

Adopting a New Dog? Here Are Tips for a Smooth Transition

Below are suggestions on how to bring a new dog into your life to make sure that the transition is the best it can be for the dog and any other pets you may have in your home.



By Kelley Bollen

- **Housetraining:** Before you bring your new dog into your home, take him for a walk so that he is “empty.” Then keep the dog on a leash when you go into the house for the first time. Walk him around on a leash so that he gets to know the house and doesn’t have the opportunity to run into another room to eliminate. It’s important to supervise your new dog for the first week or so because the only time you can reprimand a dog for eliminating in the house is if you catch him in the act. If you catch the dog starting to eliminate say “ET-ET” sharply and then take him outside to finish. Make sure you take your dog outside regularly to eliminate and praise and give a treat for outdoor elimination. It can help to establish a routine such as first thing in the morning, right before bed, and 30 minutes after mealtime.

- **Safeguard against separation anxiety:** Dogs bond quickly to their new owners – a quality we love, but that may lead to separation issues if you spend 24/7 with your new dog the first few days/weeks and then suddenly go back to work. To help your dog adjust to your schedule, make sure that you leave her alone for bits of time starting on the very first day you bring her home. When you leave, turn on the radio and give the dog a food-filled Kong or hollow bone or hide treats around the house to keep her busy while you are gone. This will also help form a positive association with your departure. Also, don’t make a big deal about leaving and greet your dog calmly when you get home.

- **Introduction to resident cat(s):** Make sure that your new dog never has the opportunity to chase your cat because the dog will learn that chasing the cat is fun and the cat will learn that the dog is unsafe. Bring the dog into the house on leash and keep him leashed for the first few days whenever he is in the same room with the cat. Reward your dog with treats when he can look at the cat calmly. When you aren’t able to supervise and control the dog, keep him behind a baby gate. Even when your new dog and cat seem fine together, you should make sure that your cat always has an escape route to get away from your dog if needed. A baby gate in a doorway that your cat can jump over or run under to escape the dog works well.

- **Introduction to resident dog(s):** You should introduce your new dog to your resident dogs in a neutral place where they won’t feel territorial. Take them for a walk in a park and then in the neighborhood before bringing them home together. After the walk, take them into your yard and let them wander around together (still on leash). When they seem OK together, you can take the leashes off and let them play. Then leash them back up before you bring them into the house and walk them around the house together. If all looks OK, you can let them off leash. Supervise the dogs well for the first week as they learn to share the house and other resources.



Bringing a new dog into your life is exciting and, with a little effort in the beginning, you can ensure a wonderful lasting relationship with your new canine family member.

Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC is a Certified Animal Behavior Consultant with a master's degree in Animal Behavior who has worked in the field of companion animal behavior for 20 years. As a shelter behavior specialist, Kelley consults with animal shelters in the design and implementation of comprehensive behavior programs to address the behavioral health of the shelter animals.

