

“I’m Bringing a Dog Home, What to Do?”
or
“Making the “Doggone Connection”

By

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Please read this material *before* you bring home your dog. If you’re *already* home with your new dog and haven’t read this material, reading it now may answer some important questions about behavior issues with your dog.

Congratulations, and thanks for giving this dog another chance at family life.

Whether or not you’ve had a dog before, we would like to offer some information that will assist you and your new companion during this exciting and critical transition period. There will be a lot of excitement *and* critical programming since initial experiences and exposures are the most impressionable for the dog. *This especially applies to the moment the dog and person first meet and walk through the doorway together.* Remember that dogs are not people. Applying people standards for our dog sets them up for failure. Consistently applying the following suggestions will increase your likelihood of successfully introducing your dog into his/her new world in a context that will offer security, direction and clarity of boundaries that dogs need to feel comfortable.

Background of these dogs:

The truth is: most dogs are abandoned or surrendered because of “behavior” problems. Behavior problems include: rowdiness, jumping up on people, biting, chewing and soiling in the house. These are normal behaviors and are not problems for dogs, but they do create a problem when living with people. They can be distasteful, annoying, expensive and dangerous. Most often these behaviors are inadvertently made worse when we try to stop or correct them in the wrong way. This generally happens because people have:

1. Unrealistic expectations.
2. Been unfamiliar with animal behavior.
3. Failed to encourage the behavior they want.
4. Allowed undesirable behavior to be repeated.
5. Exercised poor management.

Getting ready:

Here is an opportunity to really learn and grow in a very short time. Two species trying to get on the same page, the four legged one savvier than the two legged one. Please try to appreciate that getting rid of an old behavior (or habit) and learning a new, desirable behavior for the dog is not achieved after a few repetitions, it is achieved after *thousands* of repetitions, (remember when we first learned to drive a stick shift, or move our fingers

around on a keyboard?). We have become “out of touch” with the natural world, expecting instantaneous results with “click of a mouse” speed. Anticipate that your dog will exhibit *normal*, annoying behaviors that perhaps have been unknowingly reinforced from their previous home. *Consistently and patiently* applying the following suggestions will *gradually* modify that troublesome behavior into acceptable behavior that will make your lives easier. Expect an insistent burst of old habit/effort from the dog to continue its objectionable behavior as you initiate your behavior-changing program! Dogs do well with structure, routine, consistency, encouragement and success.

The Question:

What do you want the dog to do? Lie down and be quiet? Come to you? Do his business outside on the grass? Keep all four feet on the floor? Walk into his crate willingly? When you know the answers to this question, then *reinforce* (reward) the desired behavior when it happens. *Reinforcement* is the training tool, TIMING, CRITERIA and RATE are the “how to” apply this tool.

Reinforcements or Rewards:

These are resources that the dog values. They vary depending on what is important at the time. Food is an excellent reinforcer, your attention is highly desirable, also access to the outside, a toy/bone, and games, etc.

Have soft, *exceptionally* delicious treats (not dry, tasteless, crumbly things) conveniently available (pockets, bowls on shelves near doorways) and use to reward desirable behavior:

Your attention should be directed at recognizing and rewarding the dog’s *desirable* behavior, managing and ignoring and/or withdrawing your attention from the dog for undesirable behavior, (rowdiness, jumping, etc). Your goal is to foster cooperation and avoid conflict. It is important that your dog recognize you as the source of good things and that *you control the resources*, (your attention, food, doorways, treats, toys, bone and games). The “secret” of training is letting the dog figure out what he needs to do (what behavior he needs to exhibit) to manipulate the environment to receive the reinforce/reward. For example, treats drop from heaven for the default behavior of lying down; the door opens to go outside when the dog is not crazy at the doorway. Timing of reward delivery is somewhat of an art. A training class would be a good place to learn this style of training. You are encouraged to sign up for a training class with a reputable trainer to learn this technique of training.

Getting into a Car:

When you get to the car use a treat to “lure” the dog into the car if he is hesitant. Reward with the treat once he’s in. Remember, some dogs associate the car with going to the vet and getting a shot, or being separated from their last home and being surrendered at the shelter. Some dogs may have no trouble at all hopping into your car. Picking the dog up to place in the car teaches the dog that hesitation will get you to pick him up. Injured, older or small dogs unable to jump up distance are the exception.

Another dog in the home?

We strongly encourage you to take your current resident dog to the Shelter for a dog-dog introduction to evaluate compatibility before taking home a new dog. *Generally* a younger dog of the opposite sex is a better choice. Always introduce dogs outside on neutral territory first, before coming inside. Pick up bones and toys to prevent issues over resources.

A preexisting cat in the home?

Arrange for your cat to have a safe area (separate room behind closed door) before introducing the dog into the home. During the learning process never allow the dog to chase the cat. This will invoke a normal prey drive in the dog. Keep them separated for several weeks. They will be very aware of each other by the presence of each other's scent. It might be helpful to set the dog's food bowl on a towel that has been rubbed on the cat and the cat's food bowl on a towel that's been rubbed on the dog. This will help each animal have a good association of the other. Allow the cat into the house area only when the dog is outdoors or shut away in another room. After the separation period, introduce the cat into the room with the dog on his lead. Pairing this meeting with special food when the dog does not struggle against the leash will continue to help a positive association, cat = treat. Proceed cautiously and *slowly*, always managing the intensity of the exposure with greater distances until the dog becomes more accepting of the cat. Be sure the cat always has an accessible safe zone

When you get home, Housetraining:

When you arrive home, allow your dog to eliminate outside *before* entering your home. Determine one place outside where you prefer the dog to eliminate. Praise him as he's eliminating, (it's nice to not have to scoop the whole yard if you've established the scent and habit of the dog using the same area every time). Reward the dog for eliminating by playing fetch or going for a walk after the potty business, (that is the reward for doing business first!) When you go into the house keep the dog on the lead and introduce the dog to one room at a time on the lead. If you turn the dog loose to run throughout the home you establish the opportunity for the dog to mark its territory inside and the precedent to soil somewhere in the house. Remember, he/she is excited, curious, confused and doesn't yet know what the boundaries are. Also, dogs that have been previously housebroken will often regress in their potty training if allowed full access to the home right away. *Constant supervision is necessary to avoid indoor soiling.* Arrange the dog's potty schedule so that it is not punished for pottying outside by having him/her return inside right away. This will train the dog to delay its elimination. Instead, go to one spot and stand still with the dog at the end of the lead. No walk, chase ball, anything till the dog does their business, then the reward with the walk, ball chase, other exercise.

House Rules:

Decide beforehand where the dog will sleep, eat. Don't allow a habit to develop that will be a problem later. Are we going to permit jumping up on furniture? Going into these rooms but not that one?

Train your dog to look at you:

“Hang out” with the dog and if he directs his/her eye contact to you, smile and immediately reward with a lot of treats to reinforce that behavior, (looking at you!). Repeat every time and his eyes will become glued to you. Repeat.

Teaching bite inhibition:

Biting too hard is normal but gets many dogs in trouble. Helping a dog to learn the strength/gentleness of his mouth is an important endeavor. If the dog grabs at a treat with too much teeth on your fingers (too much mouth/teeth), shout “OW!” as you withdraw the treat, act hurt for a moment, (this teaches the dog that too much teeth touching your skin hurts you *and* makes the treat go away). Offer the treat again and say “easy” or “gentle” and allow the dog the treat if the response is improved from the prior attempt. Repeat the “OW!” startle if the teeth get too enthusiastic. The dog thus learns that a *gentle mouth gets the treat; rough mouth makes it go away*. Continue to rehearse this ceremony indefinitely to achieve and maintain a soft mouth.

Crate Training:

Crate training is an excellent means of protecting your dog from chewing your sofa as well as protecting them from the electrical cord. Many dogs have had a bad introduction to a crate and are not always receptive to entering one. It should be a safe and desirable place. Make it that way by throwing in a dog biscuit or piece of hotdog. After doing that many, many times assign a word or phrase (i.e. “into your bed”) as your dog is going into the crate. Don’t shut the door right away. Make a game of going in and finding a new reward! Feeding with the bowl just outside the crate door and then *gradually* advancing it inside the crate with successive feedings will often dispel a prior bad association with the crate. Get your dog used to short periods in the crate, leaving a favorite chew toy, (Kong balls stuffed with special treats will keep them busy). When you walk by the crate and the dog is being calm, drop in a treat. Make a habit of rewarding quiet behavior.

Alone Training:

This is probably the most important exercise for your dog’s (and possible your) emotional well-being. Assume that your dog will require training to be successfully left alone! Dogs are strongly wired as pack/social animals and being separated can be a very difficult experience that can result in panic, destruction of property and injury to the dog. “Velcro” dogs (dogs who have never been out of their companion’s sight) can easily develop this panic condition called “separation anxiety.” If you have a second-hand-dog, the last time they were left behind, their person never came back. Alone training teaches them to trust that you will return.

After the honeymoon and initial adjustment of getting familiar with the new home and routine, *frequently* train your dog to be alone while you are in another area of the house. It is most important to let the dog experience time in the crate or area of isolation *even when you are at home* so that they don’t associate being there just when you’re leaving the house and them behind for a long period of isolation. Practice leaving the dog alone for brief intervals. Start with 2 seconds, then 5,10 seconds, etc. and then return, *gradually* lengthening the time alone. Always leave them with an exceptionally desirous busy toy to

occupy their attention. Avoid returning with a fanfare greeting or letting them out if barking or acting up. Doing so teaches them that that behavior is successful. Greet or let them out when they are quiet and still. This will train them that “being quiet and still” is what works to manipulate you to open the door!

Departures and arrivals:

When you leave your dog don't make it a “poor baby” ceremony. When you return disregard your dog for several minutes and *then* greet them with calm affection. If greetings are explosive, the dog will associate being explosive with greetings! When isolating or crating your dog for longer periods do so with a good highly desirable chew puzzle or bone 15-20 minutes prior to your leaving. A kong toy stuffed with low fat peanut butter or cream cheese is a good choice.

Your dog will have to chew:

Dogs are naturals at chewing. They're programmed to chew. Trying to stop it only aggravates an already confused animal. The secret to chewing is directing it to an acceptable source like a favorable chew bone. Observe your dog's preferences to identify an exciting one. Avoid those items like pig ears, that might aggravate a strong possessive behavior. *You should control access to the chew bone, as well as all toys. Make them available as a reward for good behavior and/or to keep them busy during time alone.* Having multiple toys lying around only makes it harder for the dog to discriminate what is and is not acceptable. If your dog is young and learning his ways with his mouth and chewing or mouthing something he's not suppose to, use a key word for him like “stop” to interrupt the action and *as soon as he looks at you*, redirect him to the acceptable chew bone and praise. Don't chase or punish, redirect. Have an *extra special* chew bone or food puzzle to provide in the crate or area of isolation when leaving the dog alone.

Your dog needs activity:

This means physical as well as mental. Engage in stimulating games: “hide and seek,” (great for establishing a strong recall), “find your bone” (start with easy finds and progressively work to more difficult finds. You might think about having a sand box in your yard where you bury his favorite bone or ball for him to find. This can then be the digging focus for him vs. your flowerbeds), “fetching” (have an exchange object of equal value). If you're a runner, now you've got company, (check with your vet regarding the distance that is safe for your dog in respect to age and health). Be sure to increase distance gradually, just like any training runner. A word of caution; *roughhousing with your dog will result in a dog that plays rough and this will escalate into a big problem quickly!*

Feeding

This is the magic moment to train the dog. Dismiss it and you're missing a golden opportunity. Be aware that we have no real idea what the dog's food guarding behaviors are. Food is a HIGH priority item for the dog, how you dispense it will determine what regard you deserve. (If your dog has snapped or growled at you, seek professional

help in place of the following exercises). If your dog has a “bitey” mouth when you offer a treat, give a loud ”OW!” and withhold the treat a moment. Offer the treat again and allow the dog the treat only when he/she offers a gentler mouth. Start out feeding your dog from your hand. Call him to you and when he comes, feed him a palm full of kibbles.

Use the food bowl for these three exercises:

1. Have the empty food bowl on the ground. Lower your hand with some kibbles in your hand to empty into the bowl. Repeat this several times. This shows the dog that your hand approaching the bowl is coming to *give* and not *take away*. This is not an exercise for children to initiate with an unfamiliar dog.
2. Fill the bowl with food at counter level; dog will likely be looking anxiously. Tell him to “wait” or “stay” as you lower the bowl towards the floor. As soon as the dog pursues the food, raise the bowl to the counter or above your head if you have a big dog. On each attempt you will be able to get the bowl closer to the floor before the dog pursues the food. Repeat this until you get the food bowl on the floor. Release the dog from their position with an “O.K” or what ever signal word you choose. Be ready to snatch up the bowl if the dog breaks position prematurely. This initial exercise may take 5mins, ½ hour, an hour or perhaps a missed mealtime. Don’t give in. This will be a beneficial accomplishment that will establish a lasting impression for a respectful relationship. Each success will result in a shorter period to accomplish ceremony. After you are able to rest the bowl on the ground, vary the waiting period before releasing the dog to the bowl. Make this exercise a habit!
3. While the dog is eating his dry kibble, *slowly* offer your hand down toward the bowl with a food of higher value (small piece of chicken, roast beef etc.) to offer in the food bowl. Again, this establishes that the hand approaching toward the bowl is doing so to *offer* and not take away.

Doorways:

Use doorways to go outside in much the same way as the food bowl exercise. Instruct your dog to “wait” or “stay” (vocalizing the command at this point is optional). As you open the door and the dog gets excited and breaks their calm, close the door. Try again, the more controlled the dog behaves, the wider the door gets. If the dog moves toward the opening the door before your approval, close the door smoothly quickly and say “sorry”, “nope”, “wrong” “too bad” or whatever expression you choose to identify this moment of “pushiness” and start again. Progress in stages until the dog is calm, door open, *and then* signal to go through. That is the ultimate reward for that moment! This establishes the precedent that for the dog to manipulate the environment to get that door open they will have to be calm and/or sit/stay in front of the door. Gradually increase the time the dog has to wait before rewarding with a release through the door.

If the above is too much for you to manage at first, practice this strategy of the doorway game: Have your dog on the lead. Approach and stop at the doorway. Have the lead securely grasped (or wrapped once around) in your hand with your hand anchored against your hip. Open the door but stand still. The dog will strain at the lead but will be unable to proceed because he is tethered to you like a tree trunk. The criterion for the dog being allowed access through the doorway is that the dog must provide slack in the lead. When the dog dismisses his pulling effort against the lead he can then be given permission to go through the doorway. Repeating this game at every doorway will gradually curtail the charging through open doors. As the dog becomes proficient at this doorway game, the next criterion can be a “sit and maintain.”

Jumping Up

Jumping up is a ritualistic dog greeting, further encouraged by all the people who either pet the dog when he jumps up for greetings or who pushes or knees them back to get them off. What if every time the dog jumps up on a person, that person turns away their body and eye contact (their attention), thus emotionally isolating the dog? And every time the dog's feet are on the ground he gets heavily dosed with some hot dog or liver treats? He'll figure it out, “what behavior do I need to offer to get the good stuff?” Consistently have everyone practice this program and the dog will figure out that this behavior results in nothing productive for him. Would you keep performing old habits if benefits were consistently withheld?

Interactions with family, friends, children and strangers

Don't let others force themselves into your dog's space when getting acquainted. We really don't know what the dog's experience has been with different peoples. Perhaps they've had a bad experience with bearded men, or have been hit, slapped or pinched by a child. People get lawyers and sue for threatening behavior. Dogs run or growl and bite when they are uncomfortable. Children should be taught to be gentle. Allowing a child to agitate, play hand circles in the dog's face, etc. will teach a dog to be mouthy and play bite during interaction with people. Vigilante adult supervision is a must with any children/dog interaction. Period. Dogs are animals with an inherent predatory drive and respond to shapes and movement from that context, (chasing the squirrel, chasing the ball). A toddler or infant flailing his limbs and crying or pulling the dog's ear, looks and sounds and acts just like another little animal. Never allow a child to chase or tease your dog. Never allow a child near the new dog's food bowl or allow an opportunity for a child to try and take something away from the dog.

Encourage others who want to greet your dog to offer a treat to your dog so that your dog will not see them as a threat. Ask them to not pet your dog when jumping up, rather, acknowledge the dog when all four paws are on the floor. *You should assume control how others interact with your dog to protect him from feeling threatened and/or feeling the need to protect himself!*

Practicing these strategies is not an all-inclusive solution to every hurdle you'll have in developing a trouble free life for you and your dog, but it will be a very big first step in doing so and will more clearly identify you as a calm and fair leader. Remember that

shaping a desirable behavior requires consistent application of these techniques by everyone in the household. If you ever recognize any threatening behavior from your dog like growling, snapping, or biting, please get professional assistance immediately. Most important, be calm, patient, have fun, and learn what your dog can teach you!

Feel free to copy this material for the benefit of your 4 *and* 2-legged friends.

If you would like an abbreviated version of this material, please refer to the handout:

“At Home with the Newly Adopted Dog”