

New Adult Dogs

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *New Adult Dogs Behavior Blueprint*.



Some shelter and rescue dogs are purebred, but most are Heinz 57 mutts or mixed-breeds. Some shelter dogs are surrendered by their owners already trained and they are behaved, friendly, and simply in need of a new caring, loving home. Many will have some behavior issues such as house-soiling, out of control chewing, barking, hyperactivity, and so forth. Other dogs are shy and fearful, or may have some food or resource guarding issues that will require a dedicated owner who is going to spend the time that it takes to rebuild the dog's

confidence or manage the resource guarding issues.

We know that raising and training a puppy requires a lot of time and know-how. The puppy's behavior is always changing, for better or for worse, depending on his socialization and training. However, an adult dog's behavior and temperament are already well established, for better or worse. Traits and habits may change over time, but compared with the behavioral mold-ability of young puppies, an older dog's habits are much more resistant to change. Whereas temperament problems may take longer to resolve in an adult dog, bad habits are also just as hard to break. Thus the key to adopting a good shelter or rescue dog depends on selection. Take your time to test drive plenty of prospective dogs. The perfect dog is waiting for you somewhere. Be patient, search well, and be realistic about your choice, i.e., choose with your brain as well as your heart. When selecting an adult dog you need to evaluate whether you like the dog, whether the dog likes you (and other people), and the dog's basic way it handles itself.

Everyone on Board

All family members must be involved in the selection process and agree 100% on the final choice. You must equally check that the dog likes all family members. Make sure that the dog eagerly approaches each family member and thoroughly enjoys being handled and stroked. Additionally, check that the dog likes other people. Observe the dog's behavior when it interacts with a wide variety of people, especially children, men, and strangers. The most important quality in a companion dog is friendliness: it should enjoy the company and attention of people. If it is at all fearful or shy, you will need to devote time and work with a trainer/behaviorist to teach it that people are non-threatening.

Bonding

Try and get a feeling for the new dog. If you are getting the dog from a private home or shelter, try and check their over-all attitude. Is the dog calm and quiet, or hyperactive?

Make sure all family members spend plenty of time with the dog. Check to see that everyone can get the dog to pay attention. Take the dog for a spin around the block to evaluate how it walks on leash. Spend lots of time specifically handling and petting, hugging, and restraining the dog. Check that it at least tolerates, without getting upset, having its muzzle, ears, neck, paws, and rear end handled. If you find it has areas that seem sensitive to touch they can respond to progressive desensitization and you'll want to know that the sensitivity does not get worse but lessens with time. There is little point in sharing your home with a dog that you or others cannot handle, bathe or examine.

The Honeymoon Period at Home

Coming to a new environment like your home offers a wonderful opportunity for a dog to learn household rules. First impressions are extremely important and leave a lasting impression. Regardless of your new dog's presumed housetraining and chew toy training, teach it *where* to eliminate, what to chew, and how to settle down calmly and quietly during its first couple of weeks at home. In the beginning, your dog is likely to be somewhat stressed with all the recent changes in its life. It may act depressed, or may react with exuberance (hyperactivity and barking) in its newfound home. The dog may become anxious (bark, chew, pee, and poop) when left alone.

It is incredibly important that your dog does not establish any bad habits during its first couple of weeks at home. Consider a short-term and long-term confinement program; check out the *Home Alone* article or the *Home Alone* booklet at the shelter, so that housetraining and chew toy training do not fail. For a little while it is a good idea not to feed your dog from a food bowl. Instead, have family, friends and strangers hand feed mostly dry food as training lures and rewards for housetraining, classical conditioning, and teaching basic manners. Stuff the rest of its dry food into [Kongs](#) to teach it to settle down quietly, calmly, and confidently. Once your dog adapts to its new surroundings and human companions, it has a lifetime to enjoy full run of its new home.

Fearful Dogs

Many dogs are under socialized and may become fearful in the shelter environment. You are a saint to rescue a fearful dog from the stress of a shelter environment, but you must realize that for fearful dogs, confidence-building can be an extremely lengthy and heart-rending procedure. You must have both the time and the know-how. Keep in mind it will take time and patience to help them reach that goal. For help try our *Fearful* article or stop by the shelter for a booklet on helping to rehabilitate fearful dogs.