

## Bringing Home Your Shelter Dog

### Your shelter dog's space

- Where will your shelter dog stay during the day? Work time? Nighttime? A structured environment is helpful for new dogs. Unlimited freedom is not advisable at first. This structured environment will go a long way in the prevention and maintenance of behavioral problems.
  - Daytime (while at home) – designate an area where your shelter dog can go to be quiet and safe. This will be your shelter dog's space! Put a dog bed or blanket, toys and water in this place, which can be a small room off the main living area with a baby gate, a corner of the family room, or similar area where he will be undisturbed. Dogs will establish a certain place as their "den" and will feel safe and secure when in this place. Get your shelter dog used to spending time alone in this place; away from the family.
  - Work time / School time – a structured environment is especially important when your shelter dog will be left alone for the first few weeks / months. Confinement to a small area is suggested during this initial time period. A baby-gate is a good option to confine your shelter dog to one area of the house (the same area to include his "space"). This should be considered temporary as a training tool; not a way of life. Gradually expand the area your shelter dog has access to until you can rely on good behavior; with the final objective being to allow your shelter dog free roam of the house.
  - Consider a pet-walking service to come in during the day to walk your shelter dog if you are gone longer than 5 – 6 hours.
  - Nighttime – chose a place for your shelter dog to sleep; preferably in the bedroom of a family member. Use a dog bed or blanket. Close the door at night at first or tether on a long leash until you can rely on good behavior.
  - Outside play - WE DO NOT APPROVE OF LEAVING DOGS OUTSIDE UNATTENDED - because of the risks: escape, stolen, or let out of the yard; or suffer other harm. Also, outdoor dogs become a magnet for potential behavior problems.
    - in fenced yard – if your yard is fenced, check it carefully for any gaps or weak spots. Also, make sure its high enough for your shelter dog. Some dogs are expert fence climbers, so watch carefully at first. Also, watch for signs of digging. Check the security of the gate, and if possible, install a lock
    - invisible fences – for the same reasons we do not approve of leaving dogs outside unattended, it is never advisable to leave a dog outside unattended with an invisible fence. While your dog may learn not to run through the "wire," an invisible fence will not keep other animals out. An invisible fence will not protect your dog from being stolen or removed against his will. Also, some dogs will run through a live "wire" if spooked or scared of a thunderstorm.

- Dog Parks – we love dog parks where dogs can play off-leash. Make sure that your shelter dog interacts well with other dogs before letting him off-leash. Allow your shelter time to adjust to his new surrounding before making a trip to the dog park. (see more below on “making a successful transition”)
- Other considerations – if a door is open, a dog will generally like to get to the other side. Monitor children’s play (especially younger children) and make sure they don’t leave doors open that lead to unsecured areas outside. Instruct neighbor friends to do the same thing.
- Never let your shelter dog off-leash and in an unsupervised structure – many dogs have an uncanny ability to “find” their way back to a previous home; which means they could be in harm’s way around vehicles and traffic. Be especially diligent at first to ensure that your shelter dog does not try to escape to find his way back to a previous “home.”
- Summer outings – dogs should never be left in a parked car in the summer. Please avoid the temptation to take your shelter dog on errands with you in the summer where he will need to stay in the car. A closed car can escalate in temperature quite rapidly. Also, dogs left in a car with open windows are prime targets for theft.

### Feed and Care

- Feed – use a high quality dry dog food found at major pet stores.
- Please do not feed table scraps. This can only lead to health problems in your shelter dog’s older years. Also, shelter dogs have not dined on human food and a rapid introduction of human food can lead to diarrhea. This is NOT fun when housetraining your shelter dog.
- Feeding Schedule – feed at a regular time; we recommend twice a day. Keep water available at all times. Feed separately from other pets until you know how they will react. Do not be alarmed if your shelter dog does not have an appetite initially – in many dogs that are stressed, they will not eat.
- Exercise – plan enough time for exercise. At least 30 minutes of active exercise in the morning is advisable; especially if the family will be away from home during the day. A period of exercise later in the day will also be necessary. A fenced-in yard for ball-playing is a plus; but should not be considered a substitute for daily exercise / interaction.

### Veterinarian Considerations

Your shelter dog will need to go to the vet to get his heartworm prescription. However, some shy and / or fearful dogs might do better if allowed to settle in to their new environment prior to scheduling a vet visit.

Even though a newly adopted shelter dog may have been tested for heartworms and receive the monthly preventative, we recommend a new test before putting your shelter dog on preventative medication. We also test most of our dogs for lyme disease.

## Vet considerations

- ❑ Heartworm medication – essential!
- ❑ Flea and tick control (Frontline or Bio-Spot)
- ❑ Shots
- ❑ Fecal sample
- ❑ Lyme disease test (if not previously done by shelter)
- ❑ Micro-chip

## Training / Behavior

Training and behavior go hand-in-hand. Training will instill obedience, confidence and socialization outlets for your shelter dog. Training will go a long way in the prevention of behavior problems.

There is no such thing as “the perfect dog.” Behavior quirks will probably appear after your shelter dog gets settled in and confident in his new surroundings. Learning basic obedience commands and being socialized will help dramatically when working to resolve any of your shelter dog’s behavior issues. We will be glad to offer ongoing support and referrals in such cases, but if your shelter dog has this training and socialization foundation, problems become much easier to solve. Studies have shown that adopted shelter dogs that go through formal obedience training have a much lower return-rate than dogs that do not.

- ❑ Obedience Training – all dogs benefit from obedience training. It helps establish communication as well as good behavior and socialization. Involve all family members if possible. Most dogs love to go to class, and you will probably find it’s the best money you ever spent. We generally recommend group classes, since the true test of a well-mannered dog is whether he obeys you when he would rather be playing with other dogs. We highly recommend “positive-reinforcement” classes only.
  - Use positive-reinforcement techniques. Give your dog opportunities for success and treat rewards. Avoid punishment; especially late punishment for behavior that happened earlier. Dogs cannot make the association between the prior act and the punishment. Rather, the dog will learn to associate the owner’s presence with punishment that will instill fear of owner or cause the dog to quit performing ANY behaviors for the owner.
  - Instead, look for a positive way to instill the behavior you want. For example, one way of teaching your shelter dog not to jump is to train a reliable “sit” command and then ask your shelter dog to sit when you see the potential for jumping. Reward the sit.
- ❑ Housetraining
  - Even previously housetrained dogs adopted from a shelter will often lapse in their housetraining. This is mainly due to a dog’s lack of ability to generalize. When dogs learn to eliminate, they are not learning an indoor vs. outdoor concept but something much more specific, such as “never eliminate in **these** rooms” (the particular rooms in his old house). The dog is unsure whether these rules apply in the new home. Humans, on the other hand, are great generalizers. If we visit a friend or hotel room, we know that bathrooms in general are the place to “go.” Since we are

good generalizers, we fail to empathize with dogs and therefore don't take precautionary measures.

- To begin the housetraining program, you will need the following:
  - Ability to confine the dog
  - A schedule for going outside
  - Treats for EVERY time you go outside with dog
  - Good observation skills
  - Patience 😊
- Confinement - is the quickest way to train or re-train a dog; because dogs don't like to mess in their "den" or space. It is for this reason that we recommend initial confinement (baby gate the kitchen area) for ALL recently adopted dogs. By confining the newly adopted dog, he will learn to hold it and then you can have a success outside later. If you find that your shelter dog is soiling in his confined area, the likelihood is that it is too large: your shelter dog can use part of it as his toilet.
- Schedule – you must set up a schedule for eating and going outside and keep to it. Try not to vary the times you set up for daily feeding and outdoor trips. If you are away for longer than 4 hours, have someone come to the house to take the dog out. Optimally, there will always be someone at home during the housetraining period. Typical schedule for trips outside looks like this (take treats with you so you can reward each and every time the dog eliminates. You can fade the treats after the dog is reliably eliminating outside and not inside).
  - Outdoor trip first thing in the morning (treat!)
  - a few minutes after each meal (treat!) This is when most dogs will have a bowel movement. You will begin to learn your dog's rhythm.
  - When you return from work (treat!)
  - Bedtime (treat!)
  - If your dog is under 1 year of age, the trips outside will need to be more frequent; as a puppy has not developed the physical ability to hold it.
- Treats – Every time your shelter dog eliminates outside, lavish him with enthusiastic praise during the act and follow with an extra special treat. If you find that the praise makes him stop in the middle of eliminating, save it until just after he finishes. Also, it is imperative that the treat is given IMMEDIATELY after the behavior is completed; or you may inadvertently be rewarding another behavior (licking, sniffing, etc). Have treats ready at the back door so you can grab them on your way out the door.
- Good Observation Skills – your shelter dog will give off signals that he needs to eliminate. It's essential that you learn what these are so you can prevent mistakes inside. Common behaviors include circling, restlessness and sniffing. Whenever you see these, take your shelter dog out.
- Patience – don't lose your cool. Many dogs have accidents, especially in the beginning of training. Since your shelter dog should be supervised at all times when loose in the house, you will be able to provide the proper feedback as the dog begins to eliminate or, even better, take him out before he even starts.

If you catch him starting to eliminate inside, interrupt him with a sharp sound “ah..ah...ah!” This may even prevent him from finishing. Urgently say “outside” and then get your shelter dog there as quickly as possible (have treat ready). Stay outside for a 5-minute period and praise him and treat if he finishes eliminating. If not, bring him back inside and either supervise or confine him for another try later.

If your shelter dog has an accident in the house and you did not see it happen, it is futile and even detrimental to punish him after that fact. Simply clean up the spot and then apply a commercial odor neutralizer. This will help prevent a certain location from smelling like an “indoor toilet.” Most importantly after the accident, vow to supervise more closely in future and / or another outing to your schedule.

- Jump start your training program when you first bring your shelter dog home. Before bringing your shelter dog in the house, stay outside with him (treats in hand) and leash-walk him until he relieves himself. Praise jubilantly!!!!!! Encourage use of a particular spot, and let him sniff and get acquainted with his new territory. If your shelter dog sniffs the floor or circles inside, take him out immediately (have treats ready at the door). When he eliminates, treat him!
  - Eliminate opportunities for unseen accidents – dogs have very powerful noses and in their natural environment in the wild, seek out urine smells and “mark” it with their own. In order to prevent this possibility in your house, remove all traces of odors left from previous dogs or you WILL have a problem.
  - If your dog starts experiencing housetraining regression, it is most likely due to a medical condition (i.e.: infection). Take your dog to the vet immediately.
- Separation Anxiety – studies have shown that puppies and shelter dogs are at a higher risk of separation anxiety (sep-anx) than other dogs. Sep-anx is often triggered by either a high-contrast situation – months of the owner staying home all day followed by sudden eight-hour absences – or some sort of life change – re-homing, a stay at a boarding kennel, a death of a key family member or any change in routine. Furthermore, if a dog is abandoned or has lost its owner, they may develop overly intense and insecure attachments to subsequent owners.

Sep-anx is both preventable and responds well to treatment. The first step is to recognize that dogs with sep-anx are not misbehaving out of boredom, spite or fun. Some dogs with sep-anx are fine when left alone in the car or fine when the owner leaves with slippers on to take out the garbage – they have learned the difference between “long absence” pictures and “short absence” pictures.

- Prevention – Newly adopted dogs are at a higher risk to develop sep-anx if they are smothered with constant attention their first few days at home. Small toy breeds are especially susceptible as they are easier to carry around all the time. It is much better to leave for brief periods extremely often (and to get the dog used to spending time in another room away from family members) so what the dog is learning about departures is

that they are no big deal and predict easy, tolerable lengths of absence: “whenever she leaves, she comes back.”

Avoid dramatic or lengthy departures and arrivals.

Give your shelter dog both physical exercise and mental work to do. Not only does problem solving increase confidence and independence, it is mentally fatiguing and so increases the likelihood that your shelter dog will rest quietly when he is left alone. Teach him to play hide and seek with his toys, teach him tricks, get him involved in a sport like obedience, flyball or agility, let him free-play with other dogs, stuff all or part of his food ration into Kong toys, teach him how to play fetch and tug. The more activities and toys are incorporated into his life, the less he will depend on human social contact as sole stimulation.

### Supplies to have on hand before bringing your shelter dog home

- ❑ ID tag.
- ❑ Leash and collar, gentle leader or harness – Purchase an extra leash and collar to place by each outside exit door in case of escape. We do not recommend pinch collars!!!
- ❑ Bed or special blanket
- ❑ Baby gate if necessary
- ❑ Water and food bowls
- ❑ Brush
- ❑ Towel
- ❑ Stain cleaner (Nature’s Miracle)
- ❑ Food (see section on food)
- ❑ Toys – LOTS of them; and Kongs. Use rawhide bones with supervision, as dogs can choke on them
- ❑ Training treats – lots of them and bring some with you!
- ❑ Bitter Apple repellent

### Making the Successful Transition

- ❑ Your shelter dog is likely to be very stressed while making the transition to living in a home. He may be very confused and anxious....”is this for real?” Your shelter dog will probably behave differently than when you observed him at the kennel. Your shelter dog will probably be on “best behavior” too, and some behavioral problems and also his true personality may not emerge for a couple of weeks. LET YOUR shelter DOG PROGRESS AT HIS OWN PACE. It is detrimental to “force” a dog to exceed his own “threshold” of fearful stimulus (new people, kids, etc).
- ❑ Create that quiet environment for the first few days.
- ❑ Limit visits from outside family members, neighbors (especially children) and other pets at first.
- ❑ Don’t invade your shelter dog’s “space” – let him approach others when in his space.

- ❑ Resist the urge to give your dog a bath immediately. A stressed dog in the confines of a tub can cause even the most docile dog's fear level to escalate to the point of growling or snapping.
- ❑ BE ESPECIALLY VIGILANT WITH CHILDREN – don't leave your shelter dog and young, unsupervised children together for the first several weeks. Ask children to wait for your shelter dog to come to them, try to avoid situations where your shelter dog feels crowded and overwhelmed. It's also important to teach children the right way to relate to your shelter dog – kindly and with respect. Simple rules may help; such as: talk to your shelter dog when sleeping before touching him; don't bother your shelter dog when he is eating or chilling out in his space; don't put your face right up to hers; don't sit on him or pull his ears, and remember, your shelter dog is a family member and not a toy.
- ❑ Introducing your shelter dog to other canine family members – a dog's natural introduction to another dog is not face-to-face but rather butt-sniffing. We humans often inhibit this form of introduction, which can lead to uncharacteristic growls, hackles and frustration. Arrange for the dogs to meet in a neutral place (park, sidewalk outside house) and allow them to take turns sniffing butts on-leash. Then, walk them side-by-side for a while. Then, let them meet and play off-leash in a secure area (fenced backyard or room in house). Have some loud metal pans handy to make noise in the event of a fight.
- ❑ Introducing your shelter dog to family cats –
  - Before bringing your shelter dog home, make sure there is a "safety room" or rooms, places the cat(s) can access but the dog cannot. A baby-gate the cat(s) can jump over or a cat-door can accomplish this. It is important that the cat can retreat and regroup and relax in a place away from the dog and then venture forward into "dog territory" at her own pace. The cat should have access to food, water and litter in this area so no interactions with your shelter dog are forced. Never hold the cat into proximity by holding her or otherwise restricting her desire to escape.
  - For the first introduction, have the dog on a leash in case he explodes into chase. If it seems to be going well, drop the leash (leave it hanging) and supervise closely. If the dog is behaving in a friendly and / or cautious way, try not to intervene in their interactions, except to praise and reward your shelter dog for good behavior. Interrupt any chase and try to redirect your shelter dog's attention to another activity (this is sometimes hard to accomplish and therefore "management" between dog and cat may be necessary until things are worked out).
  - Don't leave them together unsupervised until you are confident there is no potential harm to either.
  - Give plenty of extra attention to the cat so she does not associate this change with reduced attention and affection!
  - Dogs will eat cat food and may eat cat feces – keep both out of reach from your shelter dog.
- ❑ Set the routine at once – especially to prevent the onset of sep-anx (see above). Establish the routine at once. We recommend picking your shelter dog up on Saturday – and use Sunday to get acclimated before leaving for your normal routine on Monday. Spend Saturday night practicing semi-absences (alone time for dog in another room) and short absences (leaving for SHORT periods of time). Start with small increments (less than 1 minute) and progress from there.

Do not make plans that will cause you to immediately leave your shelter dog for a long period (i.e.: cancel or refrain from any dinner, shopping and movie plans).