

# Adopting a Shelter Dog

## A Roadmap to Unconditional Love

Shelters are a more affordable and compassionate way to get a pet dog. For every dog that is adopted, space and resources are freed up for another dog.

Shelters have dogs of all ages - from puppies to seniors; single-breed and mixed-breed dogs.

Each dog is an individual. You can't always know a dog's breed ancestry based solely on how that dog looks.



There are few things in life as rewarding as opening your home and heart to a shelter dog. Dogs in shelters have experienced loss, abandonment, sometimes trauma. Sadly, many shelter dogs in the US do not find forever homes, and up to one out of five dogs adopted from shelters get returned, often within the first ten days.

All shelter dogs have the potential to become wonderful family members. But the process takes TIME, UNDERSTANDING, and adequate SUPPORT during the transition period.

***Here is a roadmap to guide you on your journey.***

## BEFORE you Adopt

### Be SURE before you commit

Learn about dog behavior and breed-related tendencies.

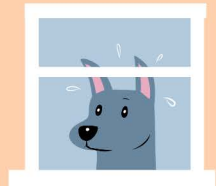
Read books backed by up to date science, talk to long-time dog owners, volunteer at a shelter, visit a dog park, watch a training class, foster a dog for a while....



### Be realistic about TIME constraints

If you work long hours or have a busy life, this may not be the best time.

A puppy needs as much guidance as a small child. All dogs need more commitment especially in the first few months.



### Define your DEAL-BREAKERS

Don't sacrifice your own well-being or the well-being of your family.

Specifying what you can't live with will help avoid impulse adoptions, and help narrow your search to dogs that have a good chance of thriving in your world!



### Consider your WHOLE FAMILY (PETS included!)

Ask the shelter staff for as much information as possible and try to meet the dog more than once.

NOTE: You cannot know a dog's true personality in a stressful shelter environment. They may blossom into a very different dog in your home.



# AFTER you Adopt

## Take time off to spend with your dog

### ASK

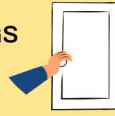
What does my new dog need to feel **SAFE** and **SECURE** here?



## Imagine this dog as a small child

How can I proof my home? e.g.,

PUT THINGS AWAY



offer lots of CHEW TOYS



SECURE the TRASH



use GATES, WINDOW COVERINGS, etc



## Give the gift of QUIET

Shelter dogs are usually exhausted and need a lot of sleep in the first week.



zzzz  
**NO**  
GUESTS  
BIG OUTINGS  
NOISY PROJECTS

## Create a SECURE ZONE

Teach your dog to enjoy this area by feeding meals, providing special treats and toys and a cozy bed for napping. *\*Don't leave them cold turkey here.*



## Establish ROUTINES

Be as **CONSISTENT** as you can with feeding times, frequent potty breaks, cozy bedtime rituals, etc, to help your dog work through transitional stress.



## Be COMPASSIONATE

Treat your new dog with the same consideration you would show to a friend going through a stressful event.



## CELEBRATE every success!

Be observant and wear rose-colored glasses! Anytime you see your dog do anything you like, *give them something they like!* Do this as often as you can.



## Instead of CORRECTING...

Whenever your new dog does something you don't like, think of this as a **LEARNING OPPORTUNITY** for both of you.

What does my dog need?  
How can I give them other ways of meeting those needs?



## Find reasons to fall in love with your dog EVERYDAY!



TAKE LOTS OF PHOTOS!  
SHARE ON SOCIALS!  
PLAY WITH YOUR DOG!  
Make a list of fun activities you can both enjoy together!

## BE PATIENT. Give it time.

Many shelter dogs do not show their true selves and do not fully settle in for at least 3 months to a year. Emotional highs and lows are normal. Be patient with yourself.

If you need support, reach out to family and friends, seek out professionals with compassionate, reward-based approaches to teaching or behavior change.

*Dogs who feel safe and happy are wonderful givers of unconditional love. Dogs deserve unconditional love from us too.*