



10 Tips to Decompress Your Rescue Dog

adapted from Debbie Wolfe

The time a pup transitions into a foster or forever home is called the “decompression” phase—which is paramount for any pup’s longterm placement success. We observe a 2 + 2 + 2 formula = adjustment milestones happen over the first two days; again after the first two weeks; and then again at the two month mark. And even after that, you may still see new snippets of their personality coming through as their full personality blooms.

Simply, we recommend that you keep your pup's social circle small and allow your new pup to bond with their new immediate family. As humans, we have the ability to verbally communicate and understand transition. Your new pup does not have that skill and regardless of his/her origin, that pup needs an adjustment period along with your time and patience for them to understand you are now family, and this new house is now their home.

Why does a pup need to decompress?

Shelters or transport / quarantine can be a stressful transition for dogs and they will need some elbow room to decompress as they learn about you and this new home. Many “hiccups” in behaviors we see are from pups that have not been fully decompressed. Sometimes they manifest as fear, withdrawal, or submission.

Younger dogs, especially puppies, will take less time to decompress than adult dogs. YET we do sometimes see adult dogs that are phased by nothing and transition

seamlessly. We want to prepare for the worst but then be surprised if the best case scenario happens instead.

1. Forget Expectations

No matter how much you plan, you won't know how a pup is going to react in their new environment until after you bring them home. The first 24 to 48 hours will be a learning experience for all. Leave your expectations at the door. Your situation is unique and each pup has their own timeline. Be prepared to share the love or provide elbow room when needed. Remember our team is always here to provide you with guidance.

2. Take Your Time

Remember our 2 + 2 + 2 formula when you are gauging progress. It's not unusual for a pup to not settle for the first couple of nights, so expect some interrupted sleep. Don't expect perfection, and don't expect them to come into their new home exhibiting their true personality. It all takes time. The best thing you can do is go slowly.

3. Keep Calm

A newly homed dog (foster or adoptive) needs a calm environment to acclimate. Bringing a new dog to your home takes a lot of trust on both parties. Keep things quiet and calm as much as possible. Every sound, movement, and smell will be new to them. Keep toys and affection to a minimum. And let the dog come to you. Less is usually better at the beginning. Resist the temptation to shower your dog with affection and toys. You want to establish structure. This new relationship should be founded on mutual respect, as well as love and affection, all weighed evenly.

4. Give Them Space

Dogs are den animals and need their own space to feel safe. To help with the transition, give them a space that is quiet, comfortable, and cozy. A corner with a dog bed or welcoming crate with an open door. This space will help them emerge out of their shell on their own time. When your pup is in their safe place, please respect it - this means teaching children that a pup's "alone time" on a bed or in a crate is exactly that. Leave them alone.

5. Keep Them Leashed

A leashed dog is a must for the safety of your pup and will help you maintain control should you end up in sticky situation inside your home or when experiencing new things outdoors.

A leash should essentially become your best friend during the initial transition, and we recommend having them drag their 6' lead around the house when you're home for at least the first couple of days. If your pup jumps on the couch, you don't have to grab them dog by the collar. Instead, you simply grab the end of the leash and give a gentle redirection vs handling the dog in a way that could make them nervous.

NEVER USE A RETRACTABLE LEASH - we do not allow retractable leashes to be used on our foster pups, and do not advocate them for adopted pups either. A quick google search will yield many articles on this.

6. Crate Train

A crate is an easy and effective way to create a safe haven. Crate training is one of the quickest and least stressful ways to encourage desirable behaviors. Some new dog owners are not fans of using a crate; however, we recommend implementing crate

training as soon as you bring a pup into your home. A crate satisfies a dog's instinct to be in a den while alleviating many behavioral issues like resource guarding, separation anxiety, and house-training issues. If you have not crate trained a puppy or dog yet, please refer to our crate training help in the adoption resources section of our website. A pup that is not crate trained cannot be expected to use a crate immediately. There are many easy and positive ways to help your pup learn that a crate is a great place to be!

7. Slow Introductions

For the first week+, keep your dog at home and limit visitors. When it comes time to make introductions to people, children, and other pets, do it slowly. If you have other animals, it's best to let them get acquainted with the new pup outside your home. Take them on a walk and let them meet on neutral territory (more walking vs nose to nose sniffing); the established dog may feel more territorial in your home. Advise your friends (especially children) to give your new dog "face space." Ask them to resist the urge to touch or get in their face. Let your dog go to them, and pay close attention to how they communicate comfort or discomfort - reading dog body language is key. We have a great "Doglanguage" document in our adoption resources page of our website along with a great link on Kids + Dogs, both are essential reads.

8. Exercise, Every Day!

The adage "a good dog is a tired dog" rings true! Dogs are active creatures and exercise is your friend. They need a daily exercise routine to keep them physically and mentally healthy. Grab the leash and take them for a walks daily and this will also help to establish a positive bond, and will benefit from the extra hours outside too.

We do not advocate dog parks on the best day and certainly bringing a pup to one before they are decompressed could be a recipe for disaster. Many trainers and

behaviorists, ours included, feel dog parks are unstable environments for any dog, but especially for those pups that need stability the most.

9. Keep A Routine

Dogs are creatures of habit. Their happiness depends on their environment. They need a steady routine so they know what to expect day to day. And their behavior will positively reflect this effort. Once they have a solid structure, they can handle occasional changes like a pro! Feeding, walking, playing, sleeping, and other daily activities can all be a part of your pup's regularly scheduled routine.

10. Establish Positive Associations

It's your job to help your dog form positive associations in their new environment. You want your new dog to feel like their home and all the sights, sounds, and smells that come with it, are the most wonderful things in the world. Keep treats on hand to praise and reward your pup if you're introducing any new activities (like the first time you run the vacuum, for example!) Your dog will soon associate any unpleasant experiences with that of comfort, affection, and treats - you lay the foundation of success!