

Bringing Your Foster Dog Home

Congratulations on fostering a new family member! Giving a dog a second chance in life is a wonderful and rewarding experience, and we applaud you for choosing to foster a dog from RSPCA Victoria.

This information aims to help you make the entry of your new foster dog into your life and your home as easy as possible.

What to Expect

Depending on the circumstances in which a dog finds themselves at an RSPCA Victoria animal care centre, we may not know a lot about your foster dog's history. We will share with you what we do know about your foster dog during their time at an RSPCA Victoria animal care centre and what information a previous owner may have provided, as well as our assessment of the dog's behaviour and adjustment to shelter life whilst in the care of RSPCA Victoria.

During your foster placement, you will discover many things about your new foster dog – what his likes and dislikes are, what he thrives on and what he fears. You will learn how well socialised your dog is, and what his level of training is. Be patient with your foster dog and yourself on this journey.

Be aware that a foster dog's behaviour in a shelter can often be quite different from a home environment. Spending a longer time in a shelter (two months plus) can significantly influence a dog's behaviour.

The following guide will help you through this time with your foster dog.

Preparing Your Home Before Your Foster Dog's Arrival

It's important to take some time to prepare for your foster dog's arrival. To make the transition from shelter to home as easy as possible, it is important to provide your foster dog with as much structure as possible and be clear about certain things before your foster dog arrives.

Tempting as it is to give your foster dog the run of the house right away, that's too much freedom too soon. Instead:

- Ensure the foster dog has a safe room where it will sleep, eat, drink, is mostly free of furniture and can remain as it gets gradually used to your home. Places such as a laundry room, bathroom or a spare room make a good safe room for your foster dog.
- Ensure the safe room has a bed or crate with something soft to sleep on, a water bowl, food bowl, several toys and a toileting area that's separate to their sleeping area.
- Use baby gates or doors to close off areas that your foster dog isn't allowed until after they've settled in. This prevents chewing accidents, house-training accidents and teaches your foster dog to relax while alone. Don't worry that this is too strict or in any way mean. Dogs are den animals who enjoy close quarters.
- Make sure your fencing is secure. Some dogs are natural born Houdini's, and others are strong enough to break through unstable fencing.
- Ensure the person whose name is on the Foster Agreement Form is responsible for the dog's care and wellbeing while in foster. Whilst other family members are encouraged to participate and interact with the dog, only the person named on the Foster Agreement Form is legally responsible for the foster dog.

- Safety proof your house: put loose cables away, store household cleaners and medication out of reach; remove plants, rugs and breakables etc. Move anything to you don't want your foster dog to get hold of out of the way.

The Day You Collect Your Foster Dog

- Ideally, plan to bring your dog home at a time when you can spend a few days at home. This will help with settling as well as giving you a chance to supervise your foster dog as he learns the house rules. Maybe choose a long weekend or take a week off work.
- Think about how to transport your dog home – consider bringing someone else along to drive the car while you comfort your foster dog. Put your foster dog in a harness or a crate to keep it safe and restrain it so it can settle. If you are on your own, bring a nice chew treat to help your foster dog enjoy the drive.
- When you get the dog in your car, let him sniff first and get familiar with this new area before you take off.
- It's important not to give your foster dog the run of the house – or make it the centre of attention - right away.
- Before taking the dog into your house, take him for a walk for around 30-40 minutes. This will not only burn off some energy, it will also give you time to bond and the opportunity to establish a line of communication. Reward and talk to your foster dog as you walk.
- Ideally you want to make sure your foster dog goes to the toilet before you get back home. It should help to avoid immediate accidents once you get home.
- Introduce your foster dog to your home on a leash.
- Ensure you follow the feeding schedule as outlined on the Foster Agreement Form.

Entering Your House

- When you bring your foster dog into your house for the first time, keep him on the leash while you show him around, both inside and outside. Let him sniff and take things slowly, at his own pace. Keeping your dog on leash will provide guidance and helps you to intervene before any accidents happen.
- Show your dog where the places for water and food are and have a tiny bit of food in the bowl.
- After a stroll inside his new home, take your foster dog outside to the toilet. After all these new sights and smells, your foster dog may have to go to the toilet. Reward your dog when he urinates outside.
- If you have other pets at home, make sure the introduction is done safely and respectfully for all animals. Refer to the **Dogs and Puppies Foster Care Handbook** for more information.
- Moving is stressful for humans and dogs: Wait a couple of days until your dog has settled in before inviting strangers over. Also, safely and slowly introduce children to the foster dog, so you don't overwhelm it. The greeting should be calm and without a lot of excitement.

Important Tips for the First Few Days

- Ensure your foster dog is limited to one room or area of your house. This will help to ensure your foster dog doesn't get overwhelmed and learns where it can go to eat, sleep and have time out from the family.
- Before putting your foster dog to bed for the night, take it to the toilet then put it in its crate or safe room.
- If your foster dog begins to howl, whine or bark, wait for him to be quiet for at least 10 seconds before you respond. Otherwise, he learns that whining or barking summons you, and he'll bark or cry for longer periods of time.

- Accept that house training accidents may happen. Even if your foster dog may have been house trained before, being in the shelter may have taught the dog something else. Be prepared and expect accidents.
- Don't leave your new foster dog alone with your existing pets. You will need to monitor and control their interactions for some time before leaving them alone. Refer to the **Dogs and Puppies Foster Care Handbook** for more information.
- Be patient and forgiving if things don't go the way you expect. Your foster dog may not be socialised to certain things and may fear them. Your foster dog may also not be taught something, or commands he has learnt may be different to the ones you use.
- Establish a routine and start your schedule of feeding, play times, training, toileting, walks etc from the first day. Dogs like it when they are given structure. Its best is to start reward-based training with your foster dog right from the start – training is a fun way to bond and establish a line of communication.

Leaving for the First Time

Just as you can't spend the first 48 hours nonstop with your foster dog and expect it to be fine when you leave, you can't launch into eight-hour absences from the moment you bring your foster dog home. At a minimum, you need to build up to longer absences gradually (especially for foster dogs who have known separation anxiety issues).

- Give your foster dog some vigorous exercise before leaving alone.
- Arrange for your dog to get a bathroom break within two to three hours of being left alone for at least the first month.
- Provide plenty of puzzles and toys when left alone.
- Before leaving the house or moving to another part of the house where you can no longer see the foster dog, ensure that your foster dog is secured in the safe room.
- Vary the length of your absences, from 30 seconds to 20 minutes and repeat them throughout the day. If your foster dog seems comfortable, then gradually increase the amount of time you're away.

The Next Few Weeks

- People often find that the first few weeks are like a honeymoon period where you get to know each other. Your foster dog's true personality may not show itself until later. Make sure you provide as much structure as possible during this time, follow the schedule you've established and adhere to the requirements outlined on the Foster Agreement Form so your foster dog knows what you expect from him and what he can expect from you.
- If you come across any behavioural issues you are not familiar with, didn't expect or are having trouble dealing with, seek help from the Foster Care Network Team (who can also put you in touch with an RSPCA Victoria behaviourist).

For a Happy and Well-Behaved Dog

Exercise and Training – a good exercise program means a healthier and better-behaved dog. Tired dogs bark less, chew less, sleep more and rest easier if left home alone.

Mental Stimulation – when it comes to boredom, dogs are a lot like children. Unless you give them something fun to do, they will make their own fun. To dogs that often means unwanted chewing or destruction. Instead, give

your foster dog acceptable outlets for their mental energy by providing toys, puzzles or chews to stimulate their mind.

Practice Positive Reinforcement

- Training your foster dog through positive reinforcement means using your dog's natural motivations to teach him which behaviours you like and which you don't. You can use anything your dog wants: praise, toys, treats, a belly rub, a leash walk or a thrown ball.
- Reward behaviours you like to make them happen more often.
- Ignore behaviours you don't like to make them happen less often.
- Make training a game so your foster dog relaxes and learns faster. Fear blocks learning.
- **Never use physical punishment.** It comes with serious side effects like aggression, fear and erosion of the trust between you and your foster dog and goes against the training methods endorsed by RSPCA Victoria.

Unwanted Behaviours

Using positive reinforcement methods doesn't mean you never say "no" to your dog. You just say it in a way he understands instead of using human language. Either:

- Ignore the behaviour (don't reinforce or inadvertently reward unwanted behaviour).
- Avoid the situation (restrict your foster dog's access to a place, person or object).
- Redirect your foster dog to an alternative behaviour and reward those (eg. sitting instead of jumping up).

Foundation Behaviours

Training your foster dog is great for exercise, learning and enjoyment and gives your foster dog skills and improved behaviour that may assist in finding a permanent home. The following five behaviours form a great foundation:

- Come when called (recall)
- Sit
- Down
- Stay
- Focus

Teaching your foster dog these behaviours will make life easier for you and your foster dog and can be taught reasonably quickly. Refer to the **Dog Behaviour Handbook** for more information on dog training.

Source: <https://bowwowinsurance.com.au/pet-community/pet-rescue/your-guide-to-bringing-a-rescue-dog-home/>

Source: <https://www.sfspca.org/sites/default/files/documents/sfspca-dog-adoption-handbook.pdf>

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