

# Welcome Home Guide

## Be Prepared and Have Patience

Here are some tips to help prevent problems before they arise. Plan to spend some time bonding, building your relationship from the ground up. Bonding in the first few days means helping your new dog feel safe, giving them opportunities to come to you for both fun and security. This is a guide for initial interactions and does not include training instructions.

Check out the Dog Adoption Resources Handout or our website, at [www.ccasd.org](http://www.ccasd.org), for additional resources to address some of the common issues that can arise when bringing a new cat in to your home.



## Setting Up for Success:

- ❖ The environment plays a large role in an animal's behavior. Your newly adopted dog is stepping foot into a new environment for the first time, which is very exciting and often a little overwhelming. Arrange the space to help the dog make good choices before picking your dog up. For example, if the new dog jumps on counters, prevent the dog from entering the kitchen until you have trained the dog to keep four paws on the floor. This can be done with semi-permanent management, like a baby gate. There are many other types of gates and styles of confinement to choose from.
- ❖ Your dog doesn't need access to the whole house, right away. Limiting access can prevent accidents while your dog is adjusting to the new space. Practice a routine that allows the dog access to opportunities to eliminate outside on a regular basis (every 2 hours is a great start). Slowly build on the 2hr window as the dog remains successful at waiting to potty outside.
- ❖ Big adventures like meeting all the neighbors and their dogs, visiting the dog park, joining family parties, local sports events, and pet supply stores are all activities that should be avoided until there has been time to build a relationship with your dog and their behavior is predictable. There are some dogs who enjoy these types of settings however, these are not the majority during their initial transition out of a shelter. Most dogs will likely become overwhelmed or over-aroused in these settings. Keep new events as positive and low stress as possible and work up to them.
- ❖ Set up a feeding station with food and water bowls. They should always have fresh clean water available and it should be changed out daily. It's best to give your dog the same food they had at the shelter or something very similar, at least at first, to reduce stomach upset. If your dog hasn't eaten for a few days, call your Veterinarian to ask for advice. Talk to them about what food they recommend for your new dog moving forward. Table scraps are not recommended.

## Shopping list of needed supplies:

- ❖ Kennel, crate and/or dog house
- ❖ Baby gates or X-pen
- ❖ Food and water bowls
- ❖ Dog Food (see handout w/ current food)
- ❖ Training treats
- ❖ Variety of toys and chews
- ❖ Collar and/ or harness and leash
- ❖ ID tag
- ❖ Bed and kennel mat
- ❖ Flea and tick prevention
- ❖ Books on dog care and training
- ❖ Grooming supplies



### Contra Costa County Animal Services

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## How Dogs Learn:

Dogs learn by association, just like humans. If a behavior or activity feels good or pays off, we are more likely to repeat it. We can harness this principle with our new dogs by offering rewards (things that feel good) to the dog when we like what they are doing. For example, if the goal is to have your dog make eye contact before the door opens, start by rewarding the dog for making eye contact when it's offered in any context. Owners who do this notice the dog making more eye contact in different situations. This behavior can then be put on cue, so that the dog's name (or another word, noise, movement) means, "Please make eye contact".

This process can be sped up with the use of a marker, typically dog owners and professionals use a clicker. A marker is a sound that is used to point out the moment the dog is doing the desired behavior, like taking a photo. The click sound predicts that reinforcement is coming and helps the dog connect the desired behavior and the reward. Using a marker provides the ability to say, "that is what I want!" This method of training has been scientifically proven to speed up your dog's learning and help maintain new skills longer. The best part is that this method works well for all animals.

If a behavior or activity results in a negative consequence (something that feels bad), the dog is less likely to perform the behavior they THINK caused the negative event. Although punishment can stop or decrease a behavior in the moment, these results are not long lasting and can have unwanted effects. This is why dog owners should do their best to avoid punishing the dog intentionally or by accidents (yelling at the dog versus a door slamming shut from the wind) and stick to more reliable methods of building behavior.

It is especially important to take extra consideration when bringing a new dog home. Take time to get to know their unique body language and reactions. Expose your dog to new experiences slowly and mindfully; what is fun for one dog can be utterly terrifying for another. Negative experiences break down relationships and can cause bigger behavior problems.

## Enrichment and Decompression:

- ❖ The shelter environment can be a stressful place for many animals. After a stressful event, a dog's body and mind need time to rest and regulate. This process is called decompression and is different for all animals. Enrichment provides species typical behavior (for dogs – sniffing, licking, chewing, barking, chasing, shredding, running, digging, and walking) outlets for this built up stress. Keeping in mind that dogs need to be set up for success, take care to provide appropriate outlets for these types of behaviors. Careful set up of enrichment can also help ease new dogs into confinement (crate, closed room, exercise pen). There are many options for store bought or homemade enrichment toys.
- ❖ Many dogs will find it enriching to get to know every inch of their new space, allowing time for this is a great idea. Not all dogs will be comfortable enough to lay down right away and it may take some time to learn your new pup's favorite games and treat preferences. Embrace the opportunity to get to know them better by offering choices (Biscuit or bone? Ball or rope toy? Chicken or beef?) and observing body language. For many dogs, you may be providing them with an experience they've never had before. Watching dogs investigate and make choices can be fun and enriching for humans as well!

## Keep it Fun, Keep it Safe:

- ❖ Have fun training, playing and living with your new companion! Please don't hesitate to contact a certified behavior professional if you see behaviors that make you uncomfortable. Getting help as soon as there are questions is the best way to start understanding the behavior and modifying it. It's never too soon to begin



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training. Seek out in person or virtual group classes if you're looking for more ways to bond with your dog. Competitive obedience is not necessary in order to train, just have fun with your dog. There are many options in the world of competitive dog sports, many of which can be done from the yard or garage, and many are family friendly. For further training support, contact a certified professional near you. The following organizations list certified, ethical trainers online: [iaabc.org](http://iaabc.org), [ccpdt.org](http://ccpdt.org), [apdt.com](http://apdt.com).

- ❖ Your new pet has been microchipped! Remember to keep their information up to date if you move or change your phone number by updating the microchip company. If they ever become lost, that microchip is their ticket back to you, but it's only helpful if the information is accurate. Always keep a collar and ID tag on your dog with your phone number and/or home address so anyone can return the dog to you. Nobody expects their dog to go missing, but accidents do happen so it's best to be prepared.
- ❖ Leaving dogs unsupervised outdoors is not recommended. An appropriately sized fenced yard, weather-appropriate shelter, and access to food and water are a must if a dog must be kept outdoors.

## Grooming & Hygiene

- ❖ Dogs should be bathed, brushed, have their nails clipped and teeth brushed on a regular basis. Some dogs have hair that grows continuously and may become matted if not maintained. Matted hair can quickly become painful and cause injury. For more information about these and other grooming topics, ask your veterinarian or groomer.

## Common Health Issues

- ❖ **Diarrhea** – Loose stools may be caused by a change in diet, stress, intestinal parasites, or other illnesses. Diarrhea in puppies can be extremely dangerous, so always consult with your veterinarian to determine the cause and treatment.
- ❖ **Kennel Cough** – Upon leaving the shelter, your pet should be current on their Bordetella vaccine. Bordetella is a common cause of kennel cough. Please give us a call if you notice coughing or hacking within the first week of bringing your pet home.
- ❖ **Fleas, ticks and mites** – External parasites may cause itching, loss of hair, and certain diseases. Consult with your veterinarian for diagnostics and treatment options, and discuss future preventative measures.

## Red Flags

If you notice any of these signs, please contact your veterinarian:

- |                          |   |                              |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| ❖ Lethargy               | ❖ Hacking cough or respiratory distress | ❖ Diarrhea or dirty bottom   |
| ❖ Weight Loss            | ❖ Missing fur                           | ❖ Weight loss or weight gain |
| ❖ Eye or nasal discharge |   | ❖ Excessive thirst           |

## Following Weeks:

- ❖ Congratulations and thank you again for Adopting a Shelter Dog! If you follow these tips, you'll be on your way to having a well-adjusted canine family member.
- ❖ It may take your dog a few weeks to adjust. Please be patient and let them set that pace.
- ❖ Call your veterinarian within 72 hours to schedule your first wellness visit for your newly adopted dog. Be sure to bring the record of immunizations from the shelter.



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