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Helping Your Dog Adjust To A New Home

Going to a new home can be an exciting and anxious experience for a dog. He is not sure what is going to happen to him next. He may have just gotten used to the shelter and now things are changing again. It is very confusing for him in the beginning and your patience and understanding during his initial adjustment period can do a lot to help your new dog feel at home.

The Ride Home

It's a good idea to have two adults with you when taking your new dog home. That way one can keep the dog under control while the other concentrates on driving. Be sure to keep your new dog on leash until you have him safely inside your home. ** putting dog in crate for ride home is best option.

The New Home

Be prepared to see some stress behaviors (panting, pacing, housebreaking accidents, excessive chewing and/or gastric upset) for up to 3 to 4 months after adopting your new dog. Try to develop and use a consistent daily routine for feeding, exercising, and bathroom duties. Dogs are creatures of habit and routine means security for them. If you do the same things in the same way and in the same order, he will settle in more quickly and learn what is expected of him and when. Most dogs will begin to feel comfortable with your routine after 2 to 4 weeks. For those dogs that adjust more slowly, patience and gentleness are critical.

Once you've arrived home, you should leash walk (even in a fenced yard) your new dog outside for at least 10-15 minutes or until he relieves himself. Let him get the "lay of the land" by sniffing and becoming acquainted with all the smells associated with your yard. The combination of the car ride and the excitement of a new family and home will cause him to have to relieve himself more often, so be sure to give him plenty of opportunities in the beginning. We recommend you take your new dog out every two to three hours when you're home for the first couple of weeks until he settles in and learns your routine!

It is best to keep a new male dog on a leash when first bringing him inside. He may, out of nervousness (or he may smell remnants of another dog), mark a doorway, plant or chair. If he starts to lift his leg on something, give the leash a short jerk (not too hard, just so he can feel it) and tell him "No," and he should stop immediately and remember his manners.

In the beginning, if you have to leave your dog at home alone for longer than two hours, try confining him to a crate or a safe, dog-proofed room. You don't have to do this forever, just until he's learned all the house rules.

Make sure that you teach your new dog what it is you expect from him, don't assume he knows your house rules and punish him for something he hasn't learned yet. Preventing unwanted behavior is easier than correcting it! For example, provide bones and chew toys and keep tempting items like shoes, belts, purses and clothing out of the dog's reach. Consistency is critical. Don't allow your dog to do something one day, then scold him the next day for the behavior. If you don't want your dog to jump on you or others when you are dressed up, don't allow him to jump on you when wearing jeans,

he can't tell the difference. Make sure all family members know and use the same commands consistently to minimize confusion and mixed messages to your dog.

Sleeping Arrangements

The first few nights you may want to confine your new dog in the bedroom with you or in a crate. Age, behavior and your preferences will dictate which you choose, but you will not want to give him too much freedom until you are sure he has learned the house rules. After the initial adjustment period is over, you might choose to let your dog sleep in your bed, on a dog bed or just leave him free to pick his own favorite spot.

Introduction to Other Animals

The ability of animals to get along together in the same household depends on their individual personalities. In relationships between animals, there will always be one who dominates. A new dog will often upset the existing "pack order" or the old dog may feel it necessary to establish dominance immediately. Wise handling of the "getting acquainted" period is an important factor in the successful introduction of a new dog. The first week or two may be hectic, frustrating and time consuming. Be patient, the adjustment will take time.

New Dog/Old Dog

Meeting outside (preferably in a fenced yard) can be less threatening for canine introductions. If you have more than one dog, introduce them one at a time. Make sure all dogs are leashed and there is an adult holding each leash.

From the first meeting, you want both dogs to expect "good things" to happen when they're in each other's presence. Let them sniff each other, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do, talk to them in a happy, friendly tone of voice -- never use a threatening tone of voice. After a short time, get both dogs' attention, and give each dog a treat in return for obeying a simple command, such as "sit" or "stay." Walk the dogs around and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals. Continue with the "happy talk," food rewards and simple commands.

Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hairs standing up on the other dog's back, teeth-baring, deep growls, a stiff legged gait or a prolonged stare. If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly and positively getting each dog interested in something else. For example, both handlers can call their dogs to them, have them sit or lie down and reward each with a treat. The dogs will become interested in the treats which will prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time period and/or at a greater distance from each other.

When the dogs seem to be tolerating each other's presence without fearful or aggressive responses, and the investigative greeting behaviors have tapered off, you can drop the leashes (if you're in a fenced yard) and let them explore the yard together. Leave the leashes on them so that you can quickly get control if you need to. When the dogs come inside, you may find that the more personal space will cause a squabble or two, so you may still want to leave the leashes on for quick control. You may also want to put all toys (and especially all treats, like rawhide, etc.) away until everyone is comfortable.

Feed your new dog away from your other dog(s) but at the same time. You can feed in the same room, but use opposite corners, putting the dominant dog's bowl down first. Watch that each dog sticks to his own bowl. Keep vigilant during the feeding time for a couple of months until the pack positions are worked out.

New Dog/Old Cat

Confine your cat to a room and let the new dog walk around the house and become familiar with his surroundings, including the cat's scent. Then take the new dog and confine him to a quiet room or a crate while your cat is allowed to investigate the newcomer's scent which is now in the home.

Next, put the dog's leash on, and using treats, have him either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly sit down with your resident cat, but don't have them physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food or catnip. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

Next, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "down-stay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command.

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect his aggression toward the cat.

You may want to keep your dog on-leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Also, be sure that your cat still has access to her food, water, and litter box and is free to use them without being harassed by the dog. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.