

Tips for Transitioning a Rescue Dog into Your Home

Before bringing your dog home

- Have an idea of what kind of training method you would like to use with your dog. If you need suggestions, please feel to ask someone from RPSM.
- **Research trainers** in your area. A lot of trainers do more than just obedience training. It's a great idea to take a class with your dog about a month after you bring them home to reinforce their training and to help with your bond. The class doesn't have to just be obedience. A lot of dog's love classes such as nose work, agility, rally, or frisbee that encourage training in a fun way.
- **Reread all of your dog's training reports.** Go over any information that has been sent to you. Training your dog will continue from the first moment you have them.
- The easiest transition for your dog is to be consistent with the command words. We suggest using the command words that the dog learned from his or her trainers. Make sure everyone in the household knows them so your dog is not trying to guess what each person asks of them. Give the dog time to adjust to taking commands from you.
- If you plan on **crate training** your dog (which is recommended), be sure to have a crate set-up and ready to go for when you bring your new dog home. Your dog could ingest something dangerous or destroy valuables in your home if not crated.
- Dog-proof the area where your dog will spend most of their time, especially during the first few months. This may mean moving items from floors, moving breakable items from the room, and setting up the room with baby gates.

First Few Days

- **Your new dog's move from prison (or foster home) to their new home is stressful.** This move may be harder on those dogs who are insecure or less confident. Give them time to acclimate to your home and family.
- Once home take them to their bathroom area immediately and spend a good amount of time with them so they will get used to the area and relieve themselves. Have treats with you and give them a treat the second they go to the bathroom. Continue this for several bathroom breaks until they know what is expected of them. Even if your dog does relieve themselves during outside time, be prepared for accidents. Coming into a new home with new people, new smells and new sounds can throw even the most housebroken dog off-track, so be ready just in case.
- You may notice some symptoms of anxiety (suppressed appetite, not going to the bathroom, tail tucked, hiding under furniture or in a dark room, or staying in one room for a few days, etc.). Don't be alarmed—this is absolutely normal behavior. By showing your new friend patience and understanding, you'll be helping them through a tough, scary time and showing them how wonderful their new home is!

- **Do not rush introductions.** If you have other pets or kids, don't bombard your new dog with introductions to family members all at once. Have your dog start in an outdoor enclosure or a room in the home that they can call home base. Once your dog is used to the sounds and smells of their surroundings, they can start meeting the family (and by family we mean the family that lives in the home. Wait to introduce them to other outside family members at a later date). Make sure children know how to approach the dog without overwhelming them. We never recommend kids hug a dog. Remember to make this a gradual process. If you need help or suggestions on how to introduce your dog to other pets or kids, please feel free to ask a RPSM volunteer.
- If you plan on crate training your dog (again, this is recommended), leave the crate door open so that they can go in whenever they feel like it. If your dog seems stressed, a good thing to do is to put the towel your dog used in prison in the crate so the dog has a familiar smell and the crate can become their "safe spot". Always remember, **crating is not a bad thing**. The crate is your dog's own personal space where they can get away when things get to be overwhelming. When your dog goes into their crate, make all attempts to avoid other pets and kids bothering them. Feeding your dog in their crate (even with the door open) can be helpful for your dog to associate good things with the crate.
- When your dog is crated, don't give in and comfort them if they whine or bark. If you offer them comfort or negative attention (such as saying "No!"), you are encouraging that behavior. Instead, give them attention and reinforcement for good behavior (good behavior includes chewing on a toy to occupy themselves or resting quietly). Offering a treat when the dog goes into the kennel or offering a Kong stuffed with treats, wet dog food, and/or peanut butter is a good way to reinforce that crate time can be enjoyable.
- Give your dog time alone to explore. When we say alone, we don't mean leave them unattended, but let them check things out on their own while you observe from a distance.
- Because they will be under a lot of stress with the change of environment (from prison or foster home to your house), they may not perform any commands or skills they have learned right away. Try to encourage your new dog perform their commands, but if they don't do it the first couple days don't be discouraged. Continue to do short sessions and once your dog is more comfortable, they will show you all they have learned.
- For the first few days, remain calm and quiet around your dog. Limit excitement such as outings, meeting new people, and other animals for at least week. Not only will this allow your dog to settle in easier, it will give you more one-on-one time to get to know them and their likes/dislikes.
- Bringing a new dog home will require patience on your part. This is a big change for both of you. Initial communication may be confusing to both of you until you get to know each other.

Following Weeks

- **Make a schedule and stick to it.** People often say they don't see their dog's true personality until several weeks after adoption. Your dog may be a bit uneasy at first as he gets to know you. Be patient and understanding while also keeping to the schedule you intend to maintain. This schedule will show your dog what is expected of them as well as what they can expect from you. **Dogs love consistency**. The first few days and weeks, routine is key.
- If you take your dog out, pay close attention to your dog's body language to be sure they are comfortable. If they are acting very fearful or unsure, remove them from the situation and make outings short so they get used to being out and about. Having treats available when you go on out makes it easier to reward and reinforce good behavior.

- Slowly introduce your new dog to unfamiliar people. A good rule of thumb is to introduce no more than one new person to your dog each day. ***This is done after at least the first week. Give your dog the first week (at a minimum) at home with just you and your family so they have time to decompress and acclimate.*** Save the first trip to any busy environment for a few weeks later, to avoid overwhelming and confusing them.
- **Schedule a trip to the veterinarian** within a week of bringing your new dog home. This helps establish a relationship with your veterinarian, establishes you as a patient if there is an emergency, and allows you to get any questions you have answered.
- **Do not allow the dog on your bed or couch:** We agree that this can be a wonderful way to bond with your dog. Not in the beginning! Sleeping in (human) beds and couches is a “right” and a privilege that your new dog must earn. By providing your dog access to your bed or your couch, you are allowing him to believe that he or she can continue this and do what he or she pleases. Just because your current dog might have those privileges does not mean that your new dog should have them right away too- the new dog gets them only once he has earned them by learning and consistently obeying commands, deferring to the leadership of all humans in the household (including children), and getting along with the other animals.
- Letting your dog **drag a leash** around is acceptable to help make it easy to correct any unwanted behavior like jumping on furniture. Grabbing your dogs’ collar when you want to redirect is dangerous so being able to grab a leash or step on it is a better option.
- **Closely monitor all toys and bones:** When you first bring your new dog into your home, please make certain to pick up all toys and bones especially if you have other dogs. There is nothing that will start a dogfight more quickly than the presence of toys and bones on the floor. Additionally, toys and bones are a type of reward for your dog and he should be made to work to earn these rewards (sit, stay, down etc.)
- If you encounter behavior issues you are unfamiliar with or are undesirable, ask your veterinarian or someone from RPSM for help or for a trainer recommendation. ***Do not let the behavior go on for an extended period of time.*** Address it as soon as possible because the longer the behavior goes on, the harder it is to correct.