

** This article was written for [Canadian Chihuahua Rescue & Transport](#) with the assistance of Anne Puchtinger, a dog trainer located in London ON. You may contact her at 519-641-2832 or weimaraners@sympatico.ca

Canadian Chihuahua Rescue & Transport
1830 Bank Street, Box 83023 Ottawa ON K1V 1A3
1-877-783-7333 - www.ccrt.net

Tips For New Adopters

Adopting a rescue dog is a very exciting time for you and your family. There is much to be done including preparing your home for your new family member, buying food and lots of toys and accessories. This is also the time to prepare yourself for the inevitable adjustment period that will take place for everyone involved – both human and furry. The Canadian Chihuahua Rescue and Transport (CCRT) wants to ensure you are fully and completely aware of what will most likely happen during the first few weeks your dog is with you so you are entirely prepared to handle the ups and downs that will occur. It is our experience – as well as the experience of all rescue groups – that the first couple of weeks can be stressful for you, your family and your new dog. You have to establish a new routine, your family needs to prioritize feedings and walks and your dog needs to become comfortable and confident in your environment. This can only be accomplished by working together as a family and most importantly, by being extremely, extremely patient with your new pet.

Our rescue dogs come to us from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences, many of which we can only guess at. It would be nice to think the dogs realize we have ‘rescued’ them and that they are grateful for our help. On the contrary, they carry baggage and scars that may take a significant amount of time to heal – and some may never heal completely. A rescue dog is a huge undertaking with an enormous amount of responsibility. You must be fully prepared to deal with the good, the bad and the ugly and to work hard at establishing a lifelong relationship with your dog.

You can expect your new dog to behave very differently to what it did in foster care. The dog may hide and be very shy or may exhibit rather negative behavior. Remember, the CCRT foster home was patient and worked with the dog early on to help it adjust and get comfortable. When the dog is moved to your home, naturally, it will be confused with its new surroundings and be out of its element in relation to its routine.

For the first several days, it would be best to keep your pet confined to a particular area in your house, one that is quiet where the dog can get to know everyone. Set up the dog’s bed and/or crate, its food and water dishes and perhaps even some ‘pee pads’. Accidents are incredibly common during the first few days in a new home and you should be prepared to handle this. A great suggestion to help establish a strong bond with the dog is to hand-feed it for at least the first 2 weeks. You should also frequently use the dog’s name in a positive voice while feeding and grooming.

Do not initiate contact or play with the dog – let the dog come to you. It will make your life a lot easier if you allow this to happen. Make sure you have a set routine for your new family member. Feed the dog at the same time every day, take it out on a regular basis, praise your new pet when it deserves it and be extremely consistent with this. Consistency will go a long way towards making the dog understand its new routine.

This is not the time to start training your dog. The CCRT recommends that you not begin any type of training or allow the dog to be negatively impacted in any way by people it has no bond with. Until your dog is completely at ease with all members of the family, its routine is established, and the dog understands who is boss, do not attempt to train or correct your new dog. The dog should not be scolded for anything – the dog needs to trust and know “this is a good home with good people.”

The arrival home is one the most important events, as you will be introducing your dog to its new surroundings, other family members, including perhaps canine or feline companions and a different routine. A dog is a pack animal and there is a specific hierarchy. The new dog will have to learn from the beginning that he/she is “low man on the totem pole” in relation to the people and the other dogs in the household. It is essential that introductions are done correctly as you have the opportunity to establish yourself as a strong pack leader and make the new transition very smooth.

INTRODUCING YOUR DOG TO RESIDENT DOGS

Start with a “meet and greet” in a neutral location. A neutral location can be anywhere such as the park, a parking lot or down the block. If meeting in a neutral location is not possible, be sure to introduce the dogs in an area away from “possessions” such as food, beds, toys, etc.

You should have another handler there to help out. All dogs must be on a leash and in control at all times. Take your new dog for a casual walk, while your helper does the same with the resident dog. Walk in a large circle or up and down a block. Let the dogs see each other from a distance before coming together. Lessen the distance between the dogs, while continuing to walk in a circle or down the block. Notice their reactions and posture. Are they threatening, inviting, fearful, or indifferent? Continue taking note of their reactions.

If all is going well, bring the dogs in for a closer look and sniff. DO NOT tighten up on the lead or let yourself become tense, as this may put the dogs on guard or alert them to the fact that something is about to happen. Relax! This is imperative. Did you know that most fights of dog on a leash start because of human interference? Dogs need to figure out their own order or position.

Allow the dogs to approach each other to one side in a casual, unforced manner and monitor the situation. Pretend that you just met a friend in the park and were approaching them for a chat. Do not allow them to meet nose to nose.

If all is still going well, let them come in for a closer look. Allow them to sniff, vocalize, posture, and growl. If you correct or interfere too much, a fight may erupt. Step back, relax and watch the dogs interact. If you have a truly submissive resident dog, you may want to hold them in place while the new dog is allowed a real good sniff of the back end of your dog. Allow the new dogs to completely finish sniffing and then release your resident dog. Again, have the dogs meet at an angle and not face-to-face.

If everyone is getting along and no serious posturing, lunging or fighting has taken place, take the dogs for a walk together. Take note of any reactions or aggressive posturing. Who knows, maybe one will issue a play bow and the other will accept. If all goes smoothly take the dogs home. If not, you will need to be prepared to keep the dogs separated for a period of time.

Fighting should not be allowed; however normal dog grumbling can be tolerated. It is highly recommended that you read up a little on dog behavior if you are unsure of what is normal and what is aggressive. Some amount of growling is normal. Keep both dogs on a leash while indoors. This will help

you to gain control of any unexpected or unwanted situations that may occur. If any problems occur the “problem” dog should be reprimanded right away and/or put in his/her crate.

Visit dog behavior links on the Internet to learn as much as you can about what’s to be expected between dogs living under one roof. Ask the group members for advice and assistance. There are several very experienced dog people in the group who would be happy to provide guidance.

The new dog should sleep in the crate at night and should not be permitted to sleep with children or have free roam of the house. If you have an older/ill dog, who is unable to go a whole night without a potty break, it may be necessary to set-up a secure sleep area utilizing items such as gates, playpen, or x-pen with their bed and some pee pads or newspaper down.

INTRODUCING YOUR DOG TO THE HOME

It is very important that you introduce your new dog to your home in the right way. Most dogs will be stressed when entering a new environment, so, they need to look to you for direction. The best way to do this is to “invite” your dog into your home on a leash and show him around. This will show your new dog that YOU own the house, and if you have a resident dog, he/she will not see the new dog as a threat either.

Once you have shown the new dog around, including his/her potty place outside, make sure you limit his/her access to certain areas of the house for a while. You can do this by closing doors to some rooms and by using baby gates. Some dogs find it very stressful to have full access to the house right away. As time goes on, and your new dog settles in, you can increase the amount of space he can occupy.

Routine is paramount. Establish a schedule for your dog and stick to it. This will help him/her to adjust by knowing what to expect. When is it mealtime? When is it playtime? When is it time for potty detail? When is it bedtime? Let your new dog take things at his/her own pace. For a few days, do not invite guests or relatives to the house. Remember that these are very uncertain times for your new companion. To facilitate the settling in period, it is suggested that you put the dog in a crate in a busy part of the house, such as the kitchen. This way he/she is able to watch the regular goings-on and not feel overly threatened by other inhabitants.

Your new dog may be excited and anxious about his new home. This stress might be expressed through panting and pacing, housebreaking accidents, excessive chewing and/or gastric upset in the form of vomiting, diarrhea or loose stools. Tell every member of your family to resist the temptation to over-handle the new dog. Give him/her a little space to get settled.

If your dog is not completely housebroken, begin housebreaking immediately. Please understand that just because your dog has a few accidents this does not mean he/she is not housebroken. Nerves and excitement can cause uncharacteristic accidents. Once he/she begins to settle into a routine in your home, and learns what you deem to be acceptable behavior, he/she will relax and behave.

A transition tip: For the first few days, leave a short leash attached to the dog's buckle collar while indoors with you, so you can stop him immediately if he starts doing something you don't want - such as lifting his leg, chewing on a chair leg, jumping on the couch, or showing any signs of aggression towards anyone in the household. Don't leave a leash attached when you're not there, as the leash could get caught on something, or chewed up. Dogs should be crated if you are not able to watch what they are doing at all times.

STRANGERS AND CHILDREN

Remember that your new dog is already nervous and if surrounded by too many people, he/she might panic. It is not unusual for children to get bitten if they rush up screaming at the dog, pet him roughly, or pester him when he's had enough interaction. Keep in mind that while a child can whine or cry, a dog can only indicate frustration or fear by biting. Try to put off introductions to strangers until the dog has had a chance to settle in.

Teach your children and others how to properly behave around the dog, and never allow them to mistreat or harass the dog. Never let your children play with your dog unsupervised.

Make new human introductions one at a time and on leash for control. Let the dog take the initiative to greet the new person. He may want to sniff the person first, before any petting. Take your cues from your dog. How comfortable does he/she appear? Many dogs love new people and attention while others may be overwhelmed.

A new dog will be under stress and engage in behaviors you may need to correct, such as growling or jumping on people. Teach your dog "off" when he/she tries to jump up. Never engage the dog in aggressive play such as wrestling, tug of war, or play biting.

If your dog is aggressive to strangers/visitors, it may be necessary to utilize additional tools such as a head halter or a soft muzzle. Please contact CCRT for direction and guidance in proceeding with "meet and greet" with an aggressive/protective dog.

Warning: Never leave small children alone with a pet no matter how "good" the dog seems.

CATS

Introductions to cats are an entirely different story. Your dog can be placed in his/her crate with a toy or stuffed Kong while the cat is allowed to roam free. Watch how the dog reacts to the cat and verbally correct if he/she lunges, barks or growls at the cat. If the new dog seems indifferent to your cat, you may let him out of the crate while the cat is roaming free in your house. Put him on leash and in a down-stay position.

Have the cat come into the area where the new dog is and wait to see if there is any reaction from the dog. The cat may choose to approach and sniff your dog. Allow this and ensure that the dog remains in a down-stay position, focused on you and not on the cat. You may use food treats and verbal praise. Never hold a cat in your arms and present it to the dog. This is a recipe for disaster. The cat will feel cornered and will likely flee from your arms, run away and cause a chase.

If it is evident that certain dogs/cats will not get along, you will need to find a way to keep them separated at all times. If this poses a problem, please contact CCRT to help you adjust or offer suggestions to rectify this problem.

DAILY LIFE

Dogs are pack animals and live by instinct and learned behavior. A dog does not think the same way a human does, and our thought processes and feelings should not be imposed upon a dog. Dogs do not act out of spite and are not getting back at you because you slighted them in some way. There is usually an explanation for any dog behavior. You are doing a great disservice to the dog if you treat him/her like a human. You are setting the dog up for potential problems by doing so since you raise the dog's place in the pack pecking order - possibly up to your level.

If you generally allow your dogs/pets on the furniture, you should allow your new dog the same privilege. If you don't allow pets on the furniture and the new dog climbs on to the couch, for example, as many of them will do, simply help him/her down, telling him/her "off" in the process. By ensuring that your dog is not allowed to make decisions on their own, you are gently conveying to him/her that you are the boss and the only things he/she is allowed to do are those things that you give him/her permission to do. A dog that does not know his/her place in the pack can become aggressive with other dogs or humans in an attempt to find his/her place.

FEEDING TIME

Feeding time is probably the most important time of the day for your dog, and it gives you a very powerful opportunity to control your dog's greatest reward. It is essential that you keep this exercise very "low key", especially in multiple dog households, as too much excitement over food can cause fighting. Make sure that you have your dog(s) wait quietly and then when the food is in the bowl(s), mush your hands around in the food. This puts your scent on the food and shows your dog that you OWN it and that you are the pack leader. Then, if your dog is remaining calm, you can then put the food down and allow him to eat. If you have more than one dog, don't feed them side by side as this can cause fighting. Determine the level of excitement of your dogs and create enough distance so that neither feels threatened. NEVER allow one dog to approach the other dog's bowl to steal and/or finish a meal. Pick the bowls up when the eating is done.

WALKING FOR SUCCESS, STEP BY STEP

Walking and daily exercise are a vital part of your dog's routine. It is also a great way to bond with your new pet and have some fun at the same time. Here are some tips to help you:

1. Before you begin any walking exercise with your dog, he/she must be in a calm, submissive state of mind and you must also be relaxed. Your dog can be either sitting or standing at your side but if he/she is excited and not focused on you, you will have to wait until he/she is calm. This can be an exercise on its own for some dogs.
2. Once everyone is calm and ready to go, you should move through the door first with your dog following behind. This is very important because you are the leader and your dog is the follower, so he/she should never go first.
3. Now that you are outside, take a minute and check your posture and body language. Make sure your shoulders are back, your head is up, you are looking ahead, and most importantly, you are very relaxed. Take a deep breath, shake your arms out if that helps, and pay close attention to your forearms as that is

where most people hold most of their tension. Another hint: try not to wrap your leash around your hand as this too causes tension that the dog can feel.

4. Now you are ready to go! Try to refrain from talking to your dog, especially if he/she is excitable, as you will be causing more excitement. The best thing to do is just to walk. Set a good pace so you can "get into the zone" and you and your "pack" will be focused on each other and nothing else. At this point don't allow sniffing or any other distractions as you, the pack leader, are making all the decisions. Later, if you want to allow "free" time that is fine, because you are deciding the when and where and how long, not your dog, he/she is a follower.

Helpful Hint: Do not allow your dog to walk in front of you as this again makes your dog the leader making decisions. Make sure your dog is at your side or slightly behind which shows, in his/her perception, he/she is following you.

5. Distractions: each dog will handle distractions differently. Ideally, a gentle correction (like a tap on the shoulder) to the side should be all it takes to bring your dog's attention back to you and the walk. However, dogs that are very excitable, have poor walking skills, or aggression issues will require much more practice, equipment changes, and/or help by a professional to work through this problem.

6. Give your dog enough physical space from the distraction to help the dog deal with it safely (like moving to the other side of the street or into a driveway). Speeding up is very effective when passing a distraction because it shifts the focus back to you. Another option is to stop and place your dog in a sitting position with his back to the distraction and practice keeping him/her calm.

7. Once you have finished your walk remember to go through the door first and have your dog follow you in and then quietly remove his/her leash and collar.

Walking for success takes practice! However, if you stay positive, relaxed, and above all, have fun and enjoy your dog, you will very soon be out there taking long, wonderful strolls with your dog and everyone will be asking you how you did it?

The CCRT is thrilled that you have chosen to adopt a rescue dog and will work with you during this important transition time. We are committed to the happiness and safety of our dogs and trust you are committed to the time, effort and energy it will take to help your dog adjust. We know that if you are, you will be rewarded many times over with a happy, furry family member.

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