

How to Help an Adult Dog Adjust to a New Home

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You're bringing home a new dog. You've searched for the right adult dog to become a member of your family. After careful thought and planning, the day has come.

It's important to recognize that, although you had a chance to think this through, your new dog has no idea that an unknown family, strange household, and different expectations are about to become his new reality. The dog will need at least a few months to develop trust, feel comfortable, and learn his role.

Here are a few suggestions to help you make your new canine pal feel at home.

Plan Ahead

A dog with big brown eyes who lies quietly in the corner may pluck at your heartstrings, but try to resist until you've asked yourself these questions:

- **What size dog can you handle?** It helps to be in good physical shape to train and control a [large dog](#).
- **Do you want a male or female?** If you have [another dog](#), trainers suggest getting a dog of the opposite sex.
- **What is your family like?** Some dogs don't enjoy [children](#), and some consider [cats](#) to be prey.
- **What do you want a dog for?** If you're a [hiker](#), you want an athletic dog. If you prefer staying home, your dog needs to enjoy hunkering down by your feet or on your [lap](#).
- **Do you have time to dedicate to your new dog?** If you have a trip coming up that would force you to leave the new dog behind – wait to get a dog.
- **Is your house [safe](#) for a new dog?** Even older dogs get into cleaning products, human foods that are bad for them, kids' toys, or poisonous plants.
- **Do you have the supplies you'll need right away?** You need: leash, collar, ID tag, dog food, bowls, training treats, dog bed, blanket, crate, gate or pen, and a veterinarian.
- **Can you get a piece of bedding or toys with the scents of the former or foster home?** These may offer comfort in a new place.
- **What are the rules?** Decide where you want the dog to eat and sleep, whether jumping on people or furniture is allowed – and tell everyone in the household.



Day One

You won't know how your dog will act in the car, so confining him with a [crate](#) or a [seatbelt harness](#) is a good idea. Take someone else along to allow you to ride near the dog.

- When you pick up your dog, early in the day if possible, ask when he was fed. Feed the same food on the same schedule at first.
- As soon as you get home, take the dog to the area where you want him to relieve himself – always on a leash. If he does go, give him a treat and praise.
- In the house, confine his space. Gate or pen him in the room where you'll be, or use a leash or long-line to keep him close. Give him some quiet time to rest and feel secure.
- Introduce the dog to household members calmly, one at a time. Wait to allow other people to visit. Supervise carefully when your dog meets children.
- Start him off where you want him to be later – put his crate or dog bed in your bedroom. Put his food and water dish someplace he'll feel safe, so you don't stimulate [guarding behavior](#).
- Keep your new dog separate from other pets. You can [introduce them](#) outside on neutral ground while on leashes – for just a few minutes. In the house, use crates, pens, and gates to keep them apart.

Orientation Period

Continue a [daily routine](#). Dogs are creatures of habit, and they're most relaxed when they know what to expect of you and what you expect of them.

- Keep the dog on the same diet for at least two weeks. If you want to switch foods, do it gradually, mixing the old food with the new one.
- Reinforce positive behaviors. When your new dog does something you approve of, reward with praise and treats.
- Be patient with [housetraining](#), and treat the dog the way you would a puppy – keeping an eye on him whenever he's not confined and giving him frequent walks outside. Just because he was housetrained somewhere else doesn't mean he understands how that works at your house.
- Visit your [veterinarian](#). The first visit should be a greet and treat to get him comfortable.



Getting Onboard

Stay calm and patient, warm and welcoming. A dog who's [anxious](#) and insecure in a new environment can take months to show trust and affection.

- Continue introducing your new dog to your other dog gradually. Take them on a walk together. Keep their food dishes, toys, and treats separate.
- Don't take your dog many other places until he's had a chance to adjust to the new surroundings. If you have to go out, leave and return calmly to prevent [separation anxiety](#).
- If the dog displays behavior issues you're not sure how to deal with, check with an [animal behaviorist](#).

- Beware of the escapists who rush the door whenever someone enters. Keep the dog attached to you, confined, or supervised at all times. Register your contact information with his microchip number.

Bottom Line

Patricia McConnell, animal behaviorist, ethologist, and author of *Love Has No Age Limit: Welcoming an Adopted Dog into Your Home*, says many dog trainers and behaviorists, when welcoming a new adult dog into their household, believe in the magic of threes.

“For the first three days, dogs are often in a bit of shock, and don’t show you too much about who they are until they’ve been there a few days. After three weeks, many dogs have settled and behave as though they feel like they are home now, but they really don’t fit into your routine until about three months have gone by.”

Give it time. Remember, even if you’re doing everything right, a new adult dog may take a while to feel at home. But it’s worth the wait.