



Setting your  
**Rescue Dog**  
up for Success





# Setting your Rescue Dog up for Success

It may seem like a rescue dog should breathe a sigh of relief when you take him home, but he likely will have a period of adjustment. After all, everything in his world is now different - from his food to his belongings to where he sleeps and the people who care for him. Patiently following these simple steps will help set your newly adopted dog up for success.

## USE TOYS AND CHEWS TO ENGAGE YOUR DOG.

Be sure your new dog has plenty of appropriate things like Kongs, hard rubber chews, food puzzles, or Licki Mats to keep him occupied. Chewing and licking help keep his mind engaged and can also help a dog to self-soothe if he has a bit of anxiety.



## CREATE AN APPROACH-FREE ZONE.

Set up a quiet place in the house with a comfy dog bed or an open crate, if your dog is comfortable being crated, so he has a spot to retreat to when he doesn't want to interact.

## REWARD YOUR DOG.

- Gently giving your dog high-value treats (such as hot dog, chicken, or cheese) is a fantastic way to build positive associations with things you want him to do.
- Toss treats on the ground near your dog instead of asking him to take them out of your hand, as hands can sometimes be scary to dogs, depending on their prior experiences.
- If he takes the treat and runs away or if he won't take the treat, this is typically a sign that he is experiencing anxiety and that you need to take things a bit slower.

## GIVE HIM SPACE.

You have a new furry member of the family and you're understandably excited about introducing him to everyone. However, it's best to minimize interactions during the first two weeks to give him time to get comfortable with his new environment and routine.

## DON'T FORCE INTERACTIONS.

Let your dog be the guide in terms of interactions with you and your family. You may want him to curl up on the couch with you, but do not force your dog to sit with you or sleep with you. Likewise, let him approach you if he wants to be pet. Over time, he's very likely to become more comfortable getting close to you, but let him make the choice.

## BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU PET.

Pet areas like your dog's side or chest instead of his ears, tail, or paws. Avoid petting your dog's head or bending over him. This can make an anxious dog feel trapped.

**Tip:** If you're petting your dog but aren't sure if he's happy with this, stop and wait to see if he solicits attention before continuing to pet him.

## READ BODY LANGUAGE.

Learning a dog's body language can help you gauge how your dog is acclimating to his new home. There are many subtle signs such as yawning, lip licking, or freezing, that indicate a dog is uncomfortable. If you see him doing any of these things, give him plenty of space.

**Tip:** People often mistakenly believe a dog is happy if his tail is wagging. However, sometimes this means they are over-aroused. To learn more, visit [Dr. Sophia Yin's website](#) to find posters on understanding fear and anxiety in dogs.

## GIVE YOUR DOG ROOM.

It is worth repeating, give your dog lots of space - particularly when he is eating anything, playing with a toy, or sleeping. If there are children in the home, make sure they follow these rules as well.

## USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT.

- Please do not use anything aversive (such as electronic collars, pinch collars, or scolding your dog). This can backfire, making an anxious dog more anxious, and can actually have a negative effect on their behavior.
- Instead, use praise and treats to reward behavior you would like your dog to continue having.

## CREATE A CONSISTENT SCHEDULE.

Where possible, create a predictable schedule for your new dog (i.e., times for him to play, go on walks, and eat meals). Having a routine helps dogs know what to expect next, improving house training and enabling them to become more comfortable in their new home.

## MANAGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT.

Before you take your new dog home, clear away things that would be unsafe or undesirable for him to grab or chew.

- Keep food off the counter.
- Gate off spaces you don't want your dog to get into.
- Put items like TV remotes, cords/wires, and shoes out of reach.

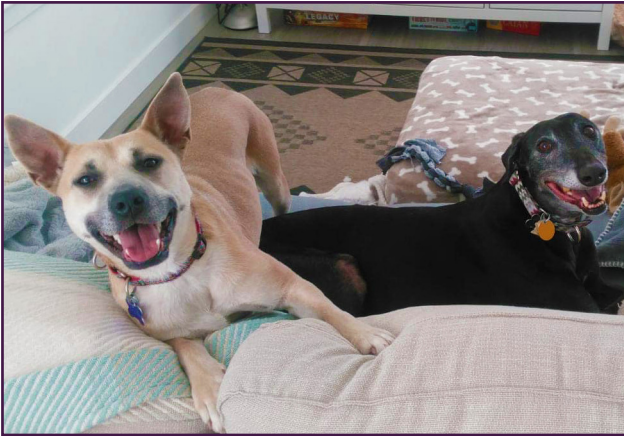
If a dog sees something yummy on the counter, he's understandably going to want to jump on the counter to get it. But research shows that the more a dog exhibits a behavior, the more likely he is to repeat it, so managing the environment to avoid some of these temptations can help prevent unwanted behaviors (and keep your favorite slippers safe).



## TOP THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Build positive associations.
2. Give your new dog plenty of space.
3. Take things slowly.





### INVOLVE A BUDDY.

Having another dog to play with can give your dog something fun to do while building his confidence and teaching him social skills. If your dog likes other dogs, consider finding time to go for a walk with a friend and his dog. Start out walking them in parallel several feet apart in a neutral area. If that goes well, you can then set up playtime for the two.

**Tip:** Avoid taking your dog to the dog park, which can be overwhelming for many dogs.



### TAKE YOUR TIME EXPOSING YOUR DOG TO NEW EXPERIENCES.

- Many seemingly innocuous things like a bicyclist, a big truck, or even the sound of your dishwasher can be scary to a dog who isn't accustomed to them.
- Start out walking your dog in very quiet places. This could be walking in your yard at first and then graduating to walking on a secluded trail.
- Bring high-value treats on walks. When you encounter something that you know makes your dog uncomfortable, toss some treats on the ground to help him build positive associations with that person or thing. Or better yet, try to avoid the "thing" in the first place. If your dog is afraid of loud trucks, for example, turn around and go the other way when you see one headed towards you.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[Training & behavior resources](#)

[Dog body language gallery](#)

[Teaching your dog recall](#)

[Fun enrichment activities for your dog](#)

[Tips on supervising children interacting with pets](#)

If you have any questions or concerns about your dog's behavior, please contact us at [info@baypathhumane.org](mailto:info@baypathhumane.org). We're here to help!