



Tips for success when bringing home your foster dog

Bringing home a dog to foster can be really exciting, especially since he will do so much better in your home than in the shelter while getting ready for adoption. In addition to the Foster Care Manual expectations, here are a few tips to help the transition go as smooth as possible:

Building trust

As with any new animal in your home, it will take time to build the trust and relationship between you and the foster dog. This is not only trust for comfort and safety from you for the dog; it is also about trust when it comes to your home and reducing the possibility of destruction.

- **All foster dogs should be crated or confined** when you are not home, and also at night, until you feel comfortable with that animal and trust that they will not cause harm to your home or other animals if left out unattended. It is ok to need to crate your foster dog when you are unable to supervise him during the tenure of your foster period. Some dogs are unable to earn that privilege due to curiosity and poor choices. Additionally, being crate trained is often a desirable trait that potential adopters look for so this is a good opportunity for him to learn! If he is having trouble adjusting to being in a crate, contact the Foster Care Team for further guidance.
- **Backyard time should be supervised.** There is no better way to learn if your foster dog is an all-star fence jumper or digger than to put him in your backyard as soon as you get him home and walk away for a few short moments. The first few outdoor potty breaks should be on leash and then continued to be supervised until you feel comfortable and confident that he will not escape. If the dog has a history of escaping or is quite fearful, leash walks only while in the yard may be required.

Help to instill good habits

It's so easy to have an "anything goes" policy with your foster dog as you may feel sad for him due to his previous life experience. However, we do not want to create habits that adopters do not desire. While it's hard to predict what his future adopter would like or dislike, we can at least not start any bad habits. Resist feeding your foster dog table scraps, avoid rewarding jumping up on people, require him to sleep in his crate instead of your bed.

Keeping the peace with your current pets

It is important to note that dogs are pack animals and this holds true even in domestic dogs. This pack has a hierarchy and you are a part of that structure, whether you want to be or not. New dogs in the home disrupt the pack order. Your resident pet may excitedly welcome your new temporary houseguest while others will shun you for even thinking this was a good idea. Regardless of where your personal pets fall on the spectrum, let us be sure that we are doing all we can to make this a harmonious experience.

- **Allow time to decompress:** Shelter life is hard and stressful; so is going into a new home with new people, new smells, new animals. Your foster dog may need some time to decompress from the chaotic shelter environment. One way to do this is to put the dog in a crate in a quiet space or spare room with little to no interactions for the first 24 hours. As much as the humans and furry members of the family want to interact, it could become stimulation overload. Give the pup some space and time to relax. He will likely take a VERY long and peaceful nap! You have the freedom to gage the dog's interest in

interacting with the rest of the home upon arrival. Perhaps they may not need solitarily confined time to decompress but would prefer to observe from a crate from afar or from other room through a baby gate. Remember to take cues from the dog and his comfort level.

- **Introduce dogs on neutral territory:** This will allow for the dogs to meet one another without anyone feeling that they need to be protective of space or property (your backyard is their property). Go for a walk with the dogs together so they can get acquainted with one another. Ensure that interactions are supervised until you feel comfortable that your resident dog and foster dog are getting along well.
- **Establish boundaries:** Rules and structure are not only a good way to help your foster dog learn the routine and expectations of your home, but it also helps to reduce any issues amongst the foster dog and your resident pets.
 - **Eliminate special treatment:** Your foster dog should be on the bottom of the totem pole in comparison to your personal pets. Putting the foster dog on a pedestal can lead to behavior issues within your own dogs. For at least the first week, the foster dog should be the last one to be fed, the last one to go outside, the last one to be greeted or pet. This may sound harsh or cruel, but it helps to reiterate the pack order in your home for the foster dog. Remember, your dog was here first. If you allow your pets to be on the furniture, your foster dog should not get that privilege initially. Allow for a safe place for your dogs to be away from the foster dog if need be.
 - **Sharing should not be required:** It is not uncommon for resident dogs to become possessive over their belongings with a new pet around. Do not punish your dog if he does not want to share his toys, kennel, or favorite human – he should not be expected to. You would not want a stranger to get cozy in your bed the first time you meet without your permission, right? Ensure that the foster dog has his own set of items that belong to him. Set boundaries in regard to crates: no swapping or invading unless the resident dog is ok with it. Consider feeding dogs in separate spaces to avoid any food possession concerns.
 - **Forcing interactions is a bad idea:** If neither the foster dog nor resident dog have any interest in interacting with one another, do not force it to happen. Just like us, dogs should have the choice on the types of interactions they have with other animals. Forcing this to happen can cause fighting or other behavior issues in either dog. This also goes for your resident cats. He should not be required to interact with a foster dog nor should the foster dog be permitted to invade his space. Be sure that your cat has a safe place to go that is a foster-dog-free zone.
 - **Fights and scuffles may happen:** It is natural for dogs to get into small tiffs or scuffles, especially as they work to establish their pack order. However, escalating into a full-blown fight is another story and your observation skills are key. Take note of whether there were objects involved such as toys, food, or a bed. Is there guarding happening over one or more of these items? Is there guarding over a human? This information is critical to pass along to the Foster Care Team for notation in the dog's file.
 - **Pregnant/nursing foster dogs NEED SPACE:** This cannot be stressed enough, especially once the puppies are born. The responsibility is on you to keep mom's stress levels down and reduce any instances where she may feel the need to protect her babies. Refer to the Foster Care Manual for more details.

Children should not be relied on for total care nor should they be left unsupervised with the foster dog. Adults must monitor for safety reasons.