



Rehome

A GUIDE FOR ADOPTERS

TAKING YOUR NEW DOG HOME

You've chosen your new dog and are raring to take him/her home, but before you take one step through the front door there are a few things you need to sort out to make sure your home is ready for your new pet.

Moving on

When you're planning to take your dog home in the car, make sure that he/she will be safe and comfortable. Familiar smelling items, such as a blanket from his/her kennel, may help them feel at ease while travelling to the new home. Check out our factsheet on how to transport your dog safely at www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment.

Settling in

When you first take your dog home, you will both need to spend time getting to know each other. Your pet may have been living in a kennel environment for a while and so giving him/her time to learn how they fit into the family is important. Be consistent from the beginning too. Make sure that everyone in the family behaves in the same way towards the dog from day one. If there are any areas that you don't want your dog to have access to, such as upstairs in the bedrooms, make sure that these areas are out of bounds from the beginning too.

Your dog may be frightened of unfamiliar places and smells at first so make sure that he/she has access to safe hiding places that they can go to if feeling scared and take things at his/her pace. Familiar smelling items from the kennel, such as bedding or toys, may also help your dog settle in more easily. Set out a good routine from the beginning with regular walks, feeding, play and bedtime around the same time each day.

Giving your dog access to just one safe and secure room for the first 24 hours may also help him/her get used to the sounds and smells of the household. This should be the room that you would like their bed, food and water to be in; the room should be secure and free from hazards.

Remember your dog doesn't know you or your lifestyle, so introduce different activities and people over a period of time, particularly supervising all interactions with any children. For more information, see the RSPCA leaflets 'Getting to know your rescue dog' and 'Growing up with a dog - how dogs and children can enjoy living together'; available from your local RSPCA animal centre or branch.

Home comforts

When your dog comes home for the first time, he/she will be faced with an unfamiliar environment. As well as somewhere to hide, your dog will need somewhere warm, dry and quiet to sleep. Provide a soft bed that is large enough to allow him/her to go through the usual dog routine of turning before going to sleep; it should be made of material that is safe for your dog too. Put the bed in a quiet place that is away from draughts in an area he/she should feel secure and safe in. Safe toys, suitable objects to chew and regular opportunities to play will also help your dog settle in. However, be observant. If your dog's behaviour changes or he/she shows regular signs of stress or fear, talk to your vet.

Food and water

Changing your dog's diet suddenly can cause an upset tummy so feed your new pet with the diet he/she has been used to in order to reduce the risk of stomach upsets. Information about your dog's preferred food and advice on feeding will be provided in the adoption pack you will be given when you come to collect your pet. If you want to change your pet's diet to something else of your choice, do so gradually over three to five days, mixing a little of the new food with the old to gradually wean your dog onto the new diet.

Dogs should be fed at least once a day (unless advised otherwise by a vet) and you will have information about how often your pet is used to being fed in your adoption pack.

Fresh, clean drinking water must be available to your dog at all times.

Tiptop training

As your dog settles in, the best thing you can do to reassure your new pet is be calm and patient. It is crucial that you spend time interacting with your dog in a way that he/she enjoys. Continuing any training that the centre or branch has been progressing with them can be a great way to form a bond - it is important to reward your dog for good behaviour in order to form a positive relationship. Your dog may benefit from training and socialisation classes, particularly if he/she is a puppy, and your local RSPCA and/or your vet may have details of a good class in your local area that uses reward-based methods. Please ensure the trainer is a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

When you get home from the centre/branch, make sure your dog goes to the toilet in an outside area that you have decided is suitable before you take him/her into your house and praise him/her when done. This will also help him/her learn where to go to the toilet. If you take your dog to visit other houses make sure that he/she goes to the toilet before you enter the house. Provide regular opportunities throughout the day for your dog to go to the toilet outside. If your dog's toileting habits change, or if you are having trouble with any toilet training, speak to an expert such as your vet. Don't shout at or punish your dog if they have an accident though - they may only become anxious and which will make the problem worse.

The time will come when you need to leave your dog alone for short periods. So that this doesn't come as a shock to your dog, get him/her used to being left alone gradually. To start with leave him/her alone for a very short period and each time stay out for a bit longer. Make sure you leave your dog with plenty of toys and chews, and for a maximum of four hours if possible. If they have been naughty when you are out do not punish them, as they will associate the punishment with your return and not the bad behaviour. See the RSPCA leaflet 'Learning to be left alone' for more information.

Keeping fit

The amount of exercise your dog will need will largely depend on his/her individual habits, age and health. The centre/branch will advise you of the exercise requirements of your dog.

Your dog will need to know how to walk on a lead to protect him/her from traffic, livestock and places where young children play as appropriate. The centre/branch will tell you if there is any further training to be continued in helping you and your dog with walking on-lead. If your dog has good recall and you are confident in providing off-lead exercise, then find a safe and secure area to provide these opportunities for your dog. The centre/branch will have advised if your dog needs additional training to provide off-lead exercise in public places- regular reward-based training is a good way to teach your dog the basics. In the meantime, make sure that your garden is fully secure, so you can have regular training sessions with your dog and provide opportunities for him/her to run off-lead.

Good company

How you introduce a new dog or puppy into your home, and to existing pets can make a difference to how their relationship will continue. Once a relationship becomes violent or fearful and the animal feels threatened, it is difficult to change behaviour patterns. Taking things slowly with careful introductions is vital to prevent excessive reactions. Choose a quiet time when the household is calm - avoid festivities, parties, visiting relatives or friends, and find time to concentrate on calm reassurance for both animals.

You can integrate the new dog into your home better by ensuring that the new pet smells of "home" before being introduced to the resident dog/cat as scent is an important communication method for them. It is a good idea to swap the bedding of your animals to enable them to smell each other prior to meeting; the RSPCA centre or branch will be able to help you with this. If you already have a dog, make sure that you provide enough toys, beds and hiding places for all of them, as well as enough space for them to get away from each other if they don't want to- don't force them to interact. If you are having trouble introducing your pets, speak to an expert, such as your vet. For more information, check out our factsheet on introducing dogs at www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company

Vet for your pet

Making sure you have someone professional to turn to if your dog is ill or involved in an accident is very important. Register your dog at your local veterinary surgery before bringing him/her home from the centre/branch and research your choice thoroughly. You'll also need to give the vet your dog's medical records as soon as possible; these will be given to you in the adoption pack.

Think about taking out pet insurance too. For just a few pounds a month, you'll be covered for unexpected vet bills in the future and safeguard your pet's health.

Health check

Make sure you treat your dog for fleas and worms regularly and continue his/her vaccinations - ask your vet how often and what products to use. If you have adopted a puppy that has not been neutered, don't forget to get this done at the recommended age too.

Regular grooming is also important to keep your dog's coat in good condition. You may need to have patience as your dog may not be used to being groomed. Reward your dog and don't shout at him/her if grooming is difficult at first- this will only make the experience more stressful for your pet. If you have a white dog, or a dog with a predominantly white face and/or ears, it is also important to remember to use a safe and suitable sunscreen when they go outside in warm weather. Ask your vet for more advice on when and what products to use.

Getting help

If things aren't going smoothly and you have concerns about your dog, talk to your vet or contact the RSPCA centre or branch from whom you adopted your dog.

There is lots of useful information and helpful tips on the RSPCA website: www.rspca.org.uk/dogs and your local RSPCA centre/branch has leaflets and guides on a range of pet ownership topics.

It takes time, effort and understanding to help your pet get used to its new life, and to help it overcome problems, but all the time and effort will be worth it when the end result is a happy addition to your family!

Please remember if you have any concerns, or require any advice, contact your RSPCA centre or local branch.