs over 12 months old are housebroken, but they may have accidents for the first few days or even weeks because they do not know the new schedule. In addition, dogs often do not like to go out in the rain. Hello, Pacific Northwest! Instead, they will hold it. Help your dog by going out in the rain with him while he potties. Immediately give him a jackpot reward (three treats in a row) for a job well done!

Is there another dog in the home?

Be patient and take things slow. Keep your home safe and calm by using baby gates and crates to increase the distance between dogs. Limit interactions for the first two weeks. As your new dog adjusts, introduce the dogs slowly. Keep the initial meetings short (1–2 minutes) and increase the time by small amounts each day. All introductions must be supervised and properly managed for everyone's safety.

When the dogs are meeting, move all toys and bones off the floor. Never leave your dogs unsupervised with bones or toys. Resource guarding is a normal dog behavior, and fights often start over a toy or high-value chew. Feed your dogs separately!

If your new dog begins to cough (even a few days after adoption), he may have kennel cough. This is very common in shelter dogs. It can be contagious to other dogs, so you may need to isolate your new dog for a few days. Always check with your vet if you have any questions!

Crates:

NEVER force or shove your dog into a crate. Establish a positive association for your dog with the crate. Start by tossing treats near the entrance of the crate. Next, toss treats just inside the entrance. Let your dog decide how far into the crate he wants to go. If he's stretching and straining to get the treat inside, bring the treat closer to the entrance until he becomes comfortable. Give your dog a little break by tossing a treat away from the crate.

Once your dog associates his crate with yummy things, it will become a safe haven for him. It also keeps him isolated from other pets and helps him make good choices (like not peeing inside or chewing your shoes).

Food:

Many dogs have sensitive stomachs, and the transition into a new home can stress them out. If your dog has diarrhea, add a few tablespoons of plain yogurt with live cultures or canned pumpkin to his food. Their stomachs can also react to dietary changes. Mix your dog's old food with the new, and slowly change the ratio until he is eating the new food exclusively. It is normal for your new dog to eat very little at first—he will probably sleep quite a bit when you bring him home!

We don't recommend free feeding or overfeeding. We don't recommend giving your dog rawhides, as they are difficult to digest and are a choking hazard. We don't recommend giving your dog cooked bones, which can splinter and cause major—possibly fatal—damage to the dog's internal organs.

Your dog's food should be made in the US or Canada. Make sure the first five ingredients are real whole food ingredients. The words "meal" and "by-product" don't count! A high-quality diet will ensure your dog has normal stools, good condition skin and coat, and a healthy weight.

TRAINING

Set your dog up for success! Make it easy for him to behave. Strengthen your bond by celebrating his successes and avoiding harsh corrections.

Use the “mark and reward” method to teach him appropriate behaviors. As soon as he performs the behavior, say “yes!” and give him a treat.

When your new dog exhibits undesirable behavior, think RA-RA:

- Restrict Access: He's chewing on your shoes? Keep them in a closet. He's counter-surfing? Put a baby gate in the doorway to the kitchen.
- Redirect Attention: 1. Train a fist target. Hold your fist out, and as soon as your dog bumps it with his nose, mark and reward. 2. Train eye contact. Mark and reward each time your dog looks into your eyes. Once he consistently makes eye contact, add the verbal cue “watch me!” Practice both of these skills indoors, and then try them outside in low-distraction environments. Next step is using them in public!

Make sure your dog is getting enough physical exercise. Leashed walks don't provide enough exercise for most dogs. Your dog needs off-leash exercise. If you have a yard, use it for daily play sessions. Fetch and tug are both excellent games. No yard? Play in a hallway! In general, we recommend avoiding dog parks for your off-leash activities.

Make sure your dog is getting enough mental exercise. While leashed walks don't provide enough physical exercise, you can still go on “sniffy walks.” Walk slowly and let your dog sniff to his heart's content.

Give your dog his meals out of a food-dispensing toy instead of his bowl. These toys provide lots of mental stimulation.

Training sessions are a great way to exercise your dog's brain. Trainer Emily Larlham's YouTube channel “Dog Training by Kikopup” has videos on everything from basic obedience commands to fun party tricks.



IN CONCLUSION

Every dog is different. Some might jump right into your life with enthusiasm. Young pups sometimes handle things more easily than older dogs. A timid or reactive dog may need extra care, as will a dog moving into a dramatically new environment (e.g., house to apartment, single owner to family with kids) or coming out of a stressful shelter environment. Every new dog will go through an adjustment period!

The main thing to remember is to slow down! Don't push your new dog to accept many different things at once. Do give your dog the opportunity to get to know you. Three weeks may seem like a long time, but it's short compared to the next 10 (or so) years you will have with your new friend. Build a great foundation, and the rest will follow!

Need additional support or resources? Email us at info@BAPBR.org

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