

Settling in and Adjustment Periods

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Moving to a new home can be very stressful for a dog, especially if they just made the trip from the shelter and into the rescue. **Not only have they had a day full of all sorts of stimulation and scary things, they have to get used to a TON of new things including:**

- Sights
- Smells
- Sounds (inside the home and from the neighborhood)
- People
- Food
- Pets
- Activity
- Routines

All of this new sensory information can be very overwhelming for a dog and this can lead to some concerning behaviors. It is important to give them time and a quiet place to decompress and settle in. Sometimes a dog seems to fit right in and is resilient to the change, but most rescue dogs will need a minimum of 2 weeks to fully adapt to their new environment. **Some of the things you can expect from a dog while it is getting used to its new home are:**

- Refusal to eat (think of how you feel nauseous when you are very stressed!)
- Hiding
- Avoidance of people or pets
- Growling towards new people or pets (communicating nervousness)
- Lower activity level (learning all of this new stuff is tiring!)
- Excessive sleeping (different from lethargy. Remember, they may not have slept at all on the ride from the shelter and need to catch up!)
- Diarrhea (caused by stress, new foods, and deworming medications)
- Refusal to potty around people (pottying makes them feel vulnerable and they don't know you enough to trust you yet!)

- Stress behaviors (panting, whale eye, pacing, whining, frequent yawning)

When you bring a new dog into your home it is common to be worried that the above behaviors are medically based and something to fix immediately. However, it is important to realize that most of the time these behaviors are caused solely by the stress of the transition into the new home and that by trying to “fix” the behaviors you can actually stress the dog out even more. **We recommend that you wait a couple of days before becoming concerned about the above unless the dog is:**

- Not drinking
- Not eating ONLY if already very underweight
- Blood in urine or stool
- Coughing
- Mucousy discharge out of eyes or nose
- Lethargic (different from sleepy! A lethargic dog wont wake easily or move even when encouraged)

Problem behaviors can also occur; when dogs are under stress, they often act out inappropriately. Much of the time these behaviors will go away on their own as the dog gets to know you and your family. If these behaviors persist after a few weeks, it may be time to consult a trainer:

- Resource guarding (food/toy/people possession or aggression).
- Growling (growling is the dog communicating that they are uncomfortable with the situation, dog, or person)
- Destructive behavior (a common form of stress relief for dogs)
- Potty accidents (they dont know the routine or how to ask to go outside yet!)
- Marking (it's a new territory and marking can make them feel like they're making it their home)

The best remedy for helping your pup transition more quickly is to do the following:

- Remain calm! Dogs can sense our anxiety and if we're worried about them, it will just make them more stressed out!
- Give the dog TIME. Time is the most important factor for a dog getting settled!
- Let the dog have a quiet place he can go to just to relax and get away from the commotion. A comfy crate in a quiet corner that is out of the way but still in the same

room as the people is best. This way they don't feel left out or lonely, but can observe and learn at their own pace.

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- Follow proper pet introduction protocols
- Prevent loud noises or periods of high activity. Don't bang pots and pans as you cook or do dishes, try to keep the kiddos from running around screaming, take arguments away from the dog, and keep current pets from bothering the new dog.
- Don't try to force feed, continuously present things to try to make the dog "happier". By constantly offering the new dog more stimuli such as tastier foods when they won't eat, or toys to try to engage play when they would rather be left alone, you're just overwhelming them even more!
- Be aware of your activity and size. If a new dog is shy or nervous, make yourself small and unthreatening by facing slightly away from them and sitting on the floor. Talk quietly or not at all.
- Don't hug, pick up, grab, etc. unless absolutely necessary. A new dog doesn't know you! By forcing affection on them when they are uncomfortable, you are only stressing them out more! Let all interactions be on the dog's terms. Wait for them to seek affection from you and make sure that the affection you give doesn't make them feel overwhelmed or threatened. Scratch under the chin rather than reaching over their heads. Many dogs are uncomfortable being hugged. Until you get to know the dog better, err on the side of less invasive demonstrations of affection.
- If the dog won't eat you can try to add a bit of canned food to the kibble to make it more appealing, but please don't try to change their food again immediately as this can just cause even more stomach upset. Dogs can go a few days without eating and be perfectly fine! Their bodies are designed differently than ours!
- Don't scold them for inappropriate behavior! This is especially important the first few days.
 - If a dog growls at someone or a pet, they are communicating that they are uncomfortable around them. Yelling at them will just make them even more uncomfortable! Instead, give them some space and the time they need to become comfortable.
 - If a dog has a potty accident, remember, this is a brand new home! He doesn't know how to ask to go potty here, or he may not be housebroken. He also may be experiencing some tummy upset from the stress, new foods, and/or dewormer.

Thank you for giving a rescue dog a chance at a new life and for working to make the transition as easy as possible for your pup!