



Preparing to Foster

Setting Up Your Space

You want to make sure you are providing your foster dog a safe, quiet space to decompress from his/her time in the shelter and in transit. You will be provided a crate, bed/blanket(s), food, leash, collar with an ID tag, and harness if needed. If you feel you need anything else, don't hesitate to ask!

- **Crate:** Set up the crate in a separate room or in a quieter area where the foster dog can be given space away from the resident dog(s) and other pets.
- **Feeding:** Plan to feed your foster dog separately from your resident dog(s). You may feed your foster dog in his/her crate or in a separate room.
- **Mindset:** Understand that fostering won't always be easy. With patience, consistency, and love, you will make great progress! We are here to support you every step of the way, so don't be afraid to ask for guidance.
- **Energy:** Be aware of the energy you are exhibiting. The dog is aware and is already responding based on your energy; either you mirror the dog's energy or s/he mirrors yours. As a leader, you need to have the dog mirroring your calm and balanced energy.
 - Try to avoid getting frustrated or angry when something doesn't go as planned with your foster dog (which it inevitably will!). Take a deep breath, and back up a step or two in the process.
 - The more you can break down a goal into incremental steps, the more success you can achieve and celebrate!

Decompression

- **Definition:** After the stress of changing environments, dogs need a "decompression" period to help them return to a calm, relaxed, SAFE state of mind.
- **Rationale:** Bringing a dog into your home may be happy and exciting for you, but it can be confusing and scary for the dog. Showering the dog with affection and "fun" new experiences may make you feel good, but this isn't about you. This is about what is best for the dog. Decompression is a safe and effective way for your foster dog to take in the sights, sounds, and smells of their new environment without being directly involved with it. It gives structure to the dog and prevents them from making poor choices while they are learning the rules and expectations.

- Procedure: For at least 2 weeks, your foster dog's life should be incredibly simple and boring while they decompress and acclimate in your home.
 - Have a daily routine planned out prior to the dog coming home. From bathroom breaks to crate time, to short walks in quiet boring places.
 - Dogs find comfort in routine more than they do belly rubs and cuddles. For that reason, keep the affection to a minimum. Their "love language" is actually confident leadership versus being pet.
 - Remember that "you get what you pet," so whatever state of mind the dog is in, you reinforce that when giving affection. Only give affection when the dog is displaying calm behavior, and they will learn to be calm more often. Keep petting and other forms of affection to 5 seconds or less at a time - don't overdo it.

Things to avoid during the decompression period:

- Introducing your foster dog to new people outside of your immediate family - It is important for your foster dog to build a strong relationship with you before introducing new people. The more new things we present to the foster dog at once, the greater the chance s/he will become overwhelmed and make a poor choice such as jumping, lunging, mouthing, biting, etc.
- Introducing your foster dog to your resident dog(s) or other dog(s), whether or not you know the dog(s) personally - As above, it is important for your foster dog to build a strong relationship with you before introducing new animals.
- Allowing lots of excitement, play time, or rough-housing - This type of behavior often leads to overstimulation on the part of the dog, and can lead to a bite incident. Many dogs have not been taught how to play nicely, so it will be up to you (eventually) to teach gentle behavior at a low level of excitement. This should happen after the decompression period, in small doses, cutting the play time short if the energy level begins to escalate.
- Allowing "free time" for the foster dog, either in the home or outside the home - The more freedom we allow the foster dog, the greater likelihood of a poor choice. They do not know what they should and should not do in this new environment, so we need to limit their ability to test those boundaries. The more we practice structured, calm behavior, the more this becomes "the new normal" for the dog. A leash is our best tool to guide them!
- Lots of petting and touching of the foster dog - While petting can be fun for us, it can be stressful for the dog. Many dogs do not want to be touched right away, and this can add to the discomfort of being in a new home if we insist on it. We can also inadvertently reinforce unwanted states of mind such as anxiety, a lack of confidence, or fear. Remember to model calm behavior for your foster dog at all times.
- Baby talk/ high-pitched voice - Don't do it! This is incredibly exciting and rewarding for most dogs, and we as humans tend to overdo it. This can quickly lead to overexcitement. Even when providing verbal praise, keep your voice calm, gentle, and even toned.

- Going outside of your neighborhood - Choose a quiet route for walks that works for you and stick to it. Do not introduce parks, hikes, or other new environments during the decompression period.

Things to focus on during the decompression period:

- Crate training - The crate is a positive place. Think of it like the dog's bedroom. During the decompression period, the dog will spend a lot of time in the crate. It is important to associate positivity with the crate. Even while the dog is out of the crate, leave the crate door open. Toss treats in the crate for your dog to retrieve and they will start to associate the crate with good things. Never physically push your dog into a crate, because it will create negative association. Instead, encourage the dog with positive things like calm praise and treats. If needed, use the leash to guide the dog into the crate using steady leash pressure. Make sure to release the leash pressure when the dog begins moving into the crate. Repeat pressure and release as needed until the dog is in the crate.
- Leash work - Keep your foster dog on leash at all times, including inside the home. This allows you to easily redirect the dog and teach them what is and is not acceptable behavior. For example, you can guide them down from jumping on furniture safely without having to grab their collar, which could be a potential trigger. Either hold the leash, tether the dog to a heavy piece of furniture, or eventually allow the dog to drag the leash around loosely without holding it.
- Your foster dog's body language - It is very common for foster dogs to become stressed out and behave differently in the first few days and weeks of being in a new home. It's important to minimize their stress level by keeping their energy calm, maintaining routine, and being aware if you are noticing any anxious, fearful, aggressive, etc. body language. This is a clear sign that you need to slow down, identify the stressor(s), and try to minimize or eliminate the stressor for the foster dog. See the body language charts below - we want calm, relaxed, neutral body language as much as possible!
- Taking things slowly - Don't rush the decompression process. Be patient and plan for everything to take twice as long as you think it will - this gives you plenty of time to wait for the behavior you want out of your foster dog and reinforce it accordingly.

Trigger Stacking
















Dogs get stressed with changes - some cause more stress than others. In a normal situation, dogs may experience one "trigger" or stressor at a time and be able to react appropriately to it.

- Part of the reason decompression is so important is that it helps avoid "trigger stacking" for the foster dog.
- A dog coming out of the shelter is experiencing A LOT of changes all at once, which can lead to them becoming overwhelmed with stress.

- Dogs will choose fight or flight - either of these responses can lead to a dangerous situation for both dog(s) and humans.
- Introduce changes slowly to set your foster dog up for success - this includes introducing new people, animals, and environments.

Reading Canine Body Language: T-E-M-P.

(with Tickle the Pit Bull) Tail, Ears & Eyes, Mouth, Posture

				
Relaxed (down)	Relaxed	Submissive / Happy Im Not A Threat	Happy	Ready To Play
				
Submissive Deferential	Please Leave Me Alone	Anxious Stressed	Terrified	Fearful Ready To Fight
				
Alert	Wary / Unsure Suspicious	Staking	Defensive Territorial	Angry Ready To Fight

3-3-3 Rule: While each dog will adjust and adapt at his or her own pace, it's important to allow time for transitions to occur. See the infographic for more information on what to expect during the first days, weeks, and months of bringing a foster dog into your home.

The 3 Days, 3 Weeks, 3 Month Rule of Adopting a Rescue Dog

The 3-3-3 rule is a general guideline, every dog is unique and will adjust differently. Give your dog space and allow him to go at his own pace.

3D



In the first 3 days,

- Feeling overwhelmed
- May be scared and unsure of what is going on
- Not comfortable enough to be "himself"
- May not want to eat or drink
- Shut down and want to curl up in his crate or hide under a table
- Testing the boundaries

3W



After 3 weeks,

- Starting to settle in
- Feeling more comfortable
- Realizing this could possibly be his forever home
- Figured out his environment
- Getting into a routine
- Lets his guard down and may start showing his true personality
- Behavior issues may start showing up

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3M



After 3 months,

- Finally completely comfortable in his home.
- Building trust and a true bond
- Gained a complete sense of security with his new family
- Set in a routine


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