



Second Chance Hounds

New Owner Guide

Everything you need to welcome your rescue dog home
- from the first ride home to a lifetime of good habits.

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY



The First 48 Hours

The first two days set the tone for your dog's entire transition. Go slow, stay calm, and let your new companion set the pace.

Hour 0-1

The Ride Home

Keep your dog secured with a harness or crate in the back seat. Bring a blanket from the shelter that smells familiar. Stay quiet and reassuring - no loud music or stops at busy places.

Hour 1-2

Arriving Home

Walk your dog around the yard on leash before going inside. Let them sniff and relieve themselves. Enter the house calmly and show them their water bowl and crate right away.

Hour 2-6

Decompression Time

Keep things quiet. Limit visitors - no extended family or friends today. Let your dog explore one or two rooms at their own pace. Offer a small meal and fresh water.

Hour 6-12

First Evening

Establish the bedtime routine early. A short leashed walk, a quiet sit together, then crate time with the door open at first. Place a worn t-shirt in the crate so your scent is nearby.

Hour 12-24

First Full Day

Begin a simple routine: morning potty break, breakfast, short walk, quiet time, potty break, dinner, evening walk. Routine builds trust. Keep walks short (10-15 min) in low-traffic areas.

Hour 24-48

Second Day

Introduce the crate with the door closed for short periods while you are in the room. Begin gentle handling - touch paws, ears, and mouth. Schedule the first vet visit if you have not already.

The 3-3-3 Rule

Rescue dogs typically take 3 days to decompress, 3 weeks to learn your routine, and 3 months to feel fully at home. Patience now pays off for years.



Feeding Schedule

Consistent mealtimes build trust and keep digestion on track. Stick to the same times every day.

DOG SIZE	MEALS PER DAY	CUPS PER MEAL	SUGGESTED TIMES
Small (under 25 lbs)	3 meals	¼ - ½ cup	7:00 AM · 12:30 PM · 5:30 PM
Medium (25-60 lbs)	2 meals	¾ - 1½ cups	7:00 AM · 5:30 PM
Large (60-100 lbs)	2 meals	1½ - 2½ cups	7:00 AM · 5:30 PM
Extra Large (100+ lbs)	2 meals	2½ - 4 cups	6:30 AM · 5:00 PM
Puppies (under 6 mo)	3-4 meals	Per vet guidance	7:00 AM · 12:00 PM · 5:00 PM · 8:00 PM

Feeding Guidelines

- ☐ Use the same high-quality food the shelter was feeding for at least the first two weeks. Transition slowly over 7-10 days if changing brands.
- ☐ Always provide fresh, clean water. Wash bowls daily with warm soapy water.
- ☐ Feed in the crate or a quiet spot to build positive associations and reduce guarding.
- ☐ No table scraps during the first month - rescue dogs have sensitive stomachs.
- ☐ Wait 30 minutes after meals before vigorous exercise to prevent bloat.
- ☐ Measure every meal with a standard measuring cup - guessing leads to weight gain.

Treat Budget

Treats should never exceed 10% of daily calories. Use small pea-sized pieces for training. Healthy options: carrot sticks, green beans, blueberries, and frozen kong fillings.



Crate Training Basics

A crate is your dog's den - a safe space, never a punishment. Done right, crate training gives your dog confidence and gives you peace of mind.

Choosing the Right Crate

Your dog should be able to stand up, turn around, and lie down fully stretched. If adopting a growing puppy, use a divider panel.

- Wire crates: good airflow, visible
- Plastic crates: cozy, den-like feel
- Soft crates: for travel only, not chewers

Where to Place It

Put the crate in a family-area room - not a basement or garage. The living room or bedroom corner works best.

- Away from drafts and direct heat
- Near where the family gathers
- Not near cleaning chemicals or cords

Making It Inviting

Never force your dog inside. Let them discover it on their own terms.

- Soft blanket or bed inside
- Toss in high-value treats randomly
- Feed meals inside the crate
- Leave the door open at first

What to Avoid

Crate training fails when the crate becomes associated with fear or isolation.

- Never use the crate as punishment
- Do not leave a collar on inside
- No long confinement early on
- Do not respond to whining with release

Step-by-Step: First Week of Crate Training

1. **Day 1-2:** Door open always. Toss treats inside, let dog enter and exit freely. Feed meals just inside the door.
2. **Day 3-4:** Place food at the back of the crate. Close the door while eating, open immediately when finished.
3. **Day 5-6:** Close the door for 1-2 minutes after meals while you sit nearby. Gradually increase to 5, then 10 minutes.
4. **Day 7:** Leave the room for 30 seconds, return calmly. Build up to 15-20 minutes with you out of sight.
5. **Week 2:** Begin short crate sessions (20-30 min) while you are home doing other things. Always give a stuffed Kong or chew toy.
6. **Week 3+:** Work toward overnight crating and short absences. Most dogs can handle 2-4 hours comfortably by week three.

Crate Time Guidelines

Puppies under 6 months: maximum 3-4 hours. Adult dogs: maximum 6-8 hours. Never crate a dog longer than they can hold their bladder. If you work full-time, arrange a mid-day dog walker.



Vet Timeline

Stay ahead of your dog's health with a clear schedule. Your rescue may come with partial records - fill in the gaps right away.

Within 7 Days

First Wellness Exam

Bring all shelter records. The vet will check weight, heart, lungs, teeth, and skin. Discuss spay/neuter status, microchip registration, and any visible behavioral concerns.

Week 2-3

Fecal Test & Deworming

Bring a fresh stool sample. Many rescue dogs carry parasites that are treatable with a simple course of dewormer. Follow up with a second dose if prescribed.

Month 1

Vaccine Boosters

Core vaccines (DHPP) may need a booster if the shelter gave only one round. Rabies vaccine is due if not already administered. Discuss Bordetella and Leptospirosis based on lifestyle.

Month 2

Heartworm Test & Prevention

If not tested at the shelter, a heartworm antigen test is essential. Start monthly heartworm preventives immediately - they require a prescription and a negative test first.

Month 3

Dental Assessment

Have the vet grade your dog's dental health. Many rescues arrive with tartar buildup. Schedule a cleaning if needed - dental disease is linked to heart and kidney issues.

Month 6

Six-Month Check-In

Weigh in, discuss behavior progress, and confirm flea/tick prevention is working. This is a good time to discuss neuter/spay if it was not done before adoption.

Annually

Yearly Wellness Exam

Annual physical, vaccine boosters, heartworm test, and weight check. Senior dogs (7+) should visit every 6 months with bloodwork to catch age-related changes early.

Core Vaccine Checklist

☐ Rabies (required by law)

☐ DHPP (Distemper combo)

☐ Bordetella (kennel cough)

☐ Leptospirosis

☐ Canine Influenza

☐ Lyme Disease

Emergency Signs - Call the Vet Immediately

Vomiting or diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours · difficulty breathing · pale gums · sudden lethargy · inability to urinate · ingestion of toxins (chocolate, xylitol, grapes, rodenticide).



House Rules

Decide your rules before your dog comes home. Print this page, fill in the blanks, and stick it on the fridge so everyone in the household is consistent.

1

Furniture: Yes or No?

Decide upfront whether the dog is allowed on the couch or bed. If yes, only with a designated blanket. If no, provide a cozy dog bed at the same level nearby.

2

Feeding Zone

Meals happen in the same spot at the same times. No hand-feeding at the table. Children do not approach the dog during mealtime.

3

Door & Gate Discipline

Dog sits before any door opens - front, back, or car. No bolting. Use a gate to block access to stairs or off-limit rooms until fully trained.

4

Quiet Hours

Establish downtime between 9:00 PM and 7:00 AM. No rough play, no visitors, no training sessions. This teaches your dog to settle and sleep through the night.

5

Chew Toy Rules

Provide 3-4 approved chew toys. Anything on the floor is fair game to a dog - pick up shoes, socks, and remote controls. Redirect chewing to approved items immediately.

6

Guest Protocol

Guests ignore the dog for the first 5 minutes. No excitable greetings at the door. Once the dog is calm, guests may offer a treat with an open palm. Children sit on the floor - never hover over the dog.

7

Bathroom Routine

Take your dog out: first thing in the morning, after every meal, after naps, after play, and right before bed. Praise calmly when they go outside. Never punish accidents - clean with enzymatic cleaner.

8

Leash & Walk Rules

No pulling. If the dog pulls, stop walking until the leash loosens. Always use a 6-foot leash (not retractable) for the first three months. One walker at a time - no chaos from multiple people.

Our Family Promise

We commit to being patient, consistent, and kind. We will use positive reinforcement only - no yelling, no hitting, no shock collars. We understand that our rescue dog is learning a whole new world, and we will meet them with love every single day.

Owner Signature & Date

Household Member & Date