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Settling Your New Canine Family Member **into Your Home**

On behalf of all at Dogs Friends I would like to say thank you for giving a dog a forever loving home, we would also like to wish you lots of happiness on this exciting journey through life together.

Making the decision to re-home a dog can be so rewarding, they may be in rescue for no fault of their own. S/he may come with some emotional issues, this will need your time and understanding to help them settle into your home and fit into society. S/he may feel the need to chew, dogs love to chew as it releases endorphins in the brain to make them feel better if they are stressed or anxious, so provide your new dog with various safe chew items just in case they have the desire to chew on something, this may help save your furniture.

Some dogs which come from a kennelled environment can forget about being clean in the house, so to help them understand again take your new dog into the garden as often as possible, especially after eating, drinking and upon waking, stay with them until they have done their business and give them praise and reward them with a tasty treat, do this every time until s/he has established where the right place is to relieve themselves. Sometimes accidents happen in the home and your new dog may forget, or some puppy farm dogs do not have good bladder or bowel control, this could be due to lack of muscle strength and not being taught where to do their business, if this happens try not to use household disinfectants as these will only mask the smell to us humans, use a biological washing detergent or you can purchase a solution from your vet or pet shop which will break down the enzymes in the urine and will remove the smell to the dog and will help prevent him/her going to toilet in the same place again. Never punish a dog for going to toilet in the wrong place as all this will do is teach him/her to hide their mistakes.

Some dogs may be in rescue due to neglect or cruelty and some behavioural issues may be likely. It is important to remember that s/he has now got the chance of a new life with you and try to help him/her move forward by allowing him/her to enjoy new experiences positively, but it is important not to flood him/her with new experiences in the hope s/he will get over his/her fears more quickly. A rescue dog may show fear of something because of a lack of socialisation from when they were a puppy. Puppy farm dogs are a classic example of this having had little socialisation with humans and other animals, some will only know about being in a small environment of a kennel or crate, so going outside can be a very scary experience. Instead of flooding him/her with lots of new experiences, it is far better to use counter-conditioning and desensitisation and to learn to recognise when s/he is not coping with a situation and remove them so they are able to recover and start to change their state of mind and think again. When a dog is fearful of a stimulus they will freeze, fight or take flight, most puppy farm dogs will either freeze, or if the opportunity arises, they will take flight, so every precaution needs to be put into place to help prevent this happening.

Dogs are experts at reading body language and they have a very quick response in reacting to a stimulus in their environment, it is important to try to learn how to read their body language to interpret their behaviour so you are able to provide a safe, secure family unit for everyone in the household. The psychology of learning and behaviour is the same regardless of which species we are. Dogs learn through studying us, their human parents, also children and other canine family members how to settle into their new home. With all rescue dogs there is a honeymoon period of about six months for him/her to really settle into their new environment, all may seem ok at first then your new dog starts to test the boundaries and their personality starts to unfold. If issues start to arise which concern you do not wait to contact a professional behaviourist/trainer who can help you with these issues as they can become more firmly engrained into the dogs habits if they are not resolved soon.

THE FIRST NIGHT

The first night can be quite scary for some rescue dogs, as they are in a strange environment with different smells and house rules which they may never have had before, provide them with a bed and their own space. Give him/her a chance to relieve themselves before settling them down for the night, decide where you would like him/her to sleep; if there are no other canine members in the household then some rescue dogs have a need to be close to their new human family members, if you are ok with them sleeping in the same room with you this is ok to do so, they will not become 'dominant' and try to take over the household just because you have allowed them to sleep in the same room as you, you are providing them with comfort and security which they may need. Some rescue dogs are happy to settle down by themselves on their new bed in their own space which you have provided for them, do not close the door on them, this will make them feel isolated and anxious, if you would like to restrict their movement when they are unsupervised use a stair gate so they are still able to see into the room but not have the access. If s/he gets up in the night they may need to go to the toilet, so take him/her out to relieve themselves, do not have lots of interaction with them, when s/he has finished give a small treat and go back to bed. S/he will soon start to get used the routine and the need to get up in the night will disappear.

TEACHING THE CHILDREN

The arrival of a new dog into the family can be very exciting for most children; this can be the start of a very loving and rewarding friendship for both the dog and the child. The children need to be educated regarding how to behave around a dog and how to interact with them. Teach them how to give the dog a treat by using the palm of their hand and keeping the treat low so the dog does not jump up to try and snatch the treat which may frighten the child. Show the children how to stroke a dog by going under the chin and throat instead of petting their head. Young children move very quickly with high pitch voices that can be quite loud at times especially when they are excited, some dogs if they are not used to children may find this very scary. Breeds like collies or terriers can become frightened or excited quickly by fast movement. Dogs do not like being hugged all the time and they also need time out in their own space away from the children, so teach the children to leave him/her alone when the dog is in their bed trying to rest and especially when they are eating. Dogs can become tired and irritable just as children can. Never leave the children with a dog unsupervised.

WHY IS A HARNESS BETTER FOR YOUR DOG THAN A COLLAR?

A study in Sweden by behaviourist Anders Hallgren had found that, of the dogs wearing just a collar, 63% had neck and spinal injuries. 78% of these dogs were aggressive or had over activity problems due to neck and spinal injuries. 91% of these dogs that had neck injuries all had at some point been jerked on a collar.

No matter how well behaved a dog is on a lead at some point in your dog's life s/he will get excited and pull against a collar and there will be times when you may need to give a tug on the lead to gain control. If you feel you need more control when walking I would recommend a harness, this will give you more control over his/her body weight and you are changing where and how the signal is given from the lead. A harness will also support the neck, hips, shoulders and spine which will also help the dog feel more relaxed and calmer. This will prevent your dog choking and gives you better control of the dog's body.

DIET

Good dog food manufacturers use only products good enough for human consumption, the nutritional value of these foods remains constant but the ingredients vary. The ingredients are very important especially if you have a dog with a sensitive digestive system.

A dog can have an allergy to things like gluten, e.g. wheat, rye and barley. In fact wheat is the most common allergen affecting millions of humans; the immune system overreacts to the food and treats it as a foreign invader. Food allergies in dogs are becoming more and more recognised and if a dog has a gluten intolerance this can cause itchy skin, vomiting, upset bowels but also behaviour changes. Dogs are primarily carnivores and are not very well equipped to deal with digesting cereal food types. A diet which is high in cereals may lead to lower serotonin levels in the brain, which is a feel good chemical that affects a dog's behaviour.

Advances in the field of nutrition have given us more understanding as to how a well balanced diet is so important to the long-term health of our canines. A balanced diet helps with normal growth and maintains good health once they are mature.

There is much concern over the pet food industry; it is believed that additives in pet food could cause behavioural problems in dogs, in a similar way that additives can affect some children. Some dog owners notice that their hyperactive or aggressive dog calms down in some cases when their diet is changed to a more nutritionally balanced diet.

THE START OF YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE TOGETHER

Dogs can make strong bonds with their own kind, they talk the same language and enjoy the same games together, but they can also have a very strong bond with us humans too especially if they do not live with other canines, they rely on us for play, interaction, exercise, food and to teach them how to behave. Enrolling on some training classes will help you build a relationship; you will learn how your dog thinks and learns. Every dog is different and learns differently, all dogs love to learn new things explore and work things out; you will be given tasks to work on at home together and have lots fun along the way. If you have a multi dog household then you will need to invest time with each dog individually so they learn to bond with you too and not just with each other.

If you start to experience any problems with your new canine family member than seek help early so these problems do not become more ingrained into the dogs habits, which will then become harder to resolve.

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SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Internet:

www.alisongarforth.co.uk
www.dog-games-shop.co.uk
www.dorwest.com

Books:

Unlock Your Dogs Potential: How to Achieve a Calm and Happy Canine by Sarah Fisher (26 Oct 2007)
100 Ways to Solve Your Dog's Problems by Sarah Fisher and Marie Miller (29 Nov 2009)
Reaching the Animal Mind: Clicker Training and What It Teaches Us about All Animals by Karen Pryor (8 Jun 2010)
Don't Shoot the Dog!: The New Art of Teaching and Training by Karen Pryor (Mar 2002)

Quality pet foods:

Applaws www.applaws.co.uk
Naturediet www.naturediet.co.uk
James Wellbeloved www.wellbeloved.com
Burns holistic dog food www.burnspet.co.uk
Fish 4 Dogs www.fish4dogs.com
Bob and lush www.bobandlush.com
Royal Canin www.royalcanin.co.uk
Pro Plan www.purina-proplan.co.uk.co.uk
Specific www-specific-diets.com
Forthglade www.forthglade.com
Canagans www.canagan.co.uk