



Whether you are bringing home your first dog, adding a new pack member, or have been a long time dog owner, there are a few things you need to keep in mind, from a trainer's point of view. We want you to be here now and always. This is just a starting point – you are now on a journey with your dog – we're here to help every step of the way. [Follow-us on Facebook!](#) ~Dana Brigman

## New Adopters:

You and Fido are about to embark on many first experiences. For him, it's those first few days at his new home, and figuring out who the heck you are and why you took him from his foster family. He may experience his first ever Christmas or terrifying 4<sup>th</sup> of July. He may experience his first overnight boarding in the first year with you, the first time having to share his home with little kids and their friends, or visiting Aunt Sally and her crazy dog! It just might be overwhelming – but if you do a little skillful planning and learn to communicate effectively with Fido – you will have a wonderful life with your new companion.

There is more to transitioning your dog into your home than buying a new bed, some dog food, and opening the front door saying "Welcome home!"

## Getting Started

- **Breed Selection**

By now, you should have done your homework on the breed of dog you have chosen. Remember, adorable, was not criteria 😊 If you haven't done so already, do a little research and figure out your breed's purpose in life. Understand their needs – exercise, grooming, medical, general temperament, etc.

Even if you have had this breed in your home before and even though there are common breed characteristics – each dog is unique. They are NOT the same dog and may be significantly affected by their genetics, their environment, and their past.



- ## Puppies

Puppies are special. Everything about this is “under development” and they are in very formative periods. The things we do during their first year of life sets the tone for well-balanced adult dogs. It is essential to give them good nutrition, medical care and training.

If your puppy is a rescue and was spayed/neutered at a very young age, removed from his litter early, without his mom for the first 7 weeks, etc – there are some things you’re going to have to do to address his developmental needs.

Ask us about our Puppy Programs. A free written Puppy Guide targeted at the first 8 weeks to 6 months of puppy development is included with any Puppy Program.

- ## Rescue Dogs

In the rescue world, genetics may be affected by poor breeding from unskilled backyard breeders. Their developmental needs may not have been met with proper socialization during early development or it may be affected by abuse or abandonment.

The benefit of working with a foster-based rescue program is that you will take home your furry friend with a high-level awareness of where they are in the process of training and some of their quirks and characteristics.

- ## From the Breeder

Not all breeders are created equal. There are far too many people with irresponsible breeding practices and oops litters. But a good reputable breeding is doing a number of things to ensure you’re getting a quality pup. They monitor genetics, avoiding breeding health, structural or temperament issues etc. They are feeding high quality food, keeping the litter to about 9 weeks of age, and discussing success with you. They will take a dog back if there are problems!

If your breeder is preventing you from seeing the parents, suggesting you take your dog at 5 weeks, feeding crap food, has not started any basic training, will not discuss health and temperament of the parents and others in the litter, etc – you need to question if this is going to be the right dog for your family or goals.

Breeds have a variety of unique needs for fulfillment – exercise, scent games, agility, herding instincts, etc. The more you embrace your dog’s breed – the happier he (and you) will be.

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# Getting Settled

- **Transitions**

It is important that you understand dogs will, on average, go through 3 transition periods. They generally occur around 3 days, 3 weeks and 3 months. Some happy-go-lucky dogs will go with the flow and fit in seamlessly with no issue at all. Others will have more of a struggle and be potentially more frustrating for you. You cannot make a mistake by taking things slower than you think is necessary.

- **Feeding**

Go ahead – look up your food on <http://www.dogfoodadvisor.com> and make sure you are feeding a high quality food. Food matters in your dog’s health and well-being – and behavior. Feed the best you can afford.

Meal time is one of the best opportunities you have to engage your dog in a meaningful way. This is one of the best times to leverage your leadership, require your dog to earn his meal, and to modify his behavior in a positive way.

Build Confidence through feeding protocols -- Crate Training, Socialization, New Skills, Overcoming fear & anxiety, etc. *(Read More on our Blog)*

Unless your dog is a puppy under 4-6 months old or has a medical issue – you should only feed your dog twice per day. Free-feeding or leaving the bowl down filled with food all day should be avoided. Give your dog 15-20 minutes to eat the meal, and the food bowl goes away, eaten or not! This builds structure and leadership by making the dog realize not only does the food come from you, but it must be eaten within a reasonable time frame. You will find your dog has a greater respect for you knowing you are in control of when and how much they eat (remember- earning your dog’s trust and respect is the foundation of a successful and obedience based relationship)

If you have multiple dogs in your home, feed each dog separately and with direct supervision to avoid any attempts to “share” out of the same bowl. You can even feed in their crate – especially if you’re working on crate training.

Once you give the dog their bowl – it’s theirs. Don’t try to take it away. If you’re trying to work on resource guarding – feed in very small portions, requiring a sit before each portion. But once you give the bowl – it’s theirs!

Take food bowls up after feeding to avoid any conflict between multiple dogs.

Consider food dispensing toys for additional mental stimulation and to slow down a quick eater, or to create more relaxation in their crate. Or, Feed the chickens! That literally is



just scattering the food across your back patio or yard. It sounds ridiculous, but your dog will love the foraging! It engages his nose and makes him work for dinner rather than inhaling an unearned meal in about 4 seconds.

- **Leashes & Collars**

Just say “No” to flexi-leads. **Period.** Despite the assumption that it gives them some freedom on the leash because of its retractable features, they are not good for walking and can be dangerous. You don’t want to leave your dog’s safety up to the plastic lock button. Work on teaching your dog leash manners and work on your own leash handling skills. Once you both master the walk, your recall, and your dog’s greeting skills, you’ll be able to progress to a longer leash or even off-leash walking!

Every home should have a good slip lead for quick access and 1-size fits all use. These are great for getting control of your dog when he comes out of the crate, looping him while he’s on the couch and should not be, etc.

For walks and training – Invest in a good leather leash. Avoid the dainty ¼ inch leashes – they will not feel good in your hands even with a dainty pooch. Your dog isn’t going to be “carrying” the weight of the leash, you will. Avoid the nylon leashes with a high powered puller. Leashes are more about your grip, comfort and ability to control the dog than does it match his collar.

Avoid “flat” or plastic snap clip collars. The clips break under stress or even from just daily use and time. The collars seldom stay appropriately sized and most are worn way to big.

Invest in an appropriately sized martingale for everyday use. It will offer you an added level of security by reducing the possibility of breakage and of slipping over your dog’s head under stress. It also gives you a reasonable amount of correction when needed.

If you are adopting a little dog prone to neck and back injury (Like a Dachshund) or one who is brachycephalic (Pugs, Boston Terriers or even Boxers) a harness may be more appropriate for these breeds. If your breed is NOT a brachycephalic one, harnesses do nothing but make it easier for your dog to pull by sitting on the strongest most comfortable place on your dog (sled dogs wear harnesses for a reason).

- **Access to Your Furniture**

In your first few weeks, avoid bringing Fido on the sofa or bed. I don’t care how cute he is or how hard his life may have been prior to being with you. It’s always easier to allow them up at a later time, than it is to train them to break that habit after the fact.

There are no rules that say your dog can’t or shouldn’t be allowed on the furniture. It’s really a personal choice, **AFTER you know that you have established rules in the home**



**that your dog follows, that there are no resource guarding issues, and you are respected as the parent.**

If your dog does jump up on the furniture and you want him “OFF” – avoid reaching for the collar early on in your relationship. It can often be a trigger for dogs who are afraid or guarding to snap. Instead, lure them off with a treat tossed across the room. Isn’t that rewarding bad behavior? No, not if you associate the treat with “OFF!” and reward the “OFF!” and a good sit. It keeps everyone safer until relationships are formed. Then, have this dog wear a drag line or leash in the house until such time as he has better manners and follows commands.

- **Socialization**

It’s critically important to socialize your dog properly. Socializing puppies is quite different than socializing older dogs. You want little puppies under 4 months old to greet lots of people.

But we advise waiting a couple of weeks before you have visitors over, start greeting people or other dogs directly on your walks, or at retailers.

You need to first learn to communicate with your dog, understand his/her behaviors and possible triggers, and for the dog to learn to trust you. Other people are not always as well versed in dog language as you are going to be! Other dogs are not always as “friendly” as their owner claims they are, and **until you can read your dog’s body language**, you may not be ready for face to face greeting or petting from strangers.

Many dogs will never find it favorable to be petted by strangers and many will never like being rushed up to by another dog or child so be prepared to educate potential greeters.

**Review Training Graphics on our Facebook Page Albums**

- **Supervision**

This is not negotiable! **Unsupervised incidents that occur can only be blamed on you – not the dog!**

1. If you have children in your home, it is your responsibility to keep eyes on the dog as they interact and play with the kids. Teach your children proper ways to interact with the dog and to **respect their space**.
  - a. **Children should never be allowed “in” the dog’s crate – no matter how cute you think it is.**
  - b. **Teach your children proper ways to interact with the dog, especially around food, when he’s sleeping, etc.** See our [FB page albums](#) for K9s and K9s training graphics.
2. If your dog is house training, you must supervise to prevent sneaking off to secret potty spots. Download our **House Training Guide** [from the website](#).



3. If your dog is teething or otherwise not reliable in the house -- protect your furniture and your shoes by supervising and redirecting attention to things he can chew.
4. Outdoor safety is critical! It is advisable to supervise your dog outside at all time, even in your fenced in yard. Holes can be discovered or created, while climbers and jumpers can be intrigued by what's on the other side.
  - a. We recommend leash walking every dog that is new to your home for the first several days, even in your fence to identify behaviors or problems.
  - b. This leash work also sets the tone for "following" you!
  - c. You may find that the dog is a fence jumper, digger, has no recall, is afraid to come to you, etc. A leash helps you address all of these issues from day 1.
5. Secure doorways so that your dog can't bolt through them when kids and visitors are coming in and out.
  - a. It's important to practice threshold work in your training to create respect for exiting doors with manners. This is also a safety protocol.
6. If you are taking your dog outside in areas that are not fenced in - -be sure you keep him/her on a good collar and leash at all times! Dogs can scoot out of sight in a split second and find themselves in danger. Young dogs especially will go through a flight period between 4-8 months of age where anything can scare them. Other dogs may have a very high prey drive. And others may simply spook easily. It is critical to not risk putting them in harm's way during this time. Keep them on leash!
  - a. Many owners will desire on off-leash training – but this takes quite some time, a significant level of obedience, trust and a reliable recall. It should be practiced in highly distracting locations with safety measures (long-lines, enclosures, etc) in place before trying it – even at home for the first time.

- **House Training –**

Perhaps one of the most frustrating issues new pet owners experience. But one that the pet owner is 100% responsible for success. Keys to success include **crate training, scheduling, effective clean-up and supervision.**

**Detailed Guide Available On Our Website**

- **Crate Training**

Until dogs are reliably house-trained and mature enough not to eat the couch, the best place for them is in the crate when you are not supervising or playing with them directly. This includes while you're in the shower or on a conference call that can't be interrupted.



Get started on training right away. The crate should be like their little bedroom and a very enjoyable space.

And for the first few days crate them even while you are home. A common issue many people make is only crating the dog when they leave the house – this can contribute to or escalate anxiety issues.

I typically do not leave dogs unattended in my house until they are about a year old. And the first time, is really just for a short while. Don't test the waters with a 9 hour work day.

**Detailed Guide Available On Our Website**

- **Pack Integrations**

Bringing in a new dog to your already established pack (even if it's only 1 dog) can bring unexpected challenges. You want them to be friends, but you need to setup the scenario for success. Take things slow! Really slow and control the integration with some very specific considerations.

**Detailed Guide Available On Our Blog**

## Leadership and Expectations:

Notice we have not even begun talking about training yet! Well, we have actually, because every single interaction you have with your dog is training him in some way. They are very associative to patterns and routines. They learn things you might not realize you are teaching!

Figure out ahead of time what the rules of the house will be. It's important that everyone in the family follow those same rules. The dog will be confused if dad lets him get away with behaviors mom doesn't.

Consistency is essential! Use consistent commands, consistent hand signals and consistent rules.

Setting the tone for being a leader doesn't mean you're becoming dominate or alpha. It simply means the dog learns to respect you, take his direction from you when instructions are given, and learns to live successfully in the home with training, nurturing, and appropriate discipline when the rules are not followed.

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Discipline doesn't mean yelling, frustration, or painful harm to the dog. It is communication and instruction about what to do instead of the bad behavior and how to be successful. It requires teaching, patience, and consistency.

## Praise and Reward

Go ahead and get yourself a treat pouch and start using it for basic training with your dog. You can easily move to randomized food rewards once skills are being learned to make sure you are training the dog to work for the treat.

**Always praise and/or reward the behaviors you want your dog to repeat.** Verbal praise is important! It should be enthusiastic and reinforce for your dog that you like his behavior. Don't overdo it! Adding too much energy and excitement to the equation can create over excitement from your dog and potentially lead him to break a command. So really work on finding the right level of reinforcement for your dog.

Where bad behaviors are present – you are going to need to address them in some way. Set the tone early for expectations and house rules. If there are concerns with your dog's behavior seek professional help immediately.

## Exercise, Stimulation and Play

**Your dog is going to need all 3.** Some dogs will need far more than others. And dogs like Aussies, Shepherds or Doxies may all need a job that feels a lot like play and exercise to stimulate their breed traits. Nose work games, agility games, or even just a good game of fetch can be fun for you both, but give him the outlets he needs for his energy and his instincts.

Get to know your dog and use his/her breed to your advantage for having fun and preventing behavioral problems.

## Skills

5 core skills will create a foundation of skills that can carry your dog successfully through life and keep you really happy with his behavior. They don't have to become competition level obedience champions – but basic manners will make everyone happier. Here are the ones to focus on first

- **Sit Stay** -- it's not a trick, it's a requirement. This is one is great in everyday life – but there becomes a point in life when you want your dog to drop into a sit on command no matter where he is relative to you. Imagine him being across a busy street and you don't want him to come to you – you need him to be able to wait until you get to him. Read this doc on how to achieve it.



- **Walking Nicely On the Leash** -- don't let your dog drag you down the street. Walks should be nice and leisurely, as well as safe for both of you. A poorly managed dog on leash can not only create nasty looks from your neighbors, but it can also be dangerous. I've seen people fall down or the dog charging up on strangers or creating negative responses from other dogs. Get this issue in check right away.
- **Come When Called** – this is an essential life skill that you must achieve with your dog under great distraction. This one could be a life-saver. It should be a 1 for 1 delivery of reward for every performance of the command. Make yourself worth coming to and more interesting/fun/enjoyable than everything else in your dog's world. Remember to never use the recall command for things your dog finds unpleasant like nail trims, baths, taking medication ect. You want your dog to think it's always going to be a positive experience to come to you when called.
- **Place!** – A fan favorite that can be used when the doorbell rings, while your making dinner, when you're at the local café, etc. Start practicing today!
- **Focus Skills** -- Leave it / Watch Me / Target/Touch – these skills are easy things for very young puppies to start learning. But they can be essential for an adult dog who is easily distracted by squirrels or other dogs. Focus can help you overcome many issues with impulse control, barking, whining, or breaking commands.

Visit our YouTube Channel for a How-To Series on basic obedience skills.

## Common Behavioral Problems

Jumping, mouthing, and chewing behaviors are especially common in young puppies. But they can also be present in more mature dogs who have never been taught otherwise. These issues are not difficult to resolve, but owners often become frustrated and even worried about the severity of these behaviors.

You do need to resolve them ASAP. Start with some basic guidance (Read doc), but if you are unable to resolve in a few days, ask for help from a trainer consultation & demonstration. Many times these are solved in a single lesson – assuming you continue with consistency!

## More Serious Issues

A key benefit of adopting a dog from a foster program means that you will typically know about any issues your dog may have experienced while in the foster home. But you should know, it's possible that issues may arise in the future. The right leadership in your home can prevent or curtail issues before they begin – but its possible serious issues may arise.



If you begin to experience any of the following issues – **please contact a professional trainer for assistance.**

- **Resource Guarding** – dogs that have had to fight for food to stay alive, who have recently discovered the benefits of a warm lap, or who may not have been well socialized around other dogs may develop guarding issues. These issues are not to be taken lightly, and they will not get better on their own. Dogs who guard can, and often will, bite if they feel threatened. Avoiding the problem may lead to escalation of the problem. The good news is typically great improvement can be made with skillful training techniques.
- **Growling** – if your dog is growling about something he is warning you. He's trying to say he is uncomfortable about something. Punishing the growl may be a mistake. It is important to understand the root of the issue and address it through training. The last thing you want is a dog that suppresses his growl for fear of punishment and moves directly to biting. Get immediate training support to evaluate and develop a plan to resolve.
- **Snapping / Biting** – a bite is a bite, even if it doesn't break the skin. If a dog really wants to bite – they will. So even an air bite counts on the scale of bites as a warning. If not addressed it could escalate much further. Do not wait and see – get immediate help if your dog is snapping or biting. No dog should feel it is acceptable to make contact with you with an open mouth. EVER.
- **Aggression** – Generally speaking, you won't be adopting an aggressive dog from a local rescue group, without full disclosure of issues. Most dogs with aggression issues will have received training before adoption. If you're pulling directly from the shelter or from other sources – you never know what dog you'll bring home. And it may take a few weeks for the behaviors to show up. If there is a history of aggression it's essential you stick with the management of precautions and training. NOTE: If a new aggressive behavior presents itself, it is essential to get help immediately. Aggression does not get better on its own and will escalate if left unchecked.
- **Fear** - fearful dogs can respond in different ways. They can withdraw and retreat or they may growl, snarl and even bite when pushed too far. In either case, they are hoping desperately that you will leave them alone. If you don't they can escalate their fearful response to keep you away. They don't want to have an altercation with you – but they will if they feel cornered or threatened. You must identify the root of the fear and work on ways to counter-condition their response.
- **Phobias** – You can't predict what will spook your dog and his/her fears may not be rational at all. There are many techniques to help dogs overcome their phobia or at least improve. It's very important that you don't just flood them with the presence of the "scary thing" or force them through anything. You could make matters worse. Seek help to create a prescriptive plan.
- **Separation Anxiety** -- This issue is often misdiagnosed and people often contribute to anxiety without even realizing it. If you suspect your dog has separation anxiety, or they are doing



anything that is severely destructive in their crate/home, escaping, profuse drooling and/or panting, or self-mutilating, get help right away. See our Blog for More info

## Your Year of Firsts

- **Boarding** – Boarding dogs for the first time can present unexpected behavior. Especially for dogs with anxiety, fears, or history in the shelter. Give things a trial run before you go on vacation – Read the Doc....
- **Visiting Relatives** -- Arrival of Aunt Suzy with her two adorable children and dog can make Fido really stressed out. It's important to keep everyone safe and supervised at all times. See document "Kids and the Tolerant Dog at the Holidays" [on our blog](#)
- **Fireworks** -- More dogs are lost on July 4<sup>th</sup> than any of day of the year. Fireworks can scare dogs. Keep them safe and inside. If you must go out – keep them leashed and supervised at all times. Don't forget your microchip! New Year's Eve is another firework event to consider!
- **Road Trip** -- Be sure our dogs are microchipped and wearing tags that help people find you should he get loose! Be sure your dog is wearing a martingale collar he cannot slip out of. Have a slip lead with you at all times. Consider safety devices or tethers that keep your dog in the car when you open the doors so he can't bolt past you.
- **New Baby?** -- start long before the arrival of the baby help Fido prepare for his new role as a fur-sibling. With a bit of preparation things will go so much smoother.
- **Moving** -- new behaviors might surface in a new environment that have never been present before. Be aware and sensitive to this, practicing similar exercises that you did when you first brought Fido home might be necessary.

## Responsible Dog Ownership

Our job as parents of the furry little creatures is to keep them safe and to keep others around us safe. Every dog has the potential to be a dog and bite. Your supervision is not negotiable. Training should be considered as a requirement for every dog – no matter their size, age, personality or breed. There are fundamental things we must teach and hold accountable.

Manage the environment when necessary. Walk away from scary strangers or dogs running up to your dog too quickly. If visitors make your dog uncomfortable, remove him from the room. If kids are visiting and your dog isn't kid friendly – consider boarding him during their visit. Don't take these precautions lightly and don't let your guard down. Don't ever assume it can't happen or that your dog would never do that. It only takes 1 mistake to have a serious incident.

Train Your Dog and Supervise them at all times around children, strangers, new environments, etc.



Keep your dog current on his veterinary needs and medical checkups. Medical issues can have a direct effect on your dog's behavior and certainly on his quality of life.

With a little effort, being open to learning more about your dog's behavior and a bit of training for you both – Fido can bring you years of joy.

## Protecting Your Dog from Dangers

There are many things in our world that can be dangerous to your dog. Many of them are not obvious or well-known, but all are preventable!

Did you know?

- Sugar free chewing gum is toxic to dogs?
- Holiday poinsettias are dangerous?
- Your dog can get sunburned? Frostbite? Blisters on their feet from hot asphalt?
- That hot cars can take your dog to heatstroke or deadly temps in a matter of minutes? Even if it's only 70 degrees outside?
- There are many more dangers you may not have thought of.

Follow-us on FB for frequent training tips, safety pointers, and more.

Join Our Pinterest Page for more safety and first aid information!

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358 Ledbetter Rd. Rockingham, NC 28379  
info@k9coach.dog | 980.339.8064 | www.k9coach.dog



## Getting Support

When you have questions or training issues you need assistance with, contact The K9 Coach. We have training options for any and every issue you may encounter. Some issues might be resolved with a phone-based consultation, others might require an in-home evaluation and problem resolution demonstration, while others might need a more formal training program. Call to discuss your issue and your options.

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