

THE ESSENTIAL HANDBOOK

— ON —

ADOPTING A SHELTER DOG



Thank you for helping a shelter dog!

You have saved a life and embarked on an incredible experience. Rescue dogs are noted for their gratitude and loyalty, which they prove to you every day they're with you ...

YOUR JOB as your rescue's new guardian is set him up for success. The way to do that is to follow certain guidelines **from the moment your rescue comes to you.**

This handbook is designed to help you through that process ... it is essential you not only read it, but practice it. It does work!

The most important chapter is the one on DECOMPRESSION. It is vital you read, absorb and utilize what is outlined there. The first weeks you have your rescue dog sets the tone for the entire experience and will impact on the adoptability of your dog.

Good luck and thank you!

A FEW GENERAL TIPS

LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS.

Do not expect perfection and be patient. Your new rescue might have accidents, chew things up, have separation problems. Expect little from your him the first few weeks ... just let him chill, decompress. Meet his basic needs, and just let him exist. Crate, walk, feed, that's it.

TRAINING.

Put your new rescue immediately on a schedule of walks, feeding twice a day, crating. Set those essential boundaries. Read the chapters on crating and housetraining. Start with simple obedience. Do not do advanced training until a bond of trust has been formed.

SAFETY.

The Yard. No tie outs! Your dog can get caught, choke, be attacked by another animal. Yards are to be used for play and supervised exercise; they are NOT a substitute for daily walks.

Dog Parks. We do not recommend dog parks for your new dog. At least until you are absolutely sure of your dogs' temperament with other canines. And that takes a while, months often. The liability to you and to the dog is too great. If you can establish relationships with other dogs, it is better to have "playdates" with known dogs than to risk an incident in the dog park.

Walk, Don't Shop. NEVER, EVER TIE YOUR DOG OUTSIDE OF A BUILDING OR STORE. A passing dog could attack them. They could be kidnapped for dog fighting. Multi tasking is not worth it. Your walks with your dog should be about that, and nothing else. It is a bonding experience, not the time to check off a to do list. Enjoy it.

REACH OUT.

Asking questions or for help is expected. Contact us; go on our social media page for fosters and adopters and post away. You are not alone.

BUCK UP.

It is not always going to be easy. There will be times you'll wonder what you got yourself into, when you want to quit. That is the time to reach down deep and be resolute. You did this for a reason; remember what that is ... to save a dog's life. And now that life is in your hands. It's a lot of responsibility, but it's also a lot of joy.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE ESSENTIAL
“DECOMPRESSION”
PHASE

The most important phase dogs go through after the shelter is the Decompression Phase. The Decompression lasts anywhere from the first day to a few weeks or even months. Key is to be patient, consistent and loving.

This chapter will show you step by step what to do from the moment your rescue arrives through the first days and weeks to set your rescue up for success.

7 STEPS TO YOUR RESCUE’S FIRST DAY HOME

- 1 The moment they arrive, do not go inside, take him for a 30 to 40 minute walk.
- 2 Back home, keep your rescue leashed and walk him calmly through the front door and around your home. NO FREE ROAM.
- 3 After your tour with your leashed dog, take him to the new crate area, give him some water and begin to practice the Crate Exercises (see Chapter Two.) The crate should be in an area of the house that is neither isolated nor in the middle of everything. Your new rescue should be able to observe you and your family (and other dogs if you have them) but not feel stressed or overwhelmed.
- 4 After some time, leash, walk to the door and out for a potty break. Back in and back in the crate. Let him rest.
- 5 Meal time, leash him up, remove him from the crate and HAND FEED HIM HIS MEAL (hand feeding a new dog quickly establishes trust, do it as often as you can). Then outside for another potty break.
- 6 Now for some “out of crate time”. Still leashed, your new dog should just relax with you. No rough play, wrestling, free roam. No engagement with your other pets.
- 7 Back in the crate. Ignore him. Let him rest.

Repeat this every day for at least two weeks.

The goal is to meet their basic needs while establishing structure, rules, boundaries, in a loving, calm, authoritative way. That is what your dog NEEDS. At this point you must exercise restraint. So here are the NO’s that must be employed during this time:

NO on the furniture. No on the couch, the bed and no sitting on any human. (Later, they may go up on furniture, with your permission only, but NOT NOW).

NO unstructured affection. Any and all affection from you must have a purpose. No kissy face, baby talk.

NO free access to toys. Toys, kongs, etc. are to be given in the crate or during play time.

NO trips to Petco. Or parties, having company over to see your new dog. That’s for you, not him. He’s not ready. What he needs is quiet time with you, your family, that’s it.

NO ahead of you. Establish this little rule right away. You go out and in first through the door, have them sit before you leash up, etc.

NO grazing. Feeding is scheduled at least twice a day, same time. Bowls come up whether the food is eaten or not. (Please read CHAPTER THREE on Resource Guarding if that is an issue.)

You will know as guardian when the phase is truly over. Use your gut. Some dogs get “it” right away, others take longer. Once they are into a routine, seem relaxed and confident, tolerate the crate well, are looking to you for guidance, they are probably beginning to feel okay about themselves and their world. Pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

CHAPTER TWO

CRATING

Crating is an essential tool that we, as guardians, have at our disposal. They are useful for housetraining, for keeping them safe when we are not around, and for dogs experiencing behavioral issues such as anxiety around new people, destructiveness, separation anxiety, etc.

Crates resemble “dens” to dogs, and when introduced properly, dogs view them as a safe place, somewhere to be cozy, calm and relaxed. A place to retire to when they feel stressed or overwhelmed.

Crate training, like any other training, is about patience, consistency and clear communication.

STEPS FOR SUCCESS AT CRATING

1

Set up the crate in a corner where your dog can observe what is going on, but not be in the middle of it. Avoid having a crate where the dog is isolated.

2

Put soft bedding in the crate and cover all sides but the door with a dark blanket. This creates a den-like feel.

3

Leash your dog, toss some treats into the crate, guide the dog in saying the words “crate up!” as he enters. When he finishes the treat, use the leash to guide him out. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

4

Next, leash your dog, toss treats in the crate, guide the dog in, say “crate up!”, then close the door. Wait 3 to 5 minutes. Open the door and use the leash to guide him out. Don't let him rush the door. If he does, guide him back in, wait a minute, till he's calm, then open the door. Remember, as the human, you're in control of him entering and exiting the crate. Repeat, gradually lengthening the time in the crate.

5

Leave the door open to the crate and allow the dog to go in and out on their own. Most dogs will explore an open crate that looks inviting. Put some chew toys such as Kongs, nylabones, in there to encourage them to relax.

6 Practice entering and exiting several times and add in longer stays with the door closed.

7 If your dog throws a “tantrum”, barks, cries or whines, IGNORE THEM. Don’t talk to them, yell at them, look at them. When they quiet down, walk over to the crate and say “good boy/girl” in a light tone and guide the dog out. Being quiet in their crate is a non-negotiable rule. Be careful not to put too much emotion into it. Repeat, slowly adding time in the crate.

Crate your dog at night. After practicing the repeat exercises above, the crate should now be somewhat of a familiar place.

Your nighttime routine should be like this:

- 8**
- Take the dog out to potty one last time 10 to 20 minutes before bed.
 - Turn off lights, leave on white noise machine or radio on classical.
 - Cover the crate door halfway with a blanket.
 - Say “good night” in even, non-emotional tone. Leave the room.
-

9 Ignore all crying, hooting and hollering. Most dogs will settle down quickly once they realize they will not get attention.

10 If you have a dog who throws tantrums of epic proportions, zip tie all sides and bottom of the crate and put Carabineer style clips (available at hardware stores) along the door. Still IGNORE ALL MELT DOWNS. Any attention they get, even scolding, encourages the barking and nonsense.

11 In the morning, wait 10 to 15 minutes before you let the dog out. Avoid the dog expecting you to let him out first thing. Same goes for when you come home from work. Wait 10 to 15 minutes for them to calm down BEFORE they are allowed to exit.

SOME NOTES:

For the small percentage of over-the-top manic dogs, push the side and back of the crate against into a wall corner, place a piece of furniture on the exposed side and place something heavy on top. Once the dog realizes attempts at escape are futile, he will give up and settle.

It is CRUCIAL that all entrances and exits to the crate are done when the dog is CALM.

It is essential to crate when you are at work or out of the home, for your dog's safety. If you work from home, carve out blocks of time that the dog is crated. It will foster your dog's independence and avoid separation anxiety.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO CRATE YOUR DOG FOR PERIODS OF TIME WHEN YOU ARE AT HOME, TOO. They need to learn to "crate up" any time for any reason. Not just when you leave the home. That way you will prevent the dogs from making the association "crate=humans leaving" meltdown.

Crating is not to be used EVER for punishment. When used correctly, your dog will view his crate as a safe place. A den. A sanctuary from the hectic world.

CHAPTER THREE

HOUSETRAINING AN ADULT DOG

Dogs coming from the shelter have been through a traumatic experience. Many regress, even if they had been totally housetrained before. Some bounce back quickly and regain their housetraining, some need help and guidance.

Here are guidelines to housetrain an adult dog from the shelter:

Have a strict feeding and water schedule. Pick up water two hours before bed and limit water intake in the morning before you leave for work. Rule of thumb is a dog should have one ounce of water per lb. of weight. You can mete that out during the day.

Potty breaks should follow feeding immediately. Potty breaks are not the same as time in the yard or walks. They are for housetraining purposes and should be ten to fifteen minutes tops. Encourage your dog by saying “go potty” or something similar. They will quickly learn the phrase. When they do their business, praise them, allow them to walk around a few more minutes (so they don’t associate peeing and pooping with the end of the “fun”), then back in. Once back in, allow some free time, then put back in the crate.

If he does NOT go during the potty break, no free time in the home, wait about 20 minutes, then back outside for another try. Do this until he pees/poops.

NEVER SCOLD for peeing and pooping in the home. It damages your relationship with your rescue and can sabotage the housetraining goals. Your rescue might not see going in the home as “bad”, and they can transfer your negativity to outside as well, defeating everything. They will then hide from you when peeing/pooping in the home, behind a chair or in a closet, to avoid the scolding.

Ignore the pee and poop in the home! Clean it up, move on.

NO Free Roam. Even during “free time”, keep your rescue confined to a small area where you can keep an eye on him. Have him drag a leash. If he shows any sign he needs to go, grab the leash, take him out. If he starts to go before you get outside, interrupt him by clapping your hands, saying “eh-eh!” and take him out. No emotion, no anger, pick up the leash and lead him out. Praise after the pee/poop.

Try to use the same door in and out for potty breaks. It is part of the consistency and routine that helps this process along. After they are housetrained, they can use different doors.

PRAISE, PRAISE, PRAISE. Positive reinforcement is essential each and every time your rescue goes outside, whether during potty breaks or your structured walks.

Be patient, consistent, calm and kind. Follow the same schedule and routine every day, even on weekends. It'll work!

CHAPTER FOUR

RESOURCE GUARDING

Resource guarding is hard wired in dogs and believe it or not, is perfectly natural. It is something that we humans, however, feel uncomfortable about, so it often does need to be managed or trained.

First, hand feed.

As described in the Decompression Chapter to quickly build a bond of trust, it also helps with food guarding. It establishes a new pattern of behavior around food, it allows you to control the resources, and it strengthens your bond and develops your dog's impulse control. Do a strict hand feeding schedule for at least three weeks.

Dogs don't have to eat together.

Feed separately if there are issues. It's a very easy to manage practice. Bowls back up after mealtime. If you have employed the hand feeding repetition however, you, as their human, should always be able to handle their food. Guarding with other dogs is natural, but guarding from humans is unacceptable.

How to effectively hand feed.

Measure out their allotment of food. Go to a quiet area and have him sit. When he makes eye contact with you, hold the gaze, say "yes" and give him a handful of food. Repeat until all food is gone. It's that simple.

IF GUARDING IS STILL A CONCERN AFTER HAND FEEDING ... usually hand feeding and implementing rules and structures are enough. However, if guarding is still going on with you, their human, one exercise to do is:

- Secure the dog by tethering him to something sturdy
- Place the empty bowl within their reach
- Walk up and toss food in and occasionally something great, like cheese
- Repeat until meal is done
- The idea is that, over time, the dog will see your approach as a good thing and as with hand feeding, realize you control the resources.
- When exercise is over, walk around to the side (away from the bowl), call the dog to you, give them a treat, unleash and walk away.
- Pick up the bowl when the dog is crated.

Teaching commands such as "leave it" or "drop" is also beneficial for dogs with guarding issues. Check out videos on the internet for help with these commands. If guarding is severe, a professional may have to be called in.

CHAPTER FIVE

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation anxiety can occur in any dog, any breed, with any background, at any age. Rescue or shelter dogs who have been abandoned, bounced around, traumatized, often show signs of separation anxiety because of the lack of consistency and the stress.

Once in your home, separation anxiety can appear or escalate because of the following factors:

- Guardian giving comfort to a stressed, insecure dog
- Expressing excitement or emotion to the dog when coming and going from the home
- Allowing the dog to follow everywhere
- Lack of overall rules and boundaries and structure
- Too much UNEARNED affection

Please remember that separation anxiety is a symptom of the issues listed above, not the problem itself.

Though you as guardian may be stressed out by the barking, whining, destruction, your rescue is even more so. They have no skills to cope with their anxiety. Their very brains are in torment and they feel panic. It's an awful feeling for them to endure. They need to release that anxiety, and unless we teach them how to cope being alone and independent, they can release in ways we might not like.

Your job as guardian is to teach them to exist peacefully without you always being there. You need to create a less dramatic contrast between when you are there and when you are not.

How do you do that?

- Creating a calm mind in your dog takes time, patient and consistency. Starting them off on the right foot is key. Set the tone the moment the dog arrives. **IF YOU FOLLOW THE DECOMPRESSION PHASE, YOU WILL GO A LONG WAY TO PREVENTING SA.**
- Follow the decompression steps, follow through with proper crating, feeding, walking.

- Limit affection; do not allow your dog to follow you everywhere if you work from home. Do not allow your dog to invade your personal and “demand” affection, etc.
- Make your comings and going from the home as uneventful as possible. Guide the dog into the crate, say “bye” or “see you later” in a neutral tone. That’s it. No baby talk. Don’t linger.
- Coming home, ignore your dog. Literally. Don’t talk to him, or let him out for 10 to 15 minutes. Put your stuff down, hang up your coat, etc. When the dog is calm, let him out. But do not make a big deal of it, take them out to potty and have them settle before you engage.

IF BARK COLLARS ARE NECESSARY. Remember they are a band aid for the problem, not the cure. Use the collar only if absolutely necessary (you’re going to lose your apartment if the neighbors hear the barking, etc.). And do not buy one from Petco or Petsmart. Purchase collars from Dogstra or E Collar Technologies. Find the lowest level that works for your individual dog. Make sure that the dog doesn’t “freak out” when the correction is given, if he does, it’s too high. **DO NOT RELY ON THE COLLAR.** Put in the work by following the steps above to help your dog cope.

SA is as difficult on your dog as it is on you, more so. The greatest gift you can give a dog with SA is to teach him how to be calm, independent and confident, allowing them to exist contently in their new world.

CHAPTER SIX

DOG TO DOG

INTRODUCTIONS

There are few things in life you have control over, but **THIS IS ONE OF THEM.** You are the only one who can guide the introductions to ensure that your new dog and your dog or dogs in your home have the absolute best chance of co-existing peacefully and happily.

To throw dogs together and “let them work it out”, is an urban myth. **DON'T DO IT.** Dogs who are new to each other are often anxious, over-excited and stressed and that state of the mind is the perfect setup for dogs on both sides to make bad choices.

By taking the time and effort to remove that excitement, stress and anxiety from the interaction -- while giving them human guidance -- sets them up for success, not failure.

These are guidelines; they are flexible according to how well adjusted your present dog or dogs are, and the temperament of your new dog.

FIRST, KEEP THEM SEPARATE. Your new dog should NOT be introduced to your present dog or dogs right away.

CRATE your new dog when not being walked or fed, or given play time (with you, not your dogs). All the dogs will be aware of the other's presence through sight and smell. You can eventually use a baby gate to let them sit alongside each other. If they do so peaceably, in a sit, they're rewarded with treats.

TAKE CONTROL. Our dogs are watching us all the time. If your foster sees you are in calm control of your resident dogs, they will have more confidence in you. One good practice is to do obedience training, one dog at time, while the others are crated.

Another good idea is to have your foster dog walk past your other dogs while crated. If they see your resident dog or dogs be calm, your new dog will likely pick up on that energy.

TOYS, FOOD. Feed separately, or in crates. All bowls picked up after eating. AND no toys, no bones, no chewies left around. Until you are absolutely confident your dogs will not resource guard with each other, it is just not worth the risk. (And it might never happen, so it might be a permanent practice.)

WALKING. After a few days, if all is going well, get them out together. Get someone to help you, at least for the first few times. Each take a dog. Leash up, dogs on the outside, humans in the middle. Walking as a pack is the most therapeutic act there is for your dogs. It is a bonding experience on all fronts, your dogs, and your dogs and you.

After a few successful walks, you can try sniff intros. Again, have someone help you. Use your most calm, balanced dog first if you have more than one. Let them sniff butts. Always do it away from home, on neutral territory.

SUPERVISED OFF LEASH. Only when and if the dogs have exhibited calm, respectful behavior with one another. This step might take weeks (even months) after your new dog arrives. Be aware of canine body language. Some common signs of stress: stiff body, high, stiff tail, closed mouth, lip licking, growling, lip lifting. (Please read ASPCA's guide: <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/canine-body-language>). If you notice any humping, escalation of play, dominance standing, separate calmly and save it for another day.

TAKING IT SLOW SETS THEM UP FOR SUCCESS, NOT FAILURE. The slower you take it, the greater chance of a successful integration. You might think (or want) your dogs to get along right off the bat, but chances are if you put them together too quickly, that relationship will get off on the wrong foot. You want this to work out and work out well. For that to happen, YOU have to be the one who exercises control, patience and sense. Your dogs depend on you, and you need to step up!

CHAPTER SEVEN

DOGS & KIDS

It's essential that dogs and kids co-exist peacefully – and safely – in the home. It is your responsibility as guardian to take the steps to ensure everyone's safety.

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE CHILDREN, but have kids visit ... the wisest thing to do is simply remove your dog.

Dogs cannot be expected to be “okay” with kids, especially young ones, and kids they aren't familiar with. Their movements are unpredictable, their voices often high pitched and loud. Why risk it? Pop your dog in his crate, or in another room in the home.

IF YOU DO HAVE CHILDREN, lesson one is that kids and dogs need to respect each other's space.

It's the adult humans' job to create a safe bubble for both dog and child. This safe bubble needs to be established before any interactions happen. Young children — toddlers and younger — need supervision at all times.

Do not leave your dog alone with your young child, ever.

Older kids can be taught the “do's” and “don'ts” of dog interaction.

Here are the steps to successfully intro your dogs to your kids:

Social Space. Have kids and dog hang out in a room about 5 feet apart. They aren't close enough to touch the dog, thus the dog won't feel pressure and will be able to relax in their presence.

Personal Space. When you feel both kids and dog are okay with the social space process, move to “personal space”. This is a distance approximately an arm's reach of the dog, generally 1 1/2 feet - 2 feet. Limit the amount of time the kids spend in this “space” right now. Many dogs begin to feel uncomfortable the more their space is encroached on.

Older kids can practice doing hand feeding with the new dog (supervised of course). It can help a dog overcome their discomfort with people being in their personal space. Pairing up something they love, their food, with something they may not be fond of -- anyone in their personal space -- is a great way to begin to develop a more tolerant relationship.

Intimate Space. This means no space between the dog and you. Hugging/kissing/nail trims/baths are all activities that involve entering a dog's intimate space.

NONE of the kids should be in this "space" right now. Contrary to what most people believe, most dogs do NOT enjoy hugs and kisses. If you watch a dog when they are being hugged, chances are they turn their head, lick their lips, yawn, look away, open their eyes wider than usual, close their mouth. These are all stress signals and the dog is communicating to anyone who is listening, that he is NOT comfortable. Problems arise when any of these signs are ignored.

Your new dog will decide if he wants to interact with the kids but it's up to you as guardian to make sure that those interactions are calm and respectful. It is a process and should always happen slowly and with care.

SOME DON'TS:

- Do not allow your dog to put his mouth on any of the kids.
- Do not allow your dog to grab clothes, treat them like one of their toys.
- Do not allow your dog to jump on them, or sit on them when on the couch or bed.
- Do not allow your child to grab your new dog. Pull on the ears. Take his toys away. Go in their crate. Get in their face.

SOME DO'S:

- Do crate your new dog and have the kids play calmly nearby. This will let the dog get used to being in their presence, their voices, their movements, and most important, their "energy".
- Do take your new dog out of the crate, keep him leashed and near you. Allow the kids to play calmly nearby. No interaction.
- Do let your kids join in on the walks. Have them walk calmly with you. No running ahead, no goofing around. Keep them calm and their energy level low.

Slow intros, consistent monitoring, limited petting and teaching both children and dogs to respect each other's space are the tools to pave the way for a healthy relationship between human kids and dogs. It's in your hands ... do it the right way and you set everyone — kids and dogs — up for success.

We have borrowed extensively and freely from the N.I.L.I.F. program from Bad Rap in San Francisco (Nothing In Life Is Free) and from trainers such as Sean O'Shea, Julio Rivera and Tracy Baldwin.