

Two-Week Shutdown

If I could stress one of the biggest errors people make with new dogs and foster dogs it is rushing the dog into the new world so fast.

- Marshmallow Foundation

The most important phase dogs go through when new to a home is the decompression phase, also known as the two-week shutdown. The decompression phase lasts anywhere from the first day to a few weeks to even, in extreme cases, months. This guide will show you step-by-step what to do from the moment your rescue arrives through the first days and weeks to set your dog up for success.

What IS the two-week shutdown?

Your new dog needs time to adjust and there are many scenarios that people put their new dog through that only encourage negative behaviors to surface. Dogs may be resilient creatures, but they do also need to know that we are in control of situations, that we will protect and provide for them, and give them clear expectations and routines to follow.

For **2** Weeks:

Immediate family only

Keep it simple

Let dog watch your routine

Quiet walks without meetings



CompAnimals Pet Rescue Alumnus, Domino, taking in his new surroundings

Two weeks is just a guideline. Most dogs advance faster but depending on the individual dog and how closely you follow the guidelines, it may take longer.

What does the two-week shutdown mean to me?

When you bring home a new dog, young or old, we KNOW you are so excited and you want to share your new addition with everyone you can!

Did you know that by taking your dog to pet stores, friends and families homes, dog parks, pet events or other really busy, social settings you may inadvertently be telling your dog to act out?

Think about this: the majority of us, when put into new situations, do not put all of ourselves out there. We put forth what we want people to see or think they want to see. Also, we are much more likely to withdraw from situations that make us uncomfortable. What would you do if you were on a date with someone new and they took you to meet their family who constantly hugged you, kissed you or otherwise invaded your space? What would you do if they then took you to meet all their friends and they did the same? Would you consider your date sane? Would you consider your date someone you could trust? Sure, you liked them initially to go out with them on a first date, but wouldn't their actions throughout that first date dictate whether you would see them again? Would you see them again if they put you in so many situations that made you uncomfortable?



From Lili Chin's www.doggiedrawings.net

Consider this as well: say you had to go live with a new family who spoke a language you didn't understand. You'll be reserved, perhaps a bit detached. What if they doted on you, as a new family member, speaking to you in a language you don't understand, expecting you to interact with all their family members and friends? Would you feel comfortable? Would you want to retreat to a safe place? Would you know where a safe place was? Would they give you one?

Things many people forget is that we expect our new dogs to be so accepting of everything and we put them in these very similar situations and then become alarmed when they "act out." Your new dog is acting out or misbehaving because they don't view you as a good decision-maker. Remember, to them, you are putting them in situations that make them feel uncomfortable.



Tongue flicks, licks and yawns can indicate stress. Learn dog body language by reading great resources such as Turid Rugaas's book "On Talking Terms With Dogs: Calming Signals"

Keep reading to find out how to help your dog adjust and begin to view you as the decision-maker of the home and to help them put their trust in YOU, where it belongs!

Trust is EVERYTHING to building a good and solid relationship with your dog!

So, how do I get started?

Even if you've had your dog a few days and are beginning to notice some issues behaviorally, you can still start fresh and get them started on the shutdown.

Some things you want to keep in mind with your new dog when you first get them:

1. A tired dog is a happy dog! Exercising your dog(s) regularly and thoroughly will help ensure they relax into their new household a little easier. Without that pent up energy, they've GOT to relax! However...
2. Keep exercise quiet, only involving your immediate family. On walks/runs, your dog will be plenty stimulated sniffing and observing the new surroundings, so wait to meet others until after the two-week shutdown. In the yard, use a long lead (e.g. 20ft) - think of it as an umbilical cord, so the dog feels connected to you. Don't expect the dog to automatically understand the rules and boundaries... show them.
3. Do not take them to pet stores, dog parks, other people's homes, etc. These situations provide an overabundance of stimulation that your dog needs to have the trust built in you for YOU to handle the situation so they don't have to.
4. Keep them leashed to you at ALL times when they are not crated. Yes, even in the house and yes, even if you have a fully fenced yard. Why? It builds the precedence with them that YOU are the bringer of everything in life. Additionally, keeping them leashed to you keeps them from unintentionally getting in trouble. If they aren't housetrained, they can't very well go run out of your line of sight and have an "accident" if you have them leashed to you, huh? Or, if someone new comes in the home, keeping them leashed to you can help you show them appropriate behavior such as keeping four-on-the-floor (i.e. not jumping on people). When the dog is leashed to you, YOU are in control. The dog WILL begin to understand this.
5. Do not allow your new dog and your existing pets get into a 24/7 free-for-all. Remember, your existing pets don't know this new "intruder" and the new dog doesn't know the routine of the home and what's permissible. Setting a routine with the new dog, without the full distraction of other pets, will make life 1000 times easier when you begin integrating them.

6. Do not allow your new dog furniture privileges. This could give them the wrong impression, like you are putting them up on a pedestal of power. Create a spot for them to be when they are out lounging around in each room. They certainly do need direction as to where they should be. Furniture privileges can be given later on down the road if you so please.
7. Do not give your new foster dog unstructured affection. Any and all affection from you must have a purpose. No kissy face or baby talk. I know it is hard, especially when they have likely never had love before but you will not be helping him or yourself if you do this.
8. **DO NOT PUT YOUR FACE IN YOUR NEW DOGS FACE.** They do not know you and this can be very intimidating for your new dog. They could growl or worse, bite out of fear/anxiety. They need to trust you so don't assume that you can do this because they appear friendly.
9. Do not allow your new dog to "go ahead of you". Establish this rule right away. You go out and in **FIRST** through the door. In fact, it is a good idea to have them sit before they can enter, before you leash up, etc.

The Basics

When bringing your new dog home, give them a brief tour of their primary living area or the places they will be most often. Now, it's crate time! It's time to give the dog some time to itself to take in everything that's happened thus far.

The crate will be used as a tool in the shutdown, not as a prison. Think of it more like their safe place. Sure, some may cry initially but with positive reinforcement (yummy crate-only treats, no coddling, etc.) they'll learn to accept their time alone and realize it's a relief! Something to remember is to **NOT** let the dog out of the crate while they are crying. There are many good articles about crate training - basically give treats and affection while they're in there, but not while they're out. Provide exercises so they are ready for a break. Keep the sessions short at the beginning, and increase the time, so they feel a sense of relief and not imprisonment.



Be clear to your dog their crate is **THEIR GOOD PLACE**. They will come to enjoy their special spot.

Plan time in your schedule so that initially, time in the crate is short. 20-30 minutes at a time initially will help keep interactions with you positive and help reinforce positive crate training. You will increase the time as needed as the days move forward, little by little. You are using the crate as a way to give them a time out to collect their thoughts and to process the new information they received in their interactions with you. If this is a new and only dog, you'll likely find that progress will move swiftly! No worries! Patience is a virtue and you will be handsomely rewarded!

You will know as a guardian when this phase is truly over. Use your gut. Some dogs don't get it right away, others take longer. Once they are into a routine, seem relaxed and confident, tolerate the crate well, and look to you for guidance, they are probably beginning to feel safe and secure in their new world. Pat yourself on the back – job well done.

Patience and consistency with your new dog will reap the greatest rewards!

Have other pets? Take things SLOW and easy!

When bringing home a new dog to a home with existing pets, it's important to realize that everyone in the household will need time to adjust to the new living arrangements and routine. It's important to take things very slow initially and keep things positive and upbeat.

First, let me go ahead and say that the initial meeting of the new dog with resident dog(s) needs to happen OFF your property in a quiet, neutral setting. We don't need your resident dogs to feel the need to "protect what is theirs" without having the opportunity to get to know one another first.

Now, after the initial meeting, if things go well and you choose to bring the new dog home (or this can be tweaked if you've already introduced some other way that wasn't recommended here), it's time to crate and rotate initially. I'd say for at least the first 48 hours, keep the new dog and your existing pets separated. Sure, let them sniff around. Shoot, crate them side by side (never nose to nose!) to help them get used to the other being around. But, keep at least the first 2 days for yourselves and don't expect the new dog and existing dogs to interact and everything be hunky dory.

After the initial time has passed, do another outdoors meeting on leash first, then bring them indoors and let them further interact. KEEP LEASHES ON and keep the leashes loose so the dogs can use their natural body language. We recommend leashes just in case something unexpected happens, so you can calmly redirect and keep things under control. It can also help when you interject a too-hyper play session to encourage the dogs to settle and relax. Keep new interactions VERY short initially. I'm talking 10-15 minutes. End things on a positive note and give the dogs time to process everything that happened. Doing things this way does a couple of things. It gives the dogs the opportunity to enjoy one another's company without becoming overstimulated and it also gives them the desire to want MORE interaction. Sure, you might have to deal with a bit more whining from them because they want to play, but remember, YOU call the shots. Not them. Ultimately, them recognizing you as leader helps



everyone. Being very deliberate in the amount of time they have to play together and WHEN they get to play together sets that precedence of YOU being the person they look to for direction. And with multiple dogs, that's what you WANT!

Over the course of a few days, slowly increase the time they are out together. Remember to end things on a positive note and be on top of their play 100% of the time. Do not allow over-excited play because it can quickly amplify. If one of the dogs is walking away from play, step in and separate. Pay attention and supervise and you can help keep a peaceful multi-dog home.

Make sure to monitor toys. Actually, at the very beginning of interactions, I recommend not having any toys at all for them to play with. Let the dogs learn one another first before introducing things which may be of high value to one or all. Give them the chance to realize one another's signals for play and for agitation. It is also YOUR responsibility to learn these things as well. As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Feed them separately so there is no chance of one dog wandering over to the other dog's bowl. They will be interested in each other's meals, which is perfectly natural. Food tends to be high-value for all species! Always set them up for success; never set them up for a situation they can't handle.

Ultimately, slowing things down and setting a solid routine helps tremendously. It will help him learn who makes the decisions and it will help build the relationship between your new dog and all the members of your household. It may sound like tough work, but it's worth it!

Congratulations on doing a wonderful thing! Take it slow, give it time and please contact us with questions! We love helping our adopters succeed! Email: comanimals@earthlink.net

- Article inspired by Looking Glass Animal Rescue <https://lgarinc.org>

I'm so glad Leslie taught me "the ottoman treatment"! Treat a new dog like a piece of furniture:

- *Don't make much eye contact.*
- *Acknowledge they're there but don't focus much energy on them.*

This takes the pressure off of them, shows them you are making the household decisions, and makes sense to them. I love dogs and want to connect in a way that is intuitive to them.

- Holly Rybinski
