

Starting Off On The Right Paw: The First 30 Days With Your Adopted Dog

Congratulations on adopting a new member of the family! Adopted dogs are often overanxious and need help in adjusting to your home. To make the transition easier for your new friend, we recommend a few basic guidelines that will help your dog adapt to your "pack" more easily and with fewer problems.

FIRST, WHAT EXACTLY IS A DOG?

Dogs are pack animals just like their ancestor, the wolf. They are very social animals, even more so than human beings. Each member of a pack has a rank (like a pecking order) and the higher up the ladder you are, the more privileges you are granted. Each pack has a leader or alpha, and for the dog you just adopted, that must become every human in your household!

Dogs are only capable of learning on a canine level and can only understand canine values. They do not understand the human terms of fairness or equality. So whether you have a young puppy or an adult dog, it is much easier to start establishing rank the minute a new dog enters your home rather than waiting until your Fido has established himself as "Leader of the Pack".

If Fido views himself as higher ranking than you, he may start to growl when you approach his food dish and/or growl when you try to take an object away from him; he may even bite when you are trying to groom him or pet him; he may try to chase away guests when they enter his den (your house); or he may refuse to remove himself from your couch or bed.

ADOPTED DOGS DO MUCH BETTER ADJUSTING TO A NEW HOME IF THEY HAVE A STRONG LEADER (WHICH SHOULD BE YOU!) as they understand exactly where they fit into your family "PACK." The following guidelines will help you in adjusting your new companion to your home and help in establishing yourself as the "pack leader."

1. KEEP YOUR DOG UNDER CLOSE SUPERVISION WHEN LOOSE IN YOUR HOUSE. An easy way to keep Rover under control is to let him drag his leash around, so you can gently guide him away from the trash or off the couch. Another way is to put up baby gates or close the doors to certain rooms to restrict the dog's access in your home.

2. WHEN YOU CAN'T WATCH FIDO, THEN CONFINED HIM TO A CRATE OR A SMALL ROOM OR AN EXERCISE PEN. Never leave him alone in your house for at least the first 30 days. If you have adopted a younger dog (two years or under), plan on keeping him in a safe place when you are gone to prevent destructive behaviors from developing. A safe place can be a crate placed in the most used room in your house or confinement to one room such as the kitchen or bathroom. An exercise pen is a metal folding pen (sort of like a playpen for babies) that is portable and can be placed in any room in your house. The Humane Society's pet store, AlphaPet sells them. We do not recommend putting your dog outside or in your garage when you cannot watch him. That to



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him is punishment (he got cast out of the pack's den), and if he becomes stressed by his isolation, he may develop bad habits such as becoming a landscape gardener or a trashaholic or an escape artist or a neighborhood serenader. Please read the hand out on Crate Training for more information on how to contain your dog inside your house.

3. HAVE TIME OUTS. Do not spend so much time with your new family member that when it comes time for you to go to work on Monday, Fido is overanxious that you are leaving him. Deliberately ignore him for 20 to 30 minutes at least three times a day. Pretend he is not there: do not pet him, say anything to him, or make direct eye contact; just move away should he try to paw you or nudge you. Use time outs just before you leave for work in the morning and use one as you arrive home each evening, so your dog learns not to become emotional about you coming and going.

4. PRACTICE PUTTING YOUR DOG IN THE PLACE HE WILL STAY WHEN YOU ARE NOT HOME, ONLY DO IT WHEN YOU ARE HOME AT FIRST. Put him in his crate or confine him to one room in the house and then remain at home watching TV or cleaning the house. Start by leaving him alone for five minutes several times in one day. Gradually increase the time he is alone until you can safely leave him for two hours at a stretch. You are preparing him for when you need to leave the house for work or errands.

5. TREAT YOUR DOG AS UNHOUSEBROKEN, EVEN IF YOU WERE TOLD THAT HE IS TRAINED. Most adopted dogs are nervous about their new surroundings. So take him out often during the day the first couple of weeks. Show him where he is to do his business, giving him loads of praise when he does eliminate. A leash can help you take him outside to the designated "potty" area. If he has an accident in the house, do not yell at him, swat him or rub his nose in it. All he will learn is to be afraid of you. See the house-training section in this adoption packet for detailed information about housebreaking.

6. GIVE YOUR DOG HIS OWN BED ON THE FLOOR. As much as you may be tempted, if you allow your dog to sleep in your bed, you are telling him that he is just as high ranking as you are.

Give him a blanket on the floor at the foot of your bed. If he roams or is unhousebroken, keep him in a crate at night or tied to the foot of your bed (giving him no more than a length of 8-16 inches of leash, depending on the size of the dog).

7. AVOID GAMES LIKE TUG OF WAR, WRESTLING OR ANY ROUGH GAMES. These games only encourage him to use his strength against you. Play games such as fetch, hide 'n' seek, blowing bubbles for him, or kicking a soccer ball around for him to chase. Some dogs love to play Frisbee and others excel at learning tricks. Children ,especially, should play all games standing up, as getting on the floor at dog level is like telling him that you are a dog, too.

8. IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN, PLEASE READ THE HANDOUT ON KIDS AND DOGS. Children are often the most disrespected members of your dog's pack. Your dog will view himself as much higher ranking than our children. This could result in a bite in the future. It is up to you to prevent any possible problems from developing between your newly adopted dog and your children by following the basic rules outlined in this and other handouts.

9. MAKE SURE THAT YOUR DOG EARNS ALL PRIVILEGES - STROKING, EATING, WALKING, PLAYING, ETC. Do not allow your dog to demand these things from you (by nudging you with his nose or paws). Making him sit or lay down before you pet, feed or play with him will put you more in control. This is called NO FREE LUNCH!

10. FEED YOUR FAMILY FIRST, and THEN FEED YOUR DOG. Pour Fido's meals (he should have at least two meals daily) in his bowl and leave it on the counter while you eat your meal first. Then put Fido's food down for him to eat. Give him no more than ten minutes to eat and then take away whatever is left over and save it as part of his next meal.

11. MAKE SURE YOU GO THROUGH NARROW OPENINGS LIKE DOORWAYS AND PASSAGEWAYS FIRST. Make your dog follow you, not lead or herd you. Leaders lead and followers follow.

12. ENROLL YOU AND YOUR DOG IN A TRAINING CLASS. Most adopted dogs do have

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some type of behavior problem, such as jumping on people; being fearful of strange people or dogs; or pulling on a leash. A good quality training class can help you with your dog's problems and help you understand why he is engaging in some of these behaviors.

13. MAKE YOUR DOG MOVE OUT OF YOUR WAY WHEN YOU MOVE ABOUT THE HOUSE. Letting him drag a six-foot to ten-foot leash behind him allows you to move him easily and without a hassle.

14. MAKE YOUR DOG A PART OF YOUR FAMILY. Unacceptable behavior is never improved by isolating your dog to the backyard, or worse, tying your dog up in the yard. Pack animals need their pack and, for better or for worse, you're it.

Thank you again for giving a home to a Humane Society animal. The unconditional love and loyalty you receive in return will more than outweigh the time and effort you have put into teaching your dog how to live with you!

If you have any questions, problems or concerns please call the Humane Society Silicon Valley's Animal Behavior Helpline at (408) 727-3383, extension 753. For more information, visit our webpage at www.hssv.org/behavior/behavior.htm.