



BUILDING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR NEW DOG

by

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What an exciting time! You're taking home a new canine companion to join your family! You want to set things off on the right paw, but there are so many things to think about and to plan. Well, to that end, here is a quick guide to the key skills to build in your dog to assure a wonderful life together...

AN ENRICHED LIFE

Exercise

Whatever the weather, young medium- to large-breed dogs need an average of two hours of exercise a day, and 30 minutes of that time needs to be aerobic in nature. Dogs fit beautifully in the human lifestyle because they are crepuscular, meaning that they are typically their most active in the morning and the evening. So the ideal routine for the average dog is an hour of exercise in the morning before you go to work, including some aerobic activity; then a dog walker for a bit of a break half way through the day; and an hour of exercise at night.



What are some ways of providing aerobic activity? Perhaps going for a jog/run together, playing fetch in the yard (preferably uphill so that your dog is working even a little harder), or dog play for the dog-friendly dog.

Note: Some effort and attention will need to be spent during these early days getting your new dog acclimated to the crate for those spans of time when he is resting throughout the day.

Mental Stimulation

We all require both physical exercise *and* mental stimulation in order to live a well-balanced life, and dogs are no exception. Feeding meals and snacks out of puzzle toys like the Kong provide a great outlet for mental energy (see the WoofGang handout "*Kongs Fit for a King*"). Training is another great way to make a dog work mentally. Dog sports like nosework and games like "go find it" can offer great mental gymnastics of the olfactory variety and can be fun for dog and human alike!



Quality Time and Play

Quality time spent together is so essential in building a deep and bonded relationship, and play is an important part of that. Especially in these early days and weeks, the things you do together will have lasting impact on your connectedness.

Training is the foundation to any mutually respectful, loving relationship, and play is the cement to that foundation. When playing, make sure to establish games with rules, with your dog dropping the toy when cued to and not rudely grabbing the toy before it's offered. For dogs with arousal issues, make sure to interleave play with calm behaviors (*sit* or *down*) so that he doesn't get too riled up. Leave a leash dragging if you think that he might get out of control so that you can put him in a time-out if necessary.

Finally, shared quiet time, with massage and petting can be wonderful for both giver and receiver!



CRATING

The crate is an essential tool for easing your dog's adjustment to a new home.

- 🐾 It helps with housetraining.
- 🐾 It keeps him safe from chewing or destroying things he's not allowed to have.
- 🐾 It gives him a private space to call his own, away from the kids and visitors.
- 🐾 It is the perfect space to enforce aloneness training.
- 🐾 It can be used to gradually introduce him to other family pets.
- 🐾 It is a great home away from home when traveling.



Of course, you want your dog to *love* his crate, not have to spend time cooped up in a place that he hates. So it's essential in these first days together that you immediately teach him that good things happen in the crate and that it's a great place for some quiet alone time. Please see WoofGang's crate-training handout for tips.

ALONENESS

Dogs need to learn to tolerate time alone right from the start. As exciting as it is to bring home your new dog and as tempted as you might be to spend every waking moment with him in these first days, ***don't!*** In a few short days, something will call you away and your dog will be left alone and, if he hasn't been prepared to do this happily, it may be a rude awakening for him.

Right from day one, and every day thereafter, design and keep a routine that includes exercise, togetherness, *and* alone time. The crate is the best place for him to spend his alone

time, stocked with a stuffed puzzle toy and other toy distractions. Make sure that he gets plenty of exercise prior to his quiet time so that he is ready for a nap, because even a dog who doesn't have separation issues per se can just get bored and destructive if he's still raring to go!

DAILY ROUTINE

Your day together with your new dog should consist of the following repeated pattern: coming out of the crate after a rest, going immediately outside for a potty break and some exercise, coming back inside and going back into the crate with a stuffed meal/snack Kong for a little rest, only to start the pattern all over again. In the beginning, there will be many repetitions, short in length, but gradually your dog should be able to tolerate longer spans resting in the crate so that the pattern is only repeated a few times over the course of the day.

BUILDING TRUST AROUND RESOURCES

Many breeds of dogs have a propensity to guard their resources. If you think about it, humans guard our resources, too, putting locks on our doors!

Often guarding will diminish as a dog builds trust in his family, as it is a relationship-based behavior. So, when first bringing a dog home, be careful around food, chewies, toys and stolen objects. Feed in the crate so that your dog is buttoned up at meal time as you build a trusting relationship together. While he's eating, toss tasty treats as you pass the crate so that your dog is learning that your proximity means good things! Teach your dog the cue "drop it!" and that sharing toys with you is advantageous, because tasty treats result and then the toy is returned – it's a win-win!

Finally, take note of any warning behaviors when resources are present – body stiffness, stillness or freezing, hunkering over something, eye whites. Such warnings are important indications of your dog's discomfort with your presence near that object. Make sure not to yell or punish this warning behavior because then you may cause him to escalate to a growl or even a bite. Instead, consider these warnings as homework assignments of things you and your dog still need to build trust around. WoofGang would be happy to help you work on this.

REDUCING AROUSAL → BUILDING IMPULSE CONTROL

Many dogs, especially young adolescents, may be jumpy and mouthy, even humpy, when they interact with people, especially in play, because no one took the time early on to train them more polite behavior and more appropriate play skills.

Exercise, mental stimulation and impulse control training are the best ways of teaching a dog how to interact with people more appropriately. A tired dog really *is* a good dog! Physical exercise will blow off some steam; stuffed puzzle toys (like the Kong) will give your dog a way of burning mental energy, which is also exhausting in its own way; and training impulse control can teach a dog alternate polite



behaviors to get the things he wants in life. For dog-friendly dogs, dog play can be a great way of blowing off steam and also reducing mouthiness. Also remember to play games with rules (WoofGang handout available upon request) and always use toys in play.

MEETING NEW PEOPLE

These first days and weeks are a big adjustment for your new dog, so keep things low-key. Now's not the time to have a party to introduce your new canine family member to all your closest friends! Instead, concentrate on your own relationship with each other first and do some training, particularly impulse control exercises, so that he learns polite behaviors that he can draw on as he starts to meet more people.

Teach your dog how to be a polite citizen in every situation and that polite behavior, like sitting quietly at your side when meeting new people, results in tasty treats, and potentially even treats from the stranger!



In the process, you may notice that your dog shows a little shyness around certain people, like men in uniforms or children on bikes. Direct interaction with these people should *not* be attempted. Instead *you* should be feeding the treats while your dog is offering polite behavior. Remember, dogs do not need to love everyone nor do they need to be petted by everyone – the important thing is that they can be polite and calm in everyone's presence.

Kids

In the home, there need to be rules so that everyone will enjoy a safe, peaceful coexistence.

- 🐾 You should *never* leave your dog alone with young children, no matter how much you trust your kid-loving dog. Accidents can happen in the blink of an eye.
- 🐾 Your dog should have a designated safe place, like a crate or private room. Children should understand that when the dog goes to this spot, he should be left alone.
- 🐾 Young kids should be respectful of dogs and what they're expressing through body language; educate your child about dog body language and stress signals.
- 🐾 Teach your child how to pet a dog gently. He should not pinch or pull on ears or tails, nor should he grab fistfuls of fur. If you know that your child tends to be rough, teach him on a stuffed dog first before introducing him to a real dog.
- 🐾 Teach your child to wake the sleeping dog by talking to him before touching him. Startling him out of a deep sleep could result in his being defensive.
- 🐾 As dogs age, they become less tolerant and more prone to pain- or startle-induced reactions. Have frequent vet appointments to make sure that your dog is healthy and pain-free.

MEETING OTHER ANIMALS

Other Dogs

This is a time of great adjustment so don't throw too much at your new dog at once. While on walks take note of your dog's behavior when seeing other dogs at a distance. Does he look social, interested, aroused, uncertain, frustrated, avoidant, ...? Start using treats to redirect his attention back to you so that he's less intent on the other dog and gradually pass at closer distances. Then you can start seeing how he is in closer proximity to different types of dogs – high energy dogs, low-key dogs, small ones, large ones, dogs of different coat colors and breeds. Make play dates with friends' dogs, spending time parallel walking and see if the two dogs can get gradually closer and how he looks when they do. Don't rush this – take the time to investigate what types of dogs make him the most comfortable.

Note: Going to the dog park is *not* a good idea at all. That is inviting a pack of dogs who you know nothing about to interact with your new dog, who you know little about. It's just asking for trouble.

Another Note: For a very dog-friendly dog, the comradery of other dogs may help him adjust to walks in the new neighborhood. So if you notice that your dog becomes looser and more animated at the sight of other dogs on walks, enlist their aid by taking walks together.

Housemate Dogs

"Howdy Do!"

Initial introductions are so important in starting the relationship out right. Having several short interactions is a good way of acquainting the dogs. Always do these on neutral territory. Walk the dogs past one another or take them on parallel walks to see if they look playful and interested in one another. Allow a polite head-to-tail sniff between them, fostering greater familiarity while still avoiding any direct eye contact. Given all this goes swimmingly, allow for some playful interaction, keeping leashes on but *slack*. Any tension in the leashes can thwart natural movement and thus increase the likelihood of defensive behavior. Still, the leash will allow you to easily separate the two dogs should things go south.

When entering your home, take the newcomer in first to avoid territorial behavior from the resident dog. Keep leashes on but dragging for these early moments.

Avoid fights at all costs, as a fight early on can diminish the likelihood of success. Be aware that aroused play, when allowed to continue for too long, can spiral into a fight. Dogs will often take short breaks from play, giving themselves a chance for a breather. If they are not doing it voluntarily, you must step in and impose a short break every few minutes. Call each dog away or go get him; then ask for a "sit" or "down" for 30 seconds before releasing them back to play.

Life Together

As successful an arranged marriage as it may be, make sure that some of their day includes private time away from each other, especially at the start. Introducing the new dog to a crate can help achieve this. Also make sure that each dog gets time alone with you, time in which you can work on some training as well as share affection.

Training is the best way to assert yourself as leader. So, as important as training is with a single dog, it is absolutely critical in a multi-dog household.

Inter-dog status is not important to all dogs, so establishing hierarchy between dogs is often not necessary. In fact, supporting status can sometimes do more harm than good, as it can result in bullying behavior. It is better to impress upon each dog the importance of polite behavior to gain his life rewards (treats, toys, walks, attention, etc). And since doorways and narrow passages can provoke friction, having well-trained dogs can help establish orderliness in these situations.

Pay attention to the dogs' behavior around resources such as toys and food. Be aware if one of the dogs stiffens, shows his eye whites, or lifts a lip when the other dog gets near him with the prized possession. Until each dog has had some training so that you can assert some obedience control, separate them for feeding and remove any resources that might cause fights. Possessions such as rawhides may prove too valuable; either the dogs will have to live without them or they should only have them when they're apart.

Cats

You should anticipate that your new dog will be *on-leash* in the company of the cat for the foreseeable future, perhaps months, until you are absolutely certain of his behavior. Some dogs are fine at the sight of cats until they run or streak by and then that elicits a predatory response, so you will have to be very careful to watch your dog's behavior in every situation around the cat before allowing closer interactions.

With your dog on-leash and your cat at a safe distance, train the dog to lie quietly beside you, rewarding with high value treats. With practice, this will teach your dog to exercise polite, controlled behavior in the presence of the cat.

HANDLING

Some dogs are sensitive to particular types of handling, such as collar grabs or when a part of their body is touched, like their paws or tail. Even dogs who are fairly tolerant to handling can benefit from associating collar grabs and body touches with tasty treats. Sometimes handling sensitivities may subside as they build a relationship with their people but they may still have these sensitivities when at the vet or groomer. It may be prudent to muzzle your dog in these circumstances and so it is advisable to desensitize him to the use of the muzzle.

PUPPIES

Taking home a new puppy may *seem* like you won't need to worry about a dog having a potential history of issues because you're starting with a blank book. But it's actually even more of a challenge to be a good puppy parent, precisely *because* you're starting with a blank book! You are the one who needs to fill this tome with page after page of good experiences – with people, with animals, with new experiences, with bite inhibition, with aloneness tolerance, and the list goes on. The lessons you miss now will become more pronounced as your dog reaches social maturity, at around 18 months or so, and then it will be too late. Because, instead of writing fresh new pages, you will be overlaying an already written book.

So training at this tender age is crucial, and training by positive humane techniques is the only acceptable approach. WoofGang offers a private 4-session puppy package (for puppies under 4 months) that covers socialization, housetraining, crate-training, resource guarding prevention, chew training and bite inhibition training, restraint and handling, aloneness training, and then basic cue training.

TRAINING

Training is the language that binds. It provides a shared vocabulary of behaviors and skills so that you can communicate your needs to your dog without causing him frustration or confusion. It is also a great way to build relationship, especially in these early weeks and months together. A well-trained dog can accompany you more places and will be invited to join more activities precisely because of his exemplary behavior. And training sessions will be fun for the family members at both ends of the leash!

WoofGang offers private sessions in relationship training as well as behavior modification for problem behaviors. Please contact us at laura@mywoofgang.com or (646) 345-5116 for more information.

