

Bringing Home Your Adopted Dog

Tips for a smooth transition

Dogs that come to an animal shelter experience a lot of upheaval and stress. Some have been surrendered by their owners because of a change of circumstances, or medical or behavioural issues, but the dogs don't know that. All they know is that they've lost their family. Other dogs are transferred from rescue organizations that have found them as strays. They endure long journeys to get here, often with radical changes in environment, then face more uncertainty as they wait for new homes.

We are so grateful to people who choose to adopt dogs from our shelter and we want to set you up for the best possible chance of success. That starts with understanding that the first few weeks will be a big adjustment for your new dog. You can help them through this transition period in a supportive, low-stress way that will benefit you both. We call it "decompression" because it literally is about minimizing any pressure or expectations on the dog so they can rest, reflect and reboot, and have a clean slate for their new life. Here's how you can help:



Have patience

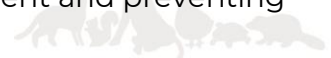
Your new dog may display behaviours you weren't expecting or wanting in the first few weeks of their arrival. Understand they are feeling stressed and anxious about yet another change in their life and may have a difficult time adjusting to new boundaries. Acclimatization into your life takes time, as well as your steadfast direction and support.

Keep calm and carry on

We know you'll feel like celebrating your new family member in the early days, but it's best to keep things as low key as possible, quietly and gradually introducing your adopted dog to their new environment. If they get agitated or over-aroused at times, remain calm and allow them to settle. Always reward the behaviour you want.

Use a sanctuary space

Providing your new dog with a private place of their own, like a crate or other form of confinement, is essential to the decompression process and can be used throughout their life. The dog should spend a fair bit of time in their crate (or x-pen or designated closed-off area) during the decompression period in order to regroup from their previous experiences and to process their new ones. A dog that goes into a new home and has free rein right off the bat may become overwhelmed, often prompting unwanted behaviours. Confinement offers sanctuary, teaches boundaries and allows decompression, all of which relieves their stress. We highly recommend starting your new relationship by providing safe confinement and preventing



problems such as destructiveness and inappropriate elimination. (Please see our *Crate and Confinement* information sheet.)

Establish a routine

Dogs love routine, especially those who've endured a lot of changing circumstances. Plan out mealtimes, confinement times, elimination and exercise times, training times, quiet hang-out times, and as much as possible stick to this schedule. Make sure to create a routine that fits into your lifestyle so that it doesn't become untenable for you and your family.

Minimize new experiences to start

It sounds boring and it's intended to be. We want you to keep your new dog's world very small over the decompression period. This means restricting their socialization to just you and the immediate family. Friends, relatives, strangers can all wait their turn to meet your pooch in a few weeks. Same goes for dog encounters; stay at a distance and allow your new dog to observe but not meet. All outings should be short — for example, a trip around the block, some loose-leash walking in the backyard or grassy area near your home. Unless your dog is in immediate need of grooming or vet care, leave that for a week or two. All these new experiences can come later once they feel more secure in their bond with you.

Reward offered behaviours

If your dog voluntarily comes to you, reinforce the behaviour with praise and a treat. If your dog offers a sit or a down, reinforce it with praise and a treat. If your dog makes eye contact with you on a walk, reinforce them for checking in with praise and a treat. You can start more formal obedience training in a few weeks, but for now concentrate on capturing and rewarding behaviours that the dog offers. It's less pressure on them and still very effective.

Be consistent

It's hard for humans to stay on an even keel all the time, but it is so confusing for dogs when we over-react to certain behaviours, then go overboard apologizing for our over-reactions. Conflicting signals do not instill confidence. It's also very confusing for dogs when one family member upholds certain rules — e.g., no jumping up on people — and another family member contradicts them by encouraging the unwanted behaviour. Consistency and clear direction are crucial for building a dog's trust, self-esteem, and ability to make good choices.

Get help if needed

While these transitioning tips are intended to ease your dog into their new life and minimize the potential for behaviour problems, sometimes troubles arise. Many new owners put off getting professional help until the behaviour is more entrenched and harder to resolve. Toronto Humane Society offers problem-solving sessions with our certified canine trainers. And, if you've adopted a "TLC" dog, meaning one that requires a little extra care and attention, you're entitled to 4 free training sessions. Get on top of problems so you and your new dog can continue your life together better equipped to understand each other. Learn more at <https://www.torontohumanesociety.com/pet-services/training-and-behaviour>

