



Guidelines courtesy of:
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Guidelines to Help an Unsocialized Sheltie

These are basic guidelines which may need to be varied according to the degree of socialization of the dog. Each dog will move at its own pace -- if it is not ready for Day 4 exercises, then wait a few more days. You will find yourself taking one step forward and six steps backwards many times. Day 3 exercises may last a week, or you may have to back up to Day 2 exercises. The key is patience.

Read the *Calming Signals* book by Turid Rugaas available on www.Amazon.com. You will want to use the two basic signals of yawning and turning your head and looking away whenever the dog is getting stressed and you need to handle them. Do NOT stare at the dog, or make direct eye contact with the dog!!! Wait for them to initiate the eye contact, and you always look away first. You need to appear non-threatening as much as possible. Unsocialized dogs may only eat at night, when the house is quiet. I usually feed the unsocialized dogs 1 time per day, at night. That helps with house training, and gets them comfortable eating in a house. I would put them in their crate, in a separate room from the other dogs (so the other dogs aren't intimidating them by their presence), and feed them there, and let them sleep there for at least the first 3-4 nights. (It will help speed socialization after the first few days to have them sleep in the same room as you). You can also leave a bowl with dry food in there with them. I try to leave all rescues crated and with minimal attention for the first 24 hours -- critical if the dogs have just had surgery, and absolute essential if they are unsocialized. I often put them in the spare room, or in the basement. It is important that they have time to mentally adjust and feel comfortable in a new environment. Talking to them, looking at them, and handling them will create stress. As dogs are social creatures, it also makes them desire some social contact when they have been isolated for a short time. So I only handle them the amount of time needed to get them out to potty.

Unsocialized dogs should be carried out and placed in an exercise pen that is in the most secluded part of the yard. Retreat some distance away and remove your focus from the dog so they can potty in peace. It always helps to have a well-socialized dog out in the yard with them, but not in the pen with them. (The purpose of a small pen enables you to get the dog easily without having to chase it down in the yard. Allow it to drag an old leash while in the pen so you don't have to physically grab him. Most unsocialized dogs are not used to a lot of freedom, and too much space too soon will only scare them.)

Day 2 - After the first 24 hours passes, I generally move their crate into a more heavily used room. I begin talking to them in an upbeat voice, and tossing little bits of hamburger or other good stuff in their crate as I pass by. I may bring them out in the evening and gently brush them for 30 minutes or so. It is important that every interaction with you is positive at this point, as every experience is adding to their ability to trust people. Think of it like a TRUST bank account. When they have a good experience with you, you deposit to the TRUST account. Since you start at zero with an unsocialized dog, it is important to build up that balance before you have to do something they are really scary to them.

Day 3 - I start to increase the amount of upbeat talking, and the amount of attention I give them. But still, my interactions are limited to probably no more than 1 hour. It is important not to push yourself on them. By giving them just a little of yourself, they are building trust, and will ask for more. I would also start playing the 'noise' tape at a low level (like a soft whisper) during the day while I am gone. Each day, I would increase the volume just a tiny bit. This process will desensitize the dog to noises.

Day 4 - I would have them sleep in my bedroom in a crate so we get some 'free' bonding time. Sleeping in your room is a signal to the dog that they are now part of the pack. They should be desirous of this place now that they have had a few days to get comfortable. At this point I would allow them to begin exploring small areas of the house. (Only AFTER I am sure they have pottied outside! You cannot risk correcting an unsocialized dog for potty mistakes until you complete 2-3 weeks of trust building. If they have an accident, well, shame on me. I should have made sure they were empty!)

I would also begin clicker training on Day 4 - if I can get the dog to eat good stuff. I would just drop the treat in the crate with the dog, and CLICK with a quiet clicker AS the dog is eating the treat. (See references on clicker training at bottom.)

Day 5 - I usually bring the dog into the bathroom with me and let them explore while I am showering. From this point forward, I bring the dog into the bathroom every morning (after they have pottied) while I am getting ready so they get more time with me, and get used to a new experience. In the evening, when I let them explore the area they were in the previous night, I now start attaching a leash to their buckle collar so they can get used to having it on. They will step on it, and learn to give to pressure. I only have the leash on when I can watch the dog to ensure they aren't getting caught on it. I continue my clicker training work, but see if the dog will take a treat outside of the crate. I click AS the dog eats the treat. They most likely won't take it from you, so you may have to drop the treat on the floor.

Every evening from this point forward, I try to take the dog to a new room in the house and let them explore. I keep a friendly, well-socialized dog with the unsocialized dog so that they can get confidence from the other dog's behavior. I also try to get at least 30 minutes of the dog dragging the leash around in an area that they have previously explored. (It might be too scary to step on leash in a new area - we want the dog gaining confidence from the experiences, not to get scared.)

Day 6 - By now, the dog should have a high balance in the Trust bank account. If you feel the dog is ready, you can now attach a LONG leash to the buckle collar, and carry the dog outside, and let the dog in the big yard. The dog may want to run back into the x-pen. Let that be an option for them! They need to feel safe. Hopefully they will just explore along with your friendly, confident dog. By dragging the leash, they are getting more leash training, plus, when you need to catch them, if necessary, you can step on the leash to retrieve them. Always approach the dog from the side, not directly in a straight line, and with your body turned sideways.

After the dog will walk freely with the leash on, it takes 3-7 days, then I would start picking up the end of the leash, and just following the dog at a distance. I start to test the dog a little bit by putting a bit of pressure on the leash and seeing how they react. I would start clicker work for any movement on the leash. I do all leash training in the house. I don't EVER allow the dog to back out of the buckle collar, even when in the house. They cannot learn that backing out is a possibility. If they start bucking and pulling, just go with them. Don't let go, because then they learn that you go away if they act up. When outside of a fenced area, it is important to use a collar the dog cannot slip out of -- either a Martingale collar or training collar. Unsociatized dogs startle easily and will back out of a buckle collar quickly. Although I always use choke/training collars for safety when I am not in my house, I don't like to use the choke collars for leash training, as getting choked definitely is not a good experience. Once the dog knows to give to pressure and that they have to walk with you, then you can start walking them in your fenced yard on the training collar.