

# Adopting a Large, Rowdy Dog: What You Need to Know

Adopting a new dog should be a fun and exciting adventure. However, with greater size, strength, and energy, you may encounter more unique challenges with a large dog than you would with a small dog. Here are things to consider along with ways to set you and your dog up for success.

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## Walking Equipment Recommendations

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- **Be Proactive:** Large, energetic dogs can be difficult to control on leash and choosing the right equipment (leash, collar, harness) can make all the difference!
- **Harnesses:** For strong pullers, a great tool is a “no pull harness” like the Easy-Walk and Sensation Harness. For strong, reactive dogs, “head halters” such as Gentle Leader and Halti are fantastic choices.



Easy Walk harness



Gentle Leader



Sensation harness

- **Keep It Pain Free:** Avoid choke chains and pinch collars as these can cause pain and injury. The pain may result in negative associations with dogs and people that they pull towards, creating and even worsening reactivity.

## Transitioning into a New Home

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- **Set a Schedule:** Dogs thrive on rules and routine, but after getting adopted, their routine is thrown off. Be patient and ready to set a regular schedule. Try to provide meals, play, exercise, and sleep around the same times each day.
- **Keep It Low Key:** In the excitement of adopting, you may want to take your dog everywhere and introduce them to everyone. While your new dog may not appear stressed, your dog will benefit from time to *decompress*, time with you, avoiding visitors or gatherings, and settling into a routine. Consider at least a week or two to get on to a schedule. Some dogs may need more time.
- **Shelter Life is Stressful:** It can be very taxing on a dog’s mental and physical health. During transition time, it is normal for challenges to arise in a dog’s behavior.

## Physical Exercise

- **Energy Burst:** Most large, energetic dogs in the shelter have not had their exercise needs fully met and can be extra rowdy for a few days to a week after transitioning to a home.
- **Plan for Exercise:** Large, athletic dogs need daily physical exertion. One to two calm walks a day generally won't cut it. Think of runs, hikes, fast walking, ball play sessions, and play with another dog as a single form of exercise. Your dog will need at least two a day if not more.



- **The Self-Exercising Dog?** It doesn't exist. Dogs will not exercise themselves. A dog in a large yard left to their own devices will become bored quickly. They need interaction and guidance to adequately meet their physical needs.
- **A Tired Dog is a Good Dog:** A tired dog is far less likely to get into mischief (destructive chewing, escape tendencies, digging, barking, etc.)

## Mental Stimulation

- **Make Them Think:** While physical exercise is a necessary part of any dog's routine, mental games and stimulation are important to avoid boredom and keep them learning. Dogs can become tired from using their brain as well!
- **Make Them Work:** Every dog should have mental enrichment daily. Here are some suggestions: interactive feeders, puzzle toys, obedience training, nose work, etc.



Obedience Training



Puzzle Feeders



Scent Work



Interactive Feeders



Agility and Sports

## Managing and Confining Your Dog in A New Environment

- **Provide a Safe Space:** Once a dog leaves the shelter and goes home, they will need a safe place to be when left alone or in need of down time. *Having access to the entire house initially can be a disaster waiting to happen.* Dogs don't know where

they are and that they are home. This can cause some anxious behaviors (chewing on inappropriate objects, barking, counter surfing, scratching).

- **Crate training:** This is highly recommended! See the *Weekend Crate Training* handout in your adoption guide for the best way to introduce this amazing tool.



- **Leave Alone:** All dogs will need some time to settle in and learning to be left alone may be a part of that. Keep the environment calm and predictable including when you leave and return.
- **Other Tools to Use:** Exercise pens and baby gates are great tools for confinement and managing movement around the house as your dog adjusts to their new environment.



## Be Your Dog's Teacher and Guide

- **Lead with Confidence and Kindness:** Good leaders form positive relationships without provoking fear.
- **Rules? What Rules?** Establish and teach your dog the rules in the home, don't just expect them to know. Your dog won't understand what you want (not jumping on furniture, what not to chew on, knowing basic commands like "sit", how to greet visitors, responding to their name, etc.), so you will need to take the time to teach them. It won't happen overnight, but consistency is key.
- **Reward the Good:** Dogs learn fast when you reward them for the things you want them to do. If your dog is laying quietly beside you while watching TV, let them know they are doing the right thing (treats, praise, affection).

Is your dog barking at other dogs on leash? Fearful of new people? Struggling with the transition? Don't wait.

**HSSV is committed to providing post-adoption behavioral assistance so please reach out right away if you have any concerns. <http://hssv.org/behavioradvice>**