

HELP FOR THE NEWLY ADOPTED DOG

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You may never know the past of the new adoptee in your life, but that isn't necessary. His new life starts the day you bring him home. What he needs most is for you to limit his stress, while increasing structure in the form of routines, training and confinement. Offering daily stress-release outlets, in the form of play, exercise, toys and positive training also helps.

Limit Stress

Bring your new friend home during a relatively calm time (not during the holidays, for example). Keep things as quiet as you can. The first week is not the time to introduce him to the Boy Scout Troop or all your neighbors. Remember, he has no clue as to who you are or how you will behave. Give him time to settle in to his new life.

On a more basic level, feed him whatever he has been eating. If you don't know his diet, choose a name-brand dog food and mix it half and half with cooked white rice (not the instant kind). This will limit diarrhea, which is something both he and you will appreciate.

Structure

Being social animals, dogs fare best when there is order in their group. Order is demonstrated through clear, calm leadership. Simple things really -- having him "Sit" before you open the door, having him "Wait" when you let him out of his crate, practicing "Leave It" a few minutes each day. These little things go a long way to making your new dog feel secure and comfortable.

Routine

Few things help an anxious dog like a routine. The more routine, the better. A biscuit before bed, a walk first thing in the morning, a little romp during commercials -- make up routines. Figure out ways you can make his world make sense to him; he'd thank you if he could.

Training

I say training, but what I mean is building trust, forming a relationship, creating communication. Again, what you teach him to do is less important than how you teach him to do it. Teach him tricks; make him a pet therapy dog, work on agility. Do what thrills you both. Think, "This animal wants to please me; it is my job to show him how." And when he doesn't, it is because he does not understand, not that he is being difficult. Such an attitude is an enormous gift to anyone, but particularly sweet to a dog that has had much disappointment and confusion in his life already.

Confinement

Give him a room of his own. Many adopted dogs thrive on a confinement schedule partly because it limits their decisions. When in the crate, all is well. Crating also prevents stress-related behaviors like chewing or housebreaking mistakes.