



Welcoming Your Shelter Dog into Their New Home

A step-by-step guide to help adopters integrate a new dog to their home.

Thank you for choosing to adopt! We understand that adopting a new dog can be both exciting and intimidating but don't worry, we're here to help! If you haven't already, we recommend reading our informational handout *Preparing Your Home for a New Dog* before beginning this guide!

You know that life for your newly adopted dog has just taken a turn for the better, but your dog doesn't know that yet. While some dogs move into their new homes and seem to adjust instantly without skipping a beat, others will need your help to show them that their new environment is a safe place and that their new family members are friends they can trust. They may also struggle learning the rules, customs, and schedules of their new life. Remember that whether your dog is immediately comfortable or if he needs a little helping hand, it's ok! This stage is not a reflection on how the rest of your lives will be together, but how you respond can be. This guide will help you transition the dog from shelter dog to loved and adored member of your family!

Things to Remember as Your Dog Adjusts

- **Familiarize yourself with signs of stress in dogs beforehand.** It is important to understand the signals your new dog is giving you so that you can help him appropriately! BARC offers resources for dog body language cues and there are also many resources available online as well.
- **Never reprimand your pet for communicating.** Growling, baring teeth, or even snapping are forms of communicating their boundaries and feelings. Reprimanding them for this will teach them not to communicate with you and may cause them to escalate to a bite instead of a warning in the future.
- **Your dog has been through a trauma.** Though our staff work hard to provide our animals with the lowest stress environment possible, the shelter is still innately stressful. Whether he was surrendered by his owner and used to being well-cared for or if he was rescued from a rough life on the streets, he has suddenly found himself in a foreign place full of new faces, new smells, new sounds, and likely more other dogs than he has ever encountered in his life. When you bring him home, he's now in another new place with new people he doesn't know yet. It is also normal for a shelter dog to sleep much of the time for first few days or so at home as his body catches up! His personality may take some time to shine during this time!
- **Be patient!** Remember that bringing a new dog home will require adjustments for everyone, including your human household residents. Go easy on your pet and yourself as you both adjust! Provide yourself and your pet with plenty of breaks. Move at the pace that best suits you *both* during this time.
- **Keep things optional.** Don't force interactions. While it's tempting to want to smother him in affection, this may overwhelm your new pet. Read his body language and respect his cues if he seems uncomfortable. Consider inviting him to come to you, rather than approaching or cornering him.
- **Keep it positive.** Pair anything you want your dog to have positive feelings about with yummy treats, verbal praise, and rewarding touch. Interrupt any undesired behaviors quickly and calmly by offering a different activity rather than a punishment. He doesn't know yet what's expected of him and reprimands can confuse him or cause him to shut down. Keep voices happy and maintain a light-hearted setting. Keeping treats easily accessible (near the front/back door, the kitchen, and other areas where you will spend time together) so that they are readily available to provide to your pet!
- **Confine your new dog in a safe area when you're not able to supervise him.** Remember that while your home is a safe haven to you, to your new dog, it is a scary new environment full of unknowns. He may look for a way out or exhibit destructive behaviors in an attempt to escape or out of stress, anxiety, or fear when left alone. Make sure all escape routes are blocked, that the fence is secure with no holes, and that the home is "dog-proofed" for safety.





First Days at Home

The first few days are an important time to help set your dog up to become a well-adjusted member of your family! Following these steps can help ensure you are starting off on the right track!

- **Vet Visit** BARC encourages all adopters to take their new pet to a full-service clinic within 72 hours of adoption have your pet receive a thorough first exam as well as to help establish a relationship with your vet! Many veterinary clinics will offer free and discounted first exams, so we recommend researching beforehand to find the clinic that works best for you! BARC offers a low-cost Wellness Clinic and we encourage adopters to take advantage of these services for basic wellness care, however it is still important to establish a relationship with a full-service veterinarian or clinic for your pet's general health needs, illnesses, injuries, etc.
- **Children & Dogs** Children and dogs can be wonderful, lifelong friends; however, it is important to always remember that it is up to us as their guardians to keep their interactions safe. Please read through our informational sheet *Children & Dogs: How to Keep Interactions Safe!*
- **Schedule & Routine** Consistency is important during transitions. Offer your new dog a consistent schedule for feedings, walks, playtime, potty breaks, and training! Remember that while your pet is learning and adjusting to your new home, it is helpful to offer frequent potty breaks to avoid accidents. These potty breaks can be gradually spread out over time as he learns the ropes! You can learn more about house-training your new dog in our informational sheet.
- **Resident Pets** We recommend giving your new pet time to adjust to you, his new home, and his new routine before introducing him to your resident pets, visitors, or your friends & family member's dogs. Check out our informational sheets on *Introducing Your New Dog to Your Existing Dogs* and *Introducing Your Dog to New People* for more helpful tips when the time comes to begin introductions!
- **Safe Space** Providing your new pet a safe, quiet space to retreat to when he feels overwhelmed or tired is helpful in allowing your dog to transition smoothly. You can help establish this space by offering your dog meals, treats, chews, or toys in the space. It is important to be sure that all members of the house understand that when your new dog is enjoying alone time in his space that the space is to be respected and not intruded upon by adults, children, or other pets.
- **Rest & Quiet Time** Your new pet may need some quiet alone time to rest & take in all the new changes in his life. Don't take it personally if your dog needs some space or extra nap time in the beginning!

Following Weeks

These next few weeks are when your pet may really begin to shine! Adopters often say they don't see their dog's true personality until several weeks after adoption, while others may fit in without missing a beat! As your pet begins to acclimate, you can slowly begin to expand your dog's new world! You may consider enrolling your pet in group training classes or gradually introducing your pet to friends or family outside of your home, your resident pets, or activities like visiting the park! Remember to pay careful attention to your dog's body language to watch for clues that it may be too much too fast so that you can adjust to the pace he needs. It is important to maintain the schedule established from the start as consistently as possible to continue this transition process, though the potty-break schedule may be carefully and slowly adjusted to a more realistic schedule.

If you encounter behavior issues you are unfamiliar with, ask your veterinarian for a trainer recommendation. Select a trainer who uses positive-reinforcement techniques to help you and your dog overcome these behavior obstacles and establish a solid relationship with your pet.

For concerns, questions, or adoption updates, please email: BARCadoptions@HoustonTX.gov

Thank you for choosing to adopt! We hope it results in many happy years with your new family member!





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We are BARC. We care deeply about animals.

