

Sr. Dog Adoption

Make a newly adopted senior dog part of your family.

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Successful Settling In Before bringing a senior dog home, spend some time planning how to fit him into your household with as few problems as possible for both of you.

Michelle Blount, owner of Pawsitive Dog Training in Cleveland, emphasizes that the focus with acclimating a senior dog should be on confidence-building and structure. After being displaced, she says, the dog needs to know what he can depend on. For the owner, this means enforcing house rules consistently, with all family members observing the same guidelines about what's allowed and what isn't and being able to say No when necessary, without punishment. It also means keeping the dog on a regular schedule of potty breaks, exercise, meals, grooming, and together time. Structure reduces stress, and stress is a major factor for a displaced senior dog, Blount says.

If the dog needs housetraining reminders, take him out frequently to a designated area. Give elaborate praise for correct performance; never punish for mistakes. Punishment creates stress and inhibits learning.

Prepare for some adjustment behaviors. Did the dog pace the bedroom the first night? It's natural. He's investigating his new quarters and adjusting to a new routine. Won't eat? Save the food for the next scheduled meal. When he's less anxious and confused, he'll eat. Keep to a schedule, and when he follows it, give praise and a treat.

During this adjustment period, talk to a trainer who can tailor tips to your dog and family situation. Also, talk to your veterinarian about treatment for stress-related behaviors, or investigate over-the-counter products, such as pheromones, Bach flower essences, herbs like valerian and kava kava, pressure wraps, or special nutrient blends, that aim to calm dogs.

Seniors and Other Pets Even if a previous owner or a shelter or rescue organization has assessed a dog's ability to get along with other animals, you still must check the dog's compatibility with your own animals. Martina Contreras, owner of A Dog's Best Friend, a dog-training center in Redwood City, Calif., emphasizes that dogs should be introduced on leash on neutral territory before going home. Contreras notes, An elderly dog usually will not want to play as energetically as a younger dog.

She also urges new owners to be aware and respectful of an older dog's diminishing eyesight or hearing when introducing him to the family pets. When surprised by a more active animal that he didn't see or hear coming, your senior dog may react in fear or aggression.