



WHS Dog Adoption Guide for Adult Dogs

By Laurel Saville

Congratulations on adding a canine friend to your family! The following tips will help you and your new best friend get off on the right paw.

Go Slow

While it's exciting to have a new dog in the house and it's natural to want to show him off to your family, friends, and neighbors, please remember that your rescue dog has been through a lot of stressful changes, and what he needs most when you first bring him home is some quiet time to decompress. Whether he came from a loving home, a difficult situation, or was a stray, your dog has lost everything he knows, spent time in a noisy shelter surrounded by strange dogs and people, and is now in another new living situation with you. Some dogs may be very tired and a little shut down, others may be anxious and restless. However your new dog is behaving, it's important to respect his needs and let him set the pace of getting acclimated.

Expect Personality Changes

It can take days, weeks, or months for a rescue dog to feel comfortable enough for their true personality to come through. Don't be surprised if your pup is affectionate one moment and aloof the next, wagging her tails at the neighbor's dog one day and growling the next, bringing you toys and then hiding in the closet. Your dog is trying to navigate a whole new world and she will test boundaries, explore, retreat, and make missteps as she learns the ropes and begins to trust you in the weeks and months after adoption.

Give Your Dog Space

Of course, you want to be petting and snuggling and including your dog in family life. But understand that all this attention and activity may be overwhelming or even frightening to your new dog, especially at first. Don't allow children to hug, ride, poke, bother, or approach the dog when he is eating or playing with a toy. Use baby gates to let the new dog and other resident pets see and sniff each other and then retreat on their own terms. Don't go to off-leash dog parks for at least the first month, until you've had a chance to see how he is with unfamiliar dogs. Create a comfy space in your home, either in a crate or a room, that is a safe zone for your new dog where he knows he can go lie down and relax without being bothered by other pets or humans.

Establish A Routine

Dogs thrive on predictability. Create a regular schedule of walks, meals, rest, play time, etc., and keep to it for a few weeks while your dog gets used to her new environment and her new people. Make sure your dog gets outdoors to do her business regularly, so she can establish a potty routine. Clean up accidents with an enzymatic cleaner like Nature's Miracle to ensure that every trace of smell is removed. Watch your dog and reward the behavior you like, like entering her crate or going to the door to tell you she needs to go outside, with a treat and praise.

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Keep Them Leashed

The most common time for rescue dogs to get lost is soon after arriving at their new homes. They may get scared by an unfamiliar noise or just being in a new place, chase a critter and not know how to get back home, or explore and get disoriented. We recommend keeping your dog leashed, even in a fenced yard for several weeks (you never know how high they can jump or deep they can dig!) and everywhere else for several months.

Sign Up For Lessons

Invest in a basic training class for adult dogs or a few private lessons with a force-free, science-based, certified dog trainer. A good trainer can help you understand your dog and teach you how to communicate effectively so you'll be set you for a long and rewarding relationship. If you haven't already received one, ask WHS staff for a list of local positive, reward-based dog trainers to help get you started.

Be Patient

Try to keep expectations and rules to a minimum at first. If your dog does something "naughty," like chews a shoe or takes food from the counter, just give him an appropriate toy instead and put food out of his reach. If she has an accident in the house, just quietly take her outside and praise her for doing her business in the grass. Understand that he may never have been taught house rules and she may never have played in a yard. Keep expectations realistic and enjoy getting to know your new friend – you'll have plenty of time together in the future to instill boundaries and teach manners.

Have Fun

Give your dog mental and physical exercise. Make sure she has plenty of appropriate items to chew. Use food puzzles and food dispensing toys to make meal time more interesting. Find out what he or she likes to do. Fetch? Tug? Tricks? Take long walks and let her sniff to her heart's content. Remember that playing with your dog is an important part of training, bonding, and becoming best pals.

Resources:

DogStarDaily.com

TheFamilyDog.com

Positively.com

3LostDogs.com

"The Puppy Primer" by Patricia McConnell

Whatcom Humane Society
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