



# WOMEN'S ANIMAL CENTER

America's First Animal Shelter

## Transitioning to a Dog Lifestyle

You are about to get a dog. Integrating him into your life is very much a pay-now-collect-later endeavor. The more work you put in up front – expectation-setting, effort, time and training – the easier it'll be the next fifteen years. Here's a primer to get you started.

### Expectations: All that Biology

We live in an uber-technological age. Dogs are, by contrast, very biological. Even the best dog on the planet urinates several times a day, defecates at least a couple, regurgitates food or bile on carpets occasionally, tracks in dirt on his paws, may roll in dead stuff and will, unless a non-shedding type, shed up a storm on our furniture and clothing. Dogs also learn at dog speed, greet us in dog-speak, i.e. jumping up and licking, and have daily dog agendas, which include chewing, barking, sniffing, playing when we want to watch TV and pulling on leash to visit other dogs so they can spit all over each other. For most of us, this is small price and part of the fascination of inter-species cohabitation. But if you're not ready, the shock from a pristine, controlled household to one with a dog can be rude.

### House Prep and Gear Checklist

- Crate and ex-pen
- Comfy beds
- Food and stainless steel dishes
- Chew toys, including stuffables such as Kongs, and consumables such as bully sticks
- Fetch and tug toys, such as balls and rope toys
- Collar, leash and ID tag
- Small treats for training rewards
- Brush, comb, nail trimmers, toothbrush

### Houstraining Refresher

Your new dog will hang out in either a crate or confined area for at least the first few weeks, especially when you're not present, to avoid houstraining and chewing mistakes. Even a perfectly houstrained adult may be bewildered by the transition away from his previous situation so don't give him a chance to screw up: crate him unless you have witnessed both potty functions within the last half-hour, in which case he can be in his dog-proofed room for an hour or two, with chew toys (see below). For the first few days, be present when he eliminates (which means accompanying him even if you have a yard), so you can throw him

a little party. Praise, patting and a few small treats from your pocket will let him know he has done a glorious thing as well as make that same glorious thing more likely in future.

### **Confinement is Key**

Dog-proof a room by scrutinizing it and removing any potentially chew-able items. Furniture, leather goods, books, power cords and rugs are all viewed through the canine lens as chew objects. Don't let him rehearse even once the chewing of your possessions. Confine him with his chew toys and you virtually guarantee a chew toy habit. If you can't fully dog-proof a room, get an ex-pen, which is a play-pen for dogs. There will be plenty of time later on to loosen up your confinement regime once he proves himself reliable. You'll know he's ready for more freedom when he consistently eliminates as soon as he's brought to the doggie toilet area, it's been weeks since you've had any accidents and he consistently seeks out and chews his own toys.

### **First Days: Alone Training**

You and your family will be understandably fascinated by the new addition and you may adopt a dog before a weekend in order to help the newcomer settle in. This is a great idea, provided the dog isn't given continuous attention. If a precedent is set that you never go away and leave him alone, it'll be a rude shock when normal routine resumes. So, come and go a lot for brief periods – anything from a few minutes to half an hour - right from the get-go so that the dog learns that departures predict arrivals. Another crafty move is to tire him out before the first absence of two or more hours. And always leave blow-softening chew toys or Kong un-stuffing "projects" to help him pass his time.

### **Exercise Regime**

A tired dog is a good dog, and a happy dog. Investing in daily hard physical exercise is right up there with training for achieving a successful adoption. Power-walking is okay but running is better, and a twenty-minute game of fetch or a half-hour trip to a dog park better still. If you have more money than time, professional dog walkers are plentiful in most urban or populated suburban areas. Day-care is another option; even a day or two a week can provide significant exercise and mental stimulation.

### **Training**

Supervise the new kid so you can interrupt any impure thoughts about, say, chewing or peeing. Your timing is vital: any after the fact punishments are not only useless but abusive. Much better to catch him on the way to naughtiness, interrupt him and re-direct him to goodness. For example, you see him sniffing the TV remote. Say, "uh-uh, hey, where's your bone? Let's go find it!" Then help him track down his own toy and hold it for him while he chews and you praise. Enroll in a training class. Even if you've got experience, the sophistication (and fun level) of dog training improves by the year, plus your dog will get practice being obedient around the distractions of people and other dogs. The instructor can also help you troubleshoot any issues you're having. Steer clear of trainers who still use metal collars (choke and prong collars). Find one who uses food and praise to motivate, not force.