

10 Ways to Welcome Your Rescue Dog

How to smooth the way for your new canine family member.

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Treat your new rescue dog like a 2-year-old child, and you'll make friends fast, says Jean Smith, coordinator of Collie Rescue of the Carolinas. "It is important to establish right away that this is his new home and he is staying," she adds.

Here are 10 tips to help you welcome your rescue dog.

1. Know your dog. "Get as much information as possible from shelter or rescue organization personnel about his behavior and daily routine," says Emma Parsons, adoption intake coordinator for Yankee Golden Retriever Rescue. Continuing the feeding, exercise, and grooming routine he was used to gives your dog confidence in his new home.
2. Clarify dog-care duties and limits in your home. These duties include who will walk the dog and when, who will feed him, and whether any furniture or rooms will be off-limit to four paws. Make sure no duty goes neglected and that everyone enforces limits consistently.
3. Check the dog's health. "Take him for a veterinary exam, including a heartworm test," says Lori Blackburn, director of Purebred Rescue Organization of Ohio, Inc. Arrange for spaying or neutering, the Humane Society of the United States recommends.
4. Take it easy. Bring your rescue dog home when you have a few full days to get used to each other. For the first two days, let only immediate family have contact with him. "Slowly introduce the new dog to other pets during short supervised sessions," Parsons says.
5. Give him security. "If the dog is used to sleeping in a crate, continue making his crate available," Blackburn suggests. Your dog will feel protected there.
6. Give him frequent potty breaks. Assume the dog is not housetrained. Take him outdoors often to eliminate to help prevent accidents and learn how to signal to you that he needs to go. "Dogs don't know which door to go to in a new home," Parsons says.
7. Walk, don't sit. Your companion needs to run and play with you. Those activities not only boost his health, but also strengthen the bond between you.
8. Go to school. Enroll in obedience classes, even if your dog already knows the basics, the Humane Society suggests. Learning together establishes you as the leader.
9. Keep him leashed. "Don't let the dog run free too soon," Parsons says. If you must chase him, escapes become a game. "When people manage their dogs well, the dogs naturally fall into the kind of behavior people want from them," she says.
10. Be patient. Give the dog time to adjust to his new life, the Humane Society recommends. Just as with people, taking your time helps you both to ease into a happy lifelong relationship.