

A Basic Guide to *Taking Home a New Foster or Adopted Dog*



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Decompression

Many dogs entering a home environment are coming from stressful situations, including multiple shelters or homes, long transport rides, stressful medical care and procedures, behavior evaluations, and more.

While many of these dogs are headed towards improved lives, the process of rescue and transition from one place to another can be one of the most traumatizing things that happens to them.

The priority when welcoming a new foster or adopted dog into your home: **give them time to decompress and settle in at their pace!**



Every dog is an individual.
Take it slow.
Recognize signs of stress.
Stick to a routine.
Offer a safe space.

[The Importance of Decompression When Bringing Home a New Dog](#)



Management

Management is essential in helping your new dog stay successful and to prevent trigger stacking, a harmful accumulation of stress in a short period of time. Trigger stacking can result in exaggerated stress responses (like growling, lunging, and biting).

Preventing these behaviors will make a dog more successful. While the necessity for management will vary from dog to dog, a good general rule of thumb is to be conservative and give your new dog a few weeks minimum to fully settle in.

◆ Predictable Routine

- Scheduled Mealtimes
- Scheduled Potty Breaks
- Scheduled Walks

◆ Zen Zone/Safe Space

- Off-limits to the rest of the family, including children and other pets
- Crate, Dog Bed, Area Under a Table

◆ Minimize Interactions

- Minimize interactions with children and other pets for several days
- Manage this with gates, crates, closed doors, and supervision
- Minimize interactions with other dogs and people on walks

◆ Avoid Gatherings

- Avoid parties, festivals, the dog park, or other “exciting” situations
- What's fun for you may be frightening or stressful for your dog
- There is plenty of time to introduce them to exciting events - start slow!

Puppies Under 16 Weeks

For young puppies under 16 weeks, the primary focus should be safe, high quality socialization opportunities. Management is still important! Learn more about socialization here: [The Most Important Thing To Teach a New Puppy](#).

Check with your foster or rescue coordinator for local, well-run, force-free puppy socialization options. More on [Properly Socializing Your Puppy](#).



Medical Issues?

Medical issues can have an effect on behavior and make a dog less resilient when dealing with stressors. (Makes sense!)

If applicable, communicate with your foster or rescue coordinator if you have a dog with medical issues, and manage them closely.



Become a Body Language Pro

Is my dog happy? A dog's body language is the easiest way to tell if any dog is doing well and comfortable at any given time.

✓ Signs of Stress

You can find out more about dog body language [here](#) and [here](#).



✓ Take a Break!

If you're noticing signs of stress when you're doing a particular activity with your dog, take a break, and give your dog some space from whatever it was that was causing stress.

Need more help? Seek out a certified, force-free dog training professional.

Petting Consent Test

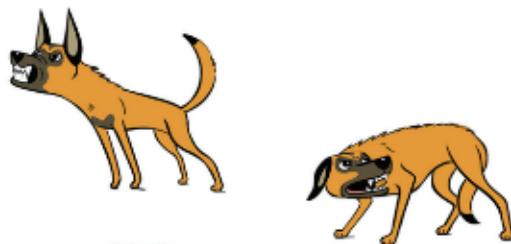
How can you be sure your dog wants to be petted? Watch [this video](#) to learn how!



THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

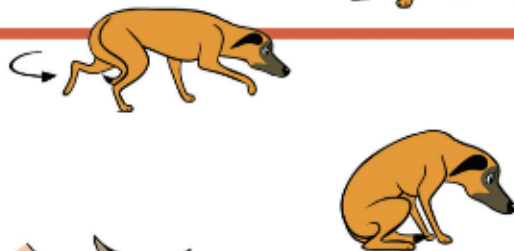
RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive aggression: lunging forward, ears forward, tail up, hair may be up on the shoulders, rump, and tail, showing only the front teeth, lip pucker - lips pulled forward, tongue tight and thin, pupils possibly dilated or constricted.
- Defensive aggression: hair may be up on the back and rump, dilated pupils, direct eye contact, showing all teeth including molars, body crouched and retreating, tail tucked, ears back.



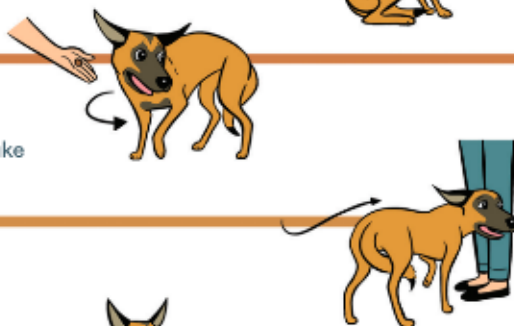
RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight: ears back, tail tucked, actively trying to escape - slinking away or running, mouth closed or excessive panting - tongue tight instead of loose out of mouth, showing whites of eyes, brow furrowed, pupils dilated.
- Freeze/Fret: tonic immobility, pupils dilated, increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tail tucked, body hunched.



YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 3)

- Similar to FAS 2 but turning head away, may refuse treats for brief moments or take treats roughly, may be hesitant to interact but not completely avoiding interaction.



YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2)

- Ears slightly back or to the side, tail down but not necessarily completely tucked, furrowed brow, slow movements or unable to settle, fidgeting, attention seeking to owner, panting with a tighter mouth, moderate pupil dilation.



GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Lip licking, avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, lifts paw, partially dilated pupils, slight panting but commissures of lips are relaxed.



GREEN: ALERT/EXCITED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Tail up higher, looking directly, mouth closed, eyes more intense, more pupil dilation, brow tense, hair may be just slightly up on the back and tail, may be expectant and excited or highly aroused.



GREEN: PERKED/INTERESTED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but loose lips, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.



GREEN: RELAXED (FAS 0)

- Sleeping.
- Neutral: ears in neutral position, not perked forward, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed but lips relaxed, body loose, tail carriage neutral, pupils normal dilation.
- Friendly greeting: slow back and forth tail and butt wag, ears just slightly back, relaxed brow and eyes, may have mouth slightly open with relaxed lips and loose tongue.





Enrichment

Dog-appropriate activities and the choice and agency to engage in them can help combat the effects of stress.

Enrichment also promotes psychological and physiological well-being and is essential for every dog's quality of life.

Ditch the Food Bowl

- Feed your dog out of puzzle toys
- Scatter kibble in the house or yard for your dog to forage
- Offer bones and chews
- Check with a vet to determine what is safest for your particular dog



Social Interaction

- Dog play: If your dog enjoys play, allow safe access to other dogs
 - Check with your foster or rescue coordinator to determine the best options
- Cuddle your dog, give your dog a massage, or brush them (if they like it)



Sensory Experiences

- Try some beginner's nose work with your dog!
- Try a flirt pole toy if your dog likes to chase critters.
- Offer different types of toys and rotate them for novelty
- Drive to a quiet place for a decompression walk
- Go on a sniffari in the neighborhood

Cognitive Opportunities

- Short training sessions can exercise your dog's brain, help them acquire new skills, and build your bond together
- Switch up the treats you use for training!

This is not an exhaustive list - more easy ideas for enrichment [here](#).



Manage Interactions

Prevention and Supervision

✓ Separation

When not actively supervising, separate your dog from other household pets and from young and small children to prevent instances of conflict for the first several weeks (longer if needed).

✓ Supervise and Teach

Teach children the “correct” way to interact and bond with a dog:

- Petting under the chin or on the side
- Practice petting consent tests
- Doing training with a guardian supervising

Manage Resources

- Leave your dog alone while they're eating.
- Don't remove food, chews, toys, or food bowls when your dog is eating or playing.
- Don't allow children or other pets to interact with your foster while they're eating or enjoying chews.
- Pick up chews, toys, and empty food bowls when not supervising to avoid conflict.
- Provide water bowls in multiple locations if you have other pets in the home.

Dogs are individuals. Different levels of management are going to be necessary for different dogs. It's up to you to get to you know your dog to know what they need.

Family Meals

- Dogs in a multi-dog situation may need to be separated while humans are eating meals - monitor this.
- If needed, separately feed the dogs meals during your meals or keep them on leash to prevent conflict.



Alone Time

It's okay to stay at home with your new dog for a week or so after bringing them home before trying an absence, but it will be important to help them become accustomed to being home, depending on their future routine.

- After pottyng and exercising your dog trial a 20-minute absence.
- Many dogs will know if you don't actually start the car and depart. Actually leave the house but stay close by in case you have to return quickly.
- The hope is that your dog is able to settle in a 15-20 minute period.
- Monitor your dog to determine how the absence goes.
 - Use FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom on your laptop, tablet, or phone.
 - Low-cost webcams are available from Wyze Cameras.
- If you see distress (inability to settle down, excessive vocalization, escape attempts, panting, drooling, etc.), Immediately return home and reach out to your foster or rescue coordinator or a qualified trainer for help.

If all goes well and your foster dog is able to settle, GREAT! Continue to leave them home alone for short periods a few times per week.

For the first several absences, your new dog should likely remain separated from other household pets to prevent conflict. You may be able to loosen your management after getting to know your dog.



Training Philosophy

- The dog training industry is unregulated, with no oversight or requirement for education, certification, or professional standards.
- There still exist many different methodologies and approaches to training, including those that are outdated and unscientific.
- Behavioral science has proven that punitive and coercion-based training often elicits aggression and anxiety as a side-effect.
- Science also tells us that fear and pain inhibit learning.

The case for force-free, reward-based training is overwhelming.

A Note from Mary

Thank you for your tireless efforts for the animals!

My entire professional career has been dedicated to working with animals and helping dogs improve their relationships with their humans. I'm committed to modern, force-free, evidence-based training and streamlining the training process for dogs and families.

After earning my Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Biology, I worked a veterinary technician, an adoption center supervisor, and as a dog training and behavior consultant at shelters in Boston, Massachusetts and Boulder, Colorado. I now work in private practice, and specialize in fear, reactivity, and aggression.

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Thank you for all you do for the animals!

An additional thanks to the talented Beth Sautins from Doggy Geeks University for assistance with this handout.

