

## **Patience, please!**

Adapting to a new home takes time

It happens way too often. The staff at the Humane Society happily sends one of our dogs off to its new home only to have the stressed and confused animal brought back in a matter of days and making a future adoption more difficult.

“He jumped the fence.” “She was too shy.” “He barked too much.” “She had an accident on the rug.” This may come as a surprise to some, but just giving a shelter dog a new home does not miraculously turn him into the perfect pet overnight. It takes time and patience and understanding.

Dogs are often returned because of communication breakdowns - the owner does not understand why the dog does what he does and the dog does not understand what the owner wants. Knowledge is certainly power when it comes to helping a dog adjust to life in your home.

Because many shelter dogs have anxiety issues, it can be difficult for them to adapt to their new environs. But even the most stubborn shelter dog should be able to adapt to a new home if his owner is patient and takes the right approach.

- Dogs thrive on routine and find it very reassuring. When you first bring your new pooch home, try to keep to your normal daily routine. You may have to do this in stages on some things. For example, shelter dogs have a very consistent activity routine, basically opening to closing of the shelter. You can help the dog's housetraining by adjusting your schedule to the dog's previous schedule as much as possible, and then over a period of days, moving the time perhaps an hour each day toward your own normal schedule.
- Similarly, if you need to give a different food, take a minimum of 4 days for the change. The first day, give 100% of the same food your dog received at the shelter. The next day give 75% of the old, 25% of the new, etc., for the next couple of days. It's fine to stretch this schedule out longer and make the change more gradual, especially with a dog showing any sign at all of digestive sensitivity. Make sure the food you're changing to is top quality, of course. Every change of homes in a dog's life is stressful, even when the new home is perfect, and good diet helps.
- If, for example, you discover the dog has had little social experience with men and/or has shown some fear, you can start by having male members of the household do the feeding. If the dog has shown difficulties in any situation, you'll know to start with low-stress levels of those situations, and build exposure/intensity very gradually, keeping it at all times enjoyable for the dog.

- If you have an existing dog, provide him and your new dog with separate feeding bowls and beds, so they don't feel they're competing for food or space. And show each dog a generous amount of attention and affection to help him feel secure.
- Duplicate the dog's former sleeping arrangements the first night or so, if feasible. Be aware, though, that changing homes can create anxiety in a dog and result in unpredictable behavior. If the dog is accustomed to resting calmly in a kennel (as in a shelter), it's a good precaution to start by having the dog sleep in a crate at night. If you don't know how the dog reacts to a crate, try the crate first in the daytime for a few minutes at a time with you staying in the room.
- When you must leave the dog alone, take whatever precautions you can. If the dog is known to panic in a crate, try a dog-proofed area instead. This could be one or more rooms in your home with a baby gate across the door. Shutting the door on a dog often leads to the dog clawing at the door. If the dog jumps one baby gate, stack another one above it in the doorway.
- It's prudent not to leave a dog alone in a new home with the complete run of the house until you've had a chance to observe the dog awhile. You might come home to serious property damage if the dog gets anxious about being alone. This is not an unusual reaction in a dog new to your home and your schedule. Understandably, the dog may fear that you're not coming back, or that you'll be gone so long the dog won't be able to hold bowels and bladder, or that you'll come home angry. It takes time for trust and confidence to grow.
- Provide the dog with enjoyable but safe toys. Chew toys and toys you can put food inside often have extra calming power for times you must leave the dog alone.
- If the dog has a history of escaping from a fenced yard, don't leave the dog alone in a fenced yard at all for quite some time. This is a powerful habit and instinct that gets reinforced by the interesting things dogs find to do when loose. You'll want to give this habit a very long time to fade before you take a chance on leaving the dog out alone at all.

*If you have any questions about how your new dog is adapting, please call our staff at 432-4250.*