



Bringing Your New Dog Home

Welcoming a rescue dog into your home is an exciting time, but it can also be a challenging one for your new family member. All of our dogs have come from a racing background, and a home environment is totally alien to them! They have no idea what to expect, or what is expected of them in this new scenario.

Even dogs who have been family pets in the past are likely to struggle with the transition at first – they have lost the home they knew and the people they trusted, spent time in kennels, and now find themselves in a totally new home, with a new routine and people they don't know well.

The following advice should help to make this transition as smooth and stress-free as possible for both yourself and your new pet.

Keep things low key

When you first bring your dog home, it can be tempting to head out for adventures straight away, invite all your friends and family to meet him, and introduce him to all the local dogs. Resist this temptation! Simply getting used to the home environment, learning the daily routine and bonding with you are enough for your dog to cope with at this early stage. Doing too much too soon can easily overwhelm your dog, and make it much harder for him to feel safe and secure at home.

Your dog's underlying stress levels will be heightened during this time, and they are more likely to react fearfully or even defensively under pressure. Just relaxing at home and letting him get his bearings is more than enough for him to deal with for the first week or so. If you have a party, family gathering, weekend away or other big event planned within the first month or so, wait until afterwards to adopt your dog.

Introduce the outside world gradually

Avoid walking your dog at all for the first few days (or even longer if he is very nervous). Many of our dogs have lead very sheltered lives and are not used to the sights and sounds of the "real world". During the first few days at home, their underlying stress levels will be heightened, and they will be more likely to react fearfully or defensively towards other things such as other dogs, unfamiliar people, traffic etc. A bad experience at this early stage can have a huge impact on your dog's behaviour in the long term! Giving your dog a few days to settle at home before introducing walks will allow those stress levels to reduce, and give him time to build that bond of trust with you, which will help him to feel safe out and about. You can meet your dog's need for physical and mental exercise without leaving the house and garden – see our factsheet on games for some ideas.

When you do start walking your dog, stick to short walks at first, in a relatively quiet area. Build up to longer walks gradually, and introduce new walking areas only once your dog is comfortable with his usual route.

Set them up for success

Never underestimate the importance of dog-proofing! Remember that your new dog has no idea what is and isn't acceptable behaviour inside the home. Chewing, stealing food and bin-raiding are all totally normal dog behaviours which are only a problem for us as humans! The best way to avoid forming bad habits is to prevent him from being practised to start with.

Before you collect your new dog, make sure that the bin is out of reach, no food is left on the sides, and any tempting objects which you don't want to be chewed are tidied away (shoes, kids toys and TV remotes all tend to be favourite targets). If you have a resident dog, remove anything which might cause conflict between the two (such as toys, chews etc.) and make sure to provide a choice of beds, water bowls etc.

Provide a safe space

It is important to provide your dog with a safe space of his own, which he can retire to whenever he starts to feel overwhelmed. Having an area of his own, in which he knows he's not going to be disturbed will give your dog the option to move away from anything he finds worrying, rather than behave defensively.

Dogs naturally feel safest in a "den" type area, a good alternative could be a dog bed placed under a table or in another sheltered area. This safe space should be placed in a quiet area of the house, away from lots of noise or footfall. Provide lots of comfy bedding to make it as inviting as possible for your dog – you can also leave treats or chews inside for him to find! If you're using an Adaptil plug-in diffuser, try to position it near the safe space (or use the spray version on the bedding).

Make sure all family members and visitors know to never disturb or approach your dog whilst he is in his safe space – respect his choice to be alone! Never shut your dog inside his safe space, or send him there as a punishment.

Take time off work

If you're planning to leave your dog alone whilst you work, you'll need to spend time gradually teaching him to feel comfortable on his own. Since the majority of our dogs have not lived in a home before, it is hard to predict how long this process will take. We would advise taking at least one week off work in order to work on this, and ideally two weeks. It is very unlikely that you'll be able to teach your dog to spend a working day alone during your first weekend together, and if your dog finds his first day alone very stressful, he is likely to develop separation issues. As such, taking time off work and doing things properly will be well worth it in the long run! See our fact sheet on spending time alone for more information.

Be consistent

Most dogs thrive on predictability and routine. Agreeing to a list of house rules and sticking to them will prevent your dog from becoming confused. For example, you may not want your dog to beg at the table during meal times. If you never encourage this by feeding him from your plate, he will soon realise he's wasting his time by begging. However, if you occasionally give in, he'll keep trying! Similarly, if your dog is not allowed upstairs or in a certain room, it is vital that all family members stick to that rule.

Be kind

When you adopt a retired greyhound, you become that dog's entire world. In order to feel safe and secure, it is important that he is able to trust you completely, and feel totally safe around you. A strong relationship based on trust is the best route to a happy and well-adjusted pet. Every positive interaction between you builds that bond, and each negative interaction damages it. Imagine how stressful life would be if the person you had to rely on for every aspect of your care and wellbeing was unpredictable and scary!

Telling your dog off, shouting at him or physically punishing him will only teach him that you are a potential threat, and not to be trusted. All training should be based around reward, choice and positive reinforcement – see our training methods fact sheet for more info.

Be patient (and don't panic!)

Remember that it can take at least 6 months for a greyhound to fully settle into their new home, and sometimes even longer. They need patience, understanding and support from their new family whilst finding their feet. It is totally normal for dogs to show some unwanted or unexpected behaviour during this time, so please don't panic if your new dog isn't settling in as quickly as you'd hoped! For example, most dogs will be clingy to start with, follow you round the house and become upset if you leave them. Some dogs will struggle to pick up the idea of toileting outside, some will be hyper-active, and others will hide away and choose not to interact at first.

Just because your new dog is displaying the above behaviours (or anything else you can think of!) does not mean that he will have an ongoing behaviour problem. More importantly, keep in mind that he's not doing any of it to be naughty, spiteful or to upset you – he just doesn't know which behaviour is and isn't appropriate yet! Finally.....lots of things may be strange to your new dog when he arrives home – like TVs, washing machines and mirrors. So, have your camera on hand to catch some funny reactions. It is lovely to see them investigate and get used to their new surroundings and we are always amazed at how quickly the dogs relax and find their bed.

Helpful Information

Kennel Manager contact info: 07704 982140 or info@brightonrgt.org.uk

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