



Sussex Brighton and East Grinstead Branch

Registered Charity No. 206630

SETTLING IN YOUR RESCUE DOG

Deciding to rescue a dog can be a very exciting and rewarding experience, but it is important that you prepare yourself for an animal who likely has past trauma and so may take a while to settle with you. Past trauma can also come with behaviours that the dog has developed as a way of coping, but that may be seen as a problem behaviour by their new guardian. Of course, not all rescue dogs have behaviour issues, but most rescue dogs have found themselves in a situation where they have lost their home and everything they knew and then must process a whole new life whilst grieving the old one. For this reason, it is important to set them up for success and to help them as much as possible to settle and realise they are safe. Below are some ways that you can do this.

SETTLING TIME

It can take a rescue dog a few months to decompress and start to settle into a new environment. Of course, for some dogs this may be much shorter, but for others, this can be much longer. During this settling period, or for at least the first couple of weeks, keep their world small and predictable and slowly open it up at the dog's pace. They will likely be very overwhelmed by his complete change in environment and circumstances, so it is important to not add any further anxieties into the situation. Avoid taking them to too many new places, introducing them to too many new people or animals and avoid busier locations at first. Open their world slowly and whilst monitoring them to make sure they are coping with any new additions into their world.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Although it can be tempting to organise a family and friends welcome party on the day you bring your dog home, the advice would be to put meeting too many new people on hold to give the dog a chance to find their feet and stagger introductions, as crowds of people can be overwhelming and sometimes frightening for dogs.

ROUTINE

Create a routine that you can follow as closely as possible to make sure the dog's needs are being met. Not having needs met can cause or exasperate problem behaviours. Having a routine is very good for dogs who are in a new environment and/or who have anxiety issues as it gives them something to rely on. A routine doesn't need to be followed exactly to be effective. Dogs don't have a sense of the time activities happen; it's more a case of the order activities happen in. The routine should include enough of the following based on age and breed type:

- Food
- Sleep
- Play
- Exercise
- Enrichment
- Training

WALKING EQUIPMENT

Dogs should ideally be walked in a comfortable and secure harness and regular lead or long training line. We would recommend a Perfect fit harness: www.perfect-fit-dog-harness.com. These harnesses are designed to not lay on any pressure points, to not require over handling to put on and to be comfortable to wear, which will help the dog's comfort levels and confidence. The use of aversive equipment with our dogs is not permitted, unless it is assessed that there is a valid reason

to do so. This includes head collars, haltis, check collars and slip lead that are used for the purpose of stopping a dog pulling on the lead (and the obvious ones, such as prong and e-collars) etc, as they work by causing pain and discomfort, which will only heighten the dog's negative emotional state and can be a welfare concern. It is very important not to let your dog off lead when you first bring them home, unless you are in private and secure locations and until the dog knows you and a reliable recall has been trained. We also do not recommend flexi leads as they can break or cause injury, or a chain lead, as these cause safety concerns.

GOING OFF LEAD

It is important not to let your dog off lead for a while when you first bring them home. This is because they do not know you yet and so will be less likely to stay close and you do not know them yet and how they will respond. Unless you are sure of your dog's recall, do not let them off for safety reasons. For some dogs, it is not appropriate for them ever to go off lead in public spaces, due to fear issues or other natural dog behaviours such as a high prey drive. For dogs undergoing recall training or those that it is not safe to let off lead, we would recommend the use of a long training line to safely give them more space on walks. You can also look into the hiring of a private and secure dog field for off lead walks and recall training.

FEEDING AND OTHER RESOURCES

If you decide to change the food your new dog is eating from what they were given at the shelter, do this slowly. A sudden change in diet can cause an upset stomach, and providing what they ate at the shelter for a while, may also provide some familiarity and help them settle. It is also important to have all their vital resources in a similar location at first, such as their food, water, and bed. This is because they will likely have been spending some time living in a kennel, where they have all their resources right there and so may be a bit worried if they can't find them in a bigger space when you first bring them home.

ENRICHMENT

Enrichment is vital for all dogs, not just rescue dogs. Enrichment provides appropriate outlets for natural dog behaviours and encourages activities that burn energy in a positive way. It also teaches problem solving, encourages solo play and releases calming and feel-good hormones. Enrichment is particularly important when you are settling in a rescue dog, as it can prevent excess energy spilling over into anxious energy and enjoyable activities can help build positive associations with locations, people, animals, and situations. Enrichment items and activities can be purchased, or even homemade. Some examples of enrichment items and activities can include, kongs, licki mats, puzzle feeders, and more.

CALMING AGENTS

Calming agents can work alongside a good routine, management, and rehabilitation plan, to help a dog settle and relax into their new environment. Natural calming agents, that are easily available at pet stores and online include pet remedy, adaptil, or skullcap and valerian tablets to name a few.

TRAINING AND BEHAVIOUR HELP

If there are any specific training and behaviour help that you require for your dog, please head to the advice section of our website, where there are training and advice guides on a lot of common behaviour issues, as well as advice on how to seek further professional help should you need it.

www.rspca-brighton.org.uk