

NEW DOG-PARENT TIPS

CONGRATULATIONS !

You are going to adopt a dog! Before you bring your new dog home, there are a couple of things you can do to help make sure everything goes smoothly for you and your new family member.

PREVENT AN IDENTITY CRISIS:

Remember, depending upon where you've adopted, your dog may come with a well-fitted collar, ID tag and lead. Or you may only be provided with a temporary slip-type lead/collar. The latter is fine in an emergency, but should not be used beyond getting your new pet safely home.

If all you have is a slip lead, the first thing to do is get your new dog a nice collar, lead and ID tag with your information on it — name, phone number, address — even if your new pet has a microchip ID from the shelter or adoption agency. A dog's collar should be snug but not tight and you should be able to fit two fingers under the collar. If your new dog does have a microchip, be sure to register the chip ID to your name and address. That way, if your pet gets loose or slips from the collar, he or she can easily be identified and returned to you.

TAKE THE LEAD:

If your new friend is not very well-trained to walk on a leash or if he or she tries to pull out of the collar, it's a good idea to get a chest harness or a type of limited-slip collar called a martingale in addition to the regular. A martingale should be used only for walking your dog on a lead and shouldn't be left on when you're at home.

Remember always to keep your new dog on a leash except in a fenced-in yard or an enclosed, leash-free dog park. Always use a leash or lead near traffic, since your dog can be distracted or fearful for just a second and run onto the street.

BE PREPARED:

Your new pet depends on you for everything, from good food to attention, affection, exercise and training. It sounds like a lot, but what could be more rewarding? To be happy and healthy, your dog will need:

- Constant access to a bowl of fresh, clean drinking water
- A nutritionally balanced diet
- A safe place to eliminate outside
- Chew toys or KONGs
- Daily exercise
- Training
- Most importantly, lots of love and attention!

HOW DO I TRAIN MY DOG?

When it comes to training, all that most families need are the basics. Most Petco® and PetSmart® stores offer group-training classes that you and your dog can attend, or you can hire a trainer to come to your home. If you want to hire a trainer, investigate the dog trainers in your area and pick out one who uses humane methods. Humane trainers do not use chain or prong collars, nor do they advocate yanking on or lifting the dog by the collar. If you haven't had any experience with the role of pack leader (i.e., this is your first dog), you will also learn a lot from the training classes. Your dog needs you to be the leader. If you don't function as the leader of your pack, your dog will start making decisions on his or her own, some of which you may not like.

DOES MY DOG NEED A SOCIAL LIFE?

Your dog also needs daily, loving interaction with you and a social life. Socialize your dog by bringing him or her on car rides, letting him be around children and other dogs, taking her to the groomer, shopping with him at pet-food stores (some of them let you bring your dog in), and walking her in public places.

Strive for structure and consistency in your dog's daily routine to give him or her a healthy feeling of stability as a member of the family. The relationship between your family and your new family member can be great if you are patient and positive. You should also select a veterinarian with whom you are comfortable, since you'll need to bring your dog in for regular checkups.

DO I NEED TO DOG-PROOF MY HOUSE?

Before your new dog arrives, you should dog-proof your home in much the same way that you would child-proof your home for a toddler. Look at your home from a dog's eye level. What can he reach? If you don't want her drinking out of the toilet, tell everyone in the household to make sure they put the lid down. If anyone in the house smokes, put ashtrays out of reach, since cigarette butts, if eaten, can lead to nicotine poisoning. Will his wagging tail inadvertently wreak havoc on your prize possessions? Dog tails have been known to sweep the contents off the tops of coffee tables. If you like to keep lit candles around, make sure they are above the dog's reach. Is there anything he can trip on or become tangled in (such as electrical cords)?

HOW CAN I PREVENT MY NEW DOG FROM CHEWING UP MY STUFF?

If your new dog has his or her own toys, they may not be as interested in chewing up human things (though leather shoes are hard to resist). Buy durable rubber or nylon toys that satisfy the dog's urge to chew. Toys that you can stuff treats into (like Kongs and Buster Cubes) should keep your pet occupied for a good long while. If she starts chewing one of your personal items, resist the urge to yell or reprimand the dog. Instead, immediately get him or her interested in one of their own toys and try to keep your personal items out of reach until the dog learns the rules of the house.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT MAKING MY YARD SAFE?

Do a walk around your yard. Is your yard completely fenced in? Are there any spaces or gaps that your new dog or puppy can squeeze through? Is there anything that he can climb on that would allow him to escape over the fence (e.g., a wood pile, a fountain, latticework)? Some dogs know how to flip open gate latches, so latches should be clipped or locked if your dog can reach them.

What sort of plants do you have in your yard? Snail bait and some plants (such as oleander, azaleas and rhododendrons) are poisonous to dogs. Antifreeze is another hazard for dogs – it is toxic and can be fatal. Dogs are attracted to its sweet taste, so don't allow your dog to drink from standing water near where cars have been parked.

Do you have an uncovered pond or pool in your yard? Dogs have been known to drown in backyard pools when they jumped or fell in and couldn't get out. You should also make sure your trash cans have tight lids – to avoid "dumpster diving" by your dog. Besides the smelly mess that an overturned trash can creates, some of the items in your trash (like chicken bones) may be dangerous for your dog to ingest.

Ideally, you should check your yard for safety before your new dog comes home. If you haven't done this prior to the dog's arrival, supervise the time that your pet spends outside. Even a child's toy can be trouble if it is chewed up and swallowed. If you have any questions about bringing a new dog into your home, ask the adoption organization or contact one of the coalition members listed on this site. But the most important thing of all is to be excited about your new family member.

This is a big occasion. You've saved a life, and it's time to have fun with your new best friend.