

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



Congratulations! You've decided to join the wonderful world of fosters! You are opening up your house, your life, your family and your other pets to a new dog that might otherwise be put down at your local shelter. You are literally, becoming a life saver.

WHY DOES A DOG NEED TO DECOMPRESS?

Shelters are stressful environments full of strange noises and smells. All of that can be overstimulating for a dog, causing them to act out in ways that they might not normally.

Decompression is a calming period that a dog needs when first arriving in your home. It is imperative the dog has this time to adjust to the new environment, people, and other animals. Many people do not realize how crucial decompression is and how this will make or break how your dog is introduced into the new home. Please set your dog up for success.

We also already know that our foster dog is coming into our house already overstimulated from too many people, dogs' noises and sounds at the shelter, and we need to help the dog decompress. Not only does this time let the dog relax, it also allows the dog to explore your house with his nose, while crated and secure but still learning about your other pets, children, etc. without the stress of a face-to-face meeting where body language might be misunderstood.

It is also imperative that the new dog and resident dog(s) have time to adjust to a new dog in the home. Many people do not realize that this takes time and cannot be rushed. (Please review our *Dog Intros* document.)

During this decompression time, we highly recommend no long walks (especially if not fully vaccinated), car rides, pet store excursions, parties, etc. **UNTIL THE DOG IS READY.** (Necessary trips to the vet are excluded from this.) Any of the above activities or events provide an overabundance of stimuli and are very stressful, especially when the dog still has no reason to trust you.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO DECOMPRESS A DOG?

Younger dogs, especially puppies, will take less time to decompress than adult dogs. The average decompression time is about two weeks, but it differs for every dog.

Decompress for at least the first 3-5 days. Then you can re-evaluate how much and what type of decompression your new dog will continue to need. **NUMBER ONE RULE:** keep your new dog/foster in a crate during decompression time, and always when you're not home. After decompression, and everyone's acquainted and comfortable, determine if your dog is ready to move past the decompression phase.

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



Make it a smooth transition with these professional tips on how to decompress a new rescue dog.

1. Forget expectations

No matter how much you plan, you won't know how a dog is going to react in their new environment until after you bring him home. "The first 24 to 48 hours will be a learning experience for all," says dog foster veteran Shannon Quinn Lewis of [Angels Among Us Pet Rescue](#). Leave your expectations at the door. Your situation is unique, so don't compare it to others.

2. Take your time

It can take on average one to three weeks for your new rescue dog's personality to surface. Don't expect to always get a lot of sleep the first few nights, don't expect the pup to be perfect, and don't expect them to come into their new home exhibiting their true personality. It all takes time. The best thing you can do is go slowly. Your dog and your family will be happier in the long run.

- When you first get to your home, allow them to potty in the front yard, walk them calmly through the front door and while keeping him leashed, walk around your home. **NO FREE ROAM.**
- Once you have done a quick tour with the dog, take him to his crate area, allow him some water.
- With the dog still leashed, walk him to the door that you will be using to take him out to potty and take him out. Bring him back in and put him in his crate. Let him rest. It's important to establish the routine and structure of the crate straight away.
- After some time, leash the dog and remove him from his crate, hand feed him his meal (great bonding/engagement exercise) and then go outside for a potty break. **DO NOT FEED WITH YOUR OTHER DOGS AROUND.**
- Then back inside for some "out of the crate time" (still leashed). **NO rough play, NO wrestling, NO couch, NO beds, NO laps, NO kissy face, NO free roam through the house, NO interactions with any other pets, NO visits from your friends and family**
- After free time, it's back outside (still leashed) for potty and then back in for some crate rest.
- Once you put your new dog in his crate, ignore him. Let him rest.

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



3. Keep calm

A newly rescued dog needs a calm environment to acclimate. Keep things quiet and calm in your home as much as possible. Every sound, movement, and smell will be new to them. Keep toys and affection to a minimum. “Let the dog come to you,” advises professional dog behaviorist and trainer Khalvin Kuczynski at [Tenacity](#). “Less is usually better at the beginning.” Resist the temptation to shower your dog with affection and toys. “The real idea is you want to establish structure,” adds Kuczynski. “You want a relationship that’s founded on respect first and foremost, as well as love and affection –those things should weigh evenly.”

4. Give them space

Dogs are den animals and need a space to feel safe. To help with the transition, give them a space that is quiet, comfortable, and cozy. Give your dog a spot to let him emerge out of his shell of his own accord. Initially limiting access to your home to one or two rooms will help to avoid overwhelming your new friend and will also help to reduce accidents. Select an area of your home where your new friend has a choice between being with people and the other members of your household or being on their own. The crate should be in an area of the house that is neither isolated nor in the middle of everything. You want your new dog to observe you and your family without feeling stressed and overwhelmed. It is all about respecting each other’s space; if your dog chooses to hang out by themselves for a while it is important that they have that choice.

5. Keep them on a leash

A leashed dog is a must for the safety of your pet and will help keep you stay in control. “The leash should essentially become your best friend,” says Kuczynski. “The idea is if the dog jumps on the couch, you don’t have to grab the dog by the collar. You just simply grab the end of the leash and pull the dog off the couch.” This keeps you safe, and it doesn’t run the risk of harming your relationship with the dog.

6. Crate train

A crate is an easy and effective way to create a safe haven. Crate training is one of the quickest and least stressful ways to encourage desirable behaviors in dogs. Some new dog owners are not fans of using a crate; however, Kuczynski strongly recommends implementing crate training as soon as you bring a dog into your home. You can even start feeding your new dog in the crate at mealtimes so that it becomes a safe, fun, and private place to hang out. Become familiar with how to properly crate train a dog and do not close the door unless you are sure the dog is already crate trained. A crate satisfies a dog’s instinct to be in a den while alleviating many behavioral issues like resource guarding, separation anxiety, and house-training issues. For more info on crate training visit: <https://www.reboundhounds.org/crate-training1.html>

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



7. Slow introductions

For the first week, keep your dog at home and limit visitors. If your dog is not fully vaccinated, they must remain in your backyard only. When it comes time to make introductions to people and other pets, do it slowly. If you have other animals, it's best to let them get acquainted with the new dog outside your home first (if your new dog is not fully vaccinated, start with the front yard.). Advise your friends (especially children) to give your new dog "face space." Ask them to resist the urge to touch or get in their face. Let your dog go to them and pay close attention to how they communicate comfort or discomfort. Dogs are very good at picking up on visual cues. Do not allow anyone to stare directly at your dog or hover over them in a stooped position. For humans, looking at the person they are interacting with is considered polite. For a dog, a direct stare is an implied threat. Instead, encourage a brief look and then look away. Sitting or getting down on the dog's eye level makes humans more approachable.

8. Exercise them every day

The adage "a good dog is a tired dog" is true for a reason. Dogs are active creatures. They need a daily exercise routine to keep them physically and mentally healthy. Get the leash and take them for a short walk the first week or two (if they are fully vaccinated) to improve you and your dog's health while establishing a positive bond. It is ok to have a few short walks throughout the day. Once your dog is comfortable with you, longer walks around the neighborhood can be taken. If your dog is not paws-on-the-ground ready; throwing the ball in the backyard or playing with puzzles can help provide stimulation. For puzzle ideas visit: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?t=76s&v=akGY7BysAwY>

9. Keep a routine

Dogs are creatures of habit. Their happiness depends on their environment. Dogs need a steady routine, so they know what to expect from their owners and their lives. Their behavior will reflect this accordingly. Once they have a solid structure, they can handle occasional changes like a pro. Feeding, walking, playing, sleeping, and other daily activities can all be a part of your dog's regularly scheduled routine.

10. Establish positive associations

It's your job to help your dog form positive associations in their new environment. You want your new dog to feel like their home and all the sights, sounds, and smells that come with it, are the most wonderful things in the world. Keep treats on hand to praise and reward your dog if you're getting ready to vacuum or there's a fire truck siren blaring. Your dog will soon associate any unpleasant experiences with that of comfort, affection, and yummy treats.

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



THE TAKEAWAY

Decompression is a key step toward ensuring a successful home transition for your new pet. Time spent getting to know your rescue pup will be well worth the love they give you in return.

Not all dogs know how to be a dog, but many are willing to learn if we help them, and if we can just slow the process down and give them time to learn.

Dogs learn through experiences, both good and bad ones. Through those experiences, they shape their understanding of the world and how to react to certain things.

Your dog's way of thinking can be summed up by a sequence of "If/Then" statements. If I see a dog, then I need to do this. If I see a cat, then I need to do this. If someone rings the doorbell, then I need to do this. The more we shape those experiences with positivity, and the more positive experiences we provide, the more we can do for misunderstood, abused, unwanted and neglected shelter animals that might not otherwise make it out the front door.

Everything is about being realistic with your abilities, your time and your other obligations. It's the only way to set your dogs and your foster dogs up for success. Not to mention the rescue you are helping.

HELPFUL RULES FOR NEW DOGS

- NEVER LEAVE DOGS UNATTENDED with toys or bones.
- We prefer all fosters to sleep in their crate at least for the first few weeks during decompression and separation time- unless otherwise agreed upon with the rescue (due to crate anxiety, etc.), and thereafter they are to sleep in their own bed. We do not like to encourage furniture or human beds as some adopters will not like this and it can be a hard habit to break.
- We do not suggest any kind of retractable leashes whatsoever, as they give you absolutely no control. Please use a leash that you can easily and swiftly bring your dog to you and away from danger/other animals. We also highly recommend a martingale collar as this prevents dogs from backing out of the collar or harness and escaping. We also recommend double leashing bigger dogs, as all new dogs can be flight risks.
- If you have a fenced yard, please do not ever leave the dog unsupervised until you know exactly how high they can jump- you would be surprised how high some dogs can jump when triggered or excited.
- No food bowls left out (even if empty) and dogs should be fed separately at least for the first few months (preferably indefinitely, but at least until you are absolutely sure there is no resource guarding on either side).

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



- Do not leave dogs unattended for at least the first few months and then ONLY if and when you are absolutely sure they are safe together (and there are no bones, toys or anything that could trigger a fight).

HOUSE TRAINING

Sometimes new dogs, even if house trained, will need some guidance on where to eliminate. As soon as possible, take your new dog to the area where you want them to eliminate. Let them sniff as long as they want to gather information. If they eliminate right away have a small party with treats and lots of praise. We recommend for the first couple of days to let them out after eating, drinking water, or play time. If your dog eliminates outside then eliminates again when brought inside, next time allow the dog to eliminate outside then walk the dog around for another 5 to 10 minutes before bringing it back inside. It would be wise for the foster/adopter to observe a dog's potty habits to pick up on the dog's cue for when it needs to go out to eliminate.

CRATE TRAINING

Crates are one of the most important and beneficial tools we, as dog guardians, have at our disposal. Crates are useful for management of our dogs when we are house training them and for keeping our dogs safe when we can't watch them. Crates are a useful tool when we have a dog who is experiencing behavioral issues such as; nervousness, territorial issues, pacing, separation anxiety and if they are not yet trustworthy to be left free without chewing inappropriate items. Dogs are den dwelling animals and crates are the modern alternative to the dens they would have in the wild. When introduced properly, our dogs will view the crate as a safe, cozy place to be calm and relax. A place that is free from stress where they can retire to when they begin to feel overwhelmed.

- Set up a crate in a corner of the kitchen or living room. We want our dogs to be able to observe us but not be in the middle of all the foot traffic through our house. Avoid having the crate in an area of the house where he is isolated.
- Put soft bedding in the crate and cover all sides but the door with a dark blanket ... creating a den-like feel.
- Leash and collar the dog, toss some treats into the crate, guide the dog in saying the word "crate" as he is walking in. When he eats the treat, use the leash to guide him out. Repeat 5-10 times. This exercise is just to give an initial positive association to simply entering the crate.

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:



Decompressing Your New Foster

- With the dog still leashed, toss treats in the crate, gently guide the dog in while saying “crate” and when he is all the way in, close the door. Wait 3-5min. Open the door and use the leash to guide him out. Don’t allow him to barge out, during this exercise, you, the human, control the entering and exiting of the crate. Repeat gradually increasing the time the dog is in the crate.
- Leave the door to the crate open and allow the dog to go in and out on their own. Most dogs will explore a crate that looks inviting, one that is dark and comfy. Put some appropriate chew toys, like Kongs and Nylabones, in the crate to further encourage the dog to relax and spend time in the crate.
- Practice entering and exiting the crate several times and add in longer stays with the door closed.
- If the dog has a tantrum, barks, cries or whines ... IGNORE THEM. Don’t talk to them, don’t yell at them, don’t look at them or engage in anyway. As soon as they quiet down, walk over to the crate, say “good boy/girl” in a light tone, not over the top excitement and guide the dog out. Being quiet in the crate is simply a non-negotiable rule. Be careful not to put too much emotion into it. Repeat, slowly adding time in the crate.

Crate your new dog at night. You should have had the opportunity to practice the above exercises so the crate should be a familiar place for the dog. Have a nighttime routine something like this:

1. Pick up water 2-3 hours before bed.
2. Take the dog out to potty one last time 10-20 min before bed.
3. Turn off the lights, leave on a white noise machine or radio on classical music.
4. Cover the door to the crate halfway with a blanket (increasing the den-like feel)
5. Say “good night” in an even toned, non-emotional way and leave the room.

Remember to ignore any shenanigans. Most dogs will settle down quickly once they realize they will not get any attention for acting up.

- If you have a dog who throws tantrums of epic proportions, zip tie all sides of the crate, the bottom of the crate where the pan slides out and put Carabiner style clips (available at hardware stores) along the door. But still IGNORE ALL MELTDOWNS. Any attention they get, even scolding (which only encourages the barking and nonsense) is all attention.

TIPS FOR FOSTERS:

Decompressing Your New Foster



For the small percentage of manic dogs, push the crate against a wall (side and back), place a piece of furniture on the exposed side and place something heavy on top. Once the dog realizes his attempts of escape are futile, he will give up and settle down.

- When you wake up, wait 10-15 min BEFORE you let the dog out of the crate. You want to avoid the dog expecting for you to open his kennel first thing. The same goes for when you get home from work. Wait 10-15 min for them to calm down BEFORE they are allowed to exit the crate.
- It's crucial that ALL entering and exiting of the crate is done when the dog is calm. If this is done consistently from the beginning, you will decrease the possibility of future issues.
- Crating your new dog during the day, when you are at work, is necessary to ensure they stay safe. If you work from home, it's important to schedule blocks of crate time for the dog. Dogs who NEVER leave their guardians' side NEVER learn to be independent and are prime dogs for developing Separation Anxiety.
- All of your comings and goings, when you are crating your dog must be non-emotional. Remember, crating a dog is not a punishment. When trained correctly your dog views his crate a safe place. A den. A sanctuary, away from our hectic world.