



Introducing dogs

If you already have a dog and would like to adopt another one, you need to **introduce them in a neutral area first**. Go for a slow, relaxed walk together. Walk a little and once you are sure both dogs are okay, let them sniff each other if they want. If they don't, don't force them. With some dogs, introductions will only take a few minutes but with others, a few walks may be needed before the two can live together. It is important not to rush the introductions and not to bring the new dog in without introducing them first. Otherwise, problems may arise.

Activities for a healthy mind

Mental stimulation is important for the dog's brain development and healing. **Providing your dog with choices and mental stimulation will develop his curiosity and help him become a confident and happy individual**. His ability to concentrate and learn will improve and his mind will be kept busy and healthy.

Treat search: You can do this every day on a walk or inside. Toss a fistful of treats around and let the dog sniff them out. This activity will lower your dog's pulse and stress levels and it is a great exercise for concentration.

Enriched environment: Take a few ordinary items and set them up in a room or on your back yard. You can use anything as long as it is safe. Things that smell of other animals, things that make noise, that taste or feel different... Let your dog explore at his own pace. If there are items he doesn't want to approach, **don't try to lure him towards the items** – just let him try again at a later time. Sooner or later his curiosity will win over.



Shelter dogs come from different backgrounds and have different experiences. While some seem unaffected by the negative experiences in their lives, others may develop behavioural issues.

Keeping things slow, lots of sleep, the feeling of security and calm activities to stimulate the brain will help your dog overcome most problems he or she may have. However, some issues may require additional training and professional help. Contact a professional if you need help with your new four-legged companion.



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Further reading:

Turid Rugaas: On talking terms with dogs - calming signals.
Turid Rugaas: Barking - the sound of a language.
Martina Scholz and Clarissa von Reinhardt: Stress in dogs.
Anne Lill Kvam: The canine kingdom of scent.



Adopting a shelter dog

More and more dogs, both puppies and adults, end up in shelters and rescues. Their history is often unknown and their backgrounds are different; some never knew a loving home, others come from a family environment. Fortunately, many get a second chance. But **adoption in itself is only the beginning** for these dogs. They will need time to learn and adapt to their new life and family. How long this will take depends on each dog's character, age and past experiences. Whether you adopt a puppy or an adult, a dog with or without behavioural issues, the steps to take are the same. First impressions are important and if you do things right, your dog will soon become the happy, loving companion you are looking for.



A shelter environment is a stressful environment.

No matter how hard shelter staff and volunteers try to make the dogs' stay pleasant, a shelter environment is stressful. Just moving to a shelter means a change in the environment and that in itself means stress. There, the dog is surrounded by unknown people and many other stressed dogs. There are new routines to adapt to. Living space and freedom of movement is limited. Dogs are often alone for long periods of time and many are only rarely taken out for walks. All of this leads to more stress.

Stress is a physiological response of the body to a difficult or a new situation. It can be good; its function is to prepare the body for action, to be able to deal with the situation the dog is in. But if a stressful situation lasts a long time, stress becomes chronic and starts to affect the dog's health and behaviour.

Many shelter dogs suffer from chronic stress.

Remember this when you bring your new dog home. ***Chronic stress can lead to impaired social ability, reactivity, inability to calm down, excessive barking, peeing and even diarrhea.*** Skin problems, ear infections and other health issues are also common for chronically stressed dogs. The dog may eat very little or refuse to eat at all.

Fortunately this will likely not last very long in a new home. But it is important to ***take things slow*** and let the dog take as long as he needs to adapt to his new environment before doing anything new. It is crucial to ***wait at least one week before adding new people, places and activities to your dog's life.*** With very stressed dogs you may need to wait longer.

One of the side effects of stress is excessive urination. Keep in mind you may need to take your new dog out to pee as often as 10 times a day for the first few weeks!



Getting to know the new home

When bringing your new dog home for the first time, let him thoroughly sniff around the house or apartment if he wants to. Let him explore at his own pace. Dogs learn about their environment by smelling and a new environment always means many new smells. It will take your dog a few days to really get to know his new home so ***spend the first few days indoors*** and only go out for very short walks around the house or garden.

Sleep

Dogs need about 16 hours of sleep a day. Sleep is important to regenerate the body and brain, to lower

the amount of stress hormones in the body and thus calm down. Only a well rested dog will be able to learn, concentrate and be social. Due to the stressful shelter environment, your dog could not get as much quality sleep as he needed, so it is important to let him rest now. To be able to sleep properly, he needs to feel safe. This means he can't be alone and he needs many different comfortable places to sleep. Provide him with many dog beds, blankets and other sleeping areas and stay in the same room as him while he rests.



What about training?

There will be time for training later, once the dog has caught up on rest and has gotten used to his new environment. Training, dog sports and other activities will only cause extra stress to your dog. Keep in mind ***a tired and stressed dog will not be able to learn properly and will forget things easily.*** And more importantly – a happy and relaxed dog will not really need much training anyway!

After about a week or two you can start taking your dog for longer walks to explore new places. Take walks in calm areas where there isn't much noise or traffic. Go for a short car ride away to explore a new area once or twice a week. Find dog company for him to go for slow, relaxed walks together. Remember to always use a comfortable harness and long lead on a walk. You can now also start introducing your new dog to your friends and family one at a time.

For safety reasons always use a harness and a long lead on walks until your dog learns to come back when called. Find safe fenced areas where your dog can run freely off leash a few times a week.