

Understanding Your Rescue Dog

COMMON CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE RIGHT START



Reasons For Relinquishment

Up to 40% of dogs are relinquished to shelters because of behavioural problems. These may stem from the environment they were in previously; perhaps they were neglected, abused, lived with other animals they did not like, or other factors discussed in the Understanding Your New Puppy Guide. Stray dogs do not come with a history, however, it has been shown that they are more likely to have undesirable behaviours than unwanted dogs

Behavioural Issues
Associated with Relinquishment:

- issues with children
- escaping
- hyperactivity
- barking
- uncontrollable behaviours
- destructive behaviours
- separation anxiety.

Shelter Environment

The shelter is a stressful environment. It's a new environment with new people, lots of new smells and dogs are usually in small enclosed spaces. These stressors can increase the chance that a dog will show signs of separation anxiety and potentially promote the development of new behavioural problems. The top 3 undesirable behaviours are listed below.



Up to 68% of dogs exhibit an undesirable behaviour within the first month of leaving the shelter

fearfulness

excessive activity

destructiveness

Dogs who exhibited problem behaviours within the first month of adoption are returned to shelters at significantly higher proportions. Many of the problems can be addressed using conditioning, and behavioral modification with the help of your veterinarian and a boarded veterinary behaviourist.

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Rule of Three's

Your new rescue dog will adjust to their new home with you over time. A good rule of thumb to help understand this adjustment is the the "Rule of Three's"

3
days

Dogs may sleep a lot at first or they can be so stimulated that they will not be able to relax. They are still learning what is expected from them, the house rules and the routine.

Dogs may show increased attachment to their new owners in the first couple of days and may even show destructive behaviours when left alone.

3
weeks

Your rescue dog is getting used to the daily routine and you will see more of their true personality. At this point you will also be able to identify their behaviour problems and can begin to narrow down training or seek help from professionals.

3
months

At this point, your rescue dog will feel truly at home, they should be fully relaxed and adjusted to their new home and you will see their full personality. Changes may occur after this time frame, but drastic personality changes due to relaxation are not expected without dedicated behavioural modification.

Introducing to Other Dogs in the Home



Have the initial meeting outside with both dogs on a leash and keep the leashes loose. Make sure there are no toys or treats that they can fight over. Taking them for a walk can be very helpful to relieve some tension and allow them to get to know each other. When in the home, they should have their own areas. You should not leave them alone loose in the house until you are sure it is safe to do so. Again, avoid having food or toys laying around that they can fight over.

It is common for dogs to get into disagreements as they are learning how to properly interact with one another; barking, growling and snapping can be normal. If a fight does break out, never reach in as you may get bitten unintentionally. With time they can become good friends. If they are not settling like you think they should, you should get in touch with the shelter or your veterinarian and seek help.

House Training

Even adult dogs that are house trained can have accidents when they arrive in their new home because they do not know your schedule, they don't know how best to communicate with you yet, and they may not know where you think is acceptable for them to go.

Luckily, house training an adult dog and a puppy are done in the same way. Take them out frequently at first then start to develop a routine. Reward when they go! Patience and consistency are key.



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Crates

A crate will keep your new dog safe while you are not watching them, not home, and overnight. If you decide to crate them, you have to ensure that you are creating a positive place that they will want to go to. This can be achieved by using treats to lead them into the crate and you can feed them in there. Once they begin to associate their crate with good things they will go in on their own to relax. To get them used to being in the crate with the door closed, start by having them in there for as little as 10 seconds and gradually increase the time, rewarding them for their calm behaviour. Monitor their comfort and do not go too fast. Some dogs panic in crates and feel trapped. Such dogs should not be crated.



Relationship Building



Dogs are excellent at signaling their feelings. It is up to you to deliver consistent and predictable feedback to help your dog understand what is wanted from them and understand their body language to gather information on what they want from you. This will guide your training and it can keep everyone safe from unwanted bites. Dogs generally follow a sequence of behaviours when they are scared, stressed or anxious, before biting. Growling is typically noticed first but there are signs that come before that are missed, such as seeing the whites of their eyes, lip licking, turning their head away, increased body tension and walking away. Not all dogs will show the same pattern of behaviours, dogs that were punished may skip steps making it look like they bite without warning. It is especially important to watch your dog's body language while you are each getting to know each other and continue to do so to build a strong relationship with them.

Identifying and Troubleshooting Common Issues

"My dog was diagnosed with separation anxiety at the shelter, how can I make sure they don't destroy my home when I leave them for the first time?"

- Encourage independence → teach them how to relax on a mat or in a crate
- Keep greetings and departures low key → jingle your keys, put on your jacket at times other than when you leave, leave at different times, switch up your routine, do not get overly excited on arrival
- Start slow, do not leave them for long period of time the first time
- Associate departure with good things → provide enrichments such as kongs, safe chews, food puzzles, music
- Crate training → If possible, solidify the crate as a safe space before leaving them confined when you leave.

If these techniques fail, talk to your vet – medication may help.

Identifying and Troubleshooting Common Issues Continued

"The shelter told me my new dog resource guards, what is that, and what can I do about it?"

- Resource guarding can look like increased speed of eating when you are around, seeing the whites of their eyes when chewing on a bone or dangerous aggression
- Avoidance→ do not set them up for failure, at first it may be wise to avoid high value items like rawhides and bone
- Trade up→ teach them to trade their items for something even better! High value treats like dried liver or hotdogs traded for their ball, make it a game.
- Teach a drop signal/request.

My new dog seems to have fear and anxiety, what can I do to help them?

- De-escalate→ increase distance or decrease stimulation, keep things calm, and go slowly
- Gradually decrease distance or increase stimulation while monitoring their comfort and providing treats→ e.g. if you live on a busy street and they are scared of cars, train them to be ok with cars by slowly introduce them to cars passing by (through a window, in the yard, on the sidewalk), rewarding them at all steps. Continue to watch their body language and ensure that they are comfortable before moving closer or increasing the stimulation
- Medical intervention→ anxiety impedes learning, medications can go a long way in helping them cope with the stressors of life and it may be time to speak with your veterinarian.

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Dane County Humane Society. Rule of three.

https://www.giveshelter.org/assets/images/documents/Rule_of_Three.pdf

Fear Free Happy Homes. The Spectrum of Fear, Stress and

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Although this is informative and helpful, please discuss any behavioral/medical concerns with your local veterinarian. For all cases where you still have concerns, seek specialist services (www.dacvb.org). At AVC you can contact the AVC Behavioural Medicine Service (AVCBehaviouralMed@upe.ca).