

Congratulations on your new dog!

What to expect in the first several weeks and what you can do to help make this work:

Thank you for choosing to adopt! **The #1 most important thing you can do for your new best friend to allow him or her to settle in very, very slowly** (this is known as “decompression”). This will help your dog relax, it will prevent future behavioral issues. By providing a safe, quiet and low-stress environment with lots of predictable routines for your dog, you’ll be setting them up for a lifetime of success.

One of the easiest ways you can ensure a low-stress home for your new pet is to **wait a few weeks (more for fearful dogs) before introducing him or her to new people or animals outside of your home**. Chances are that your new buddy has been through a lot of big changes lately (maybe coming in as an owner surrender or a stray, then living at the shelter, having spay or neuter surgery and now going to another totally new place). Your home will have unfamiliar sounds, smells and routines, so getting used to all of this will be more than enough to handle.

Avoid taking your new friend on walks through your neighborhood for at least the first few weeks (more for fearful dogs). For potty breaks, brief leashed walks in a back yard or side yard, away from cars, people and other animals, will be the best option. The most important thing for your dog will be to continue bonding with you or someone else in your home, not your neighbors or friends. While waiting for the day you can walk through your neighborhood with your new dog, you can do things together indoors and provide your dog with lots of quiet time, engaging in “enrichment” activities (like stuffed kongs, antler chews, puzzle toys, etc).

As soon as possible, **take your new dog to the designated area where you want them to eliminate**. Let them sniff as long as they want to gather information and praise and give a treat to make a positive association with this new area. When your dog eliminates, softly praise and give a treat!

Provide your new dog with an area in your home where they will feel safe. Select an area of your home where your new friend has a choice between being with people and the other members of your household or being alone. It’s important that your new dog feels they have that choice, in case he or she feels overwhelmed.

Initially limiting access to furniture and other rooms in your home will help your new friend from feeling overwhelmed & being confused and will also help reduce accidents. Once you're sure your new friend is housebroken and won't chew on inappropriate items, you can begin allowing supervised visits to other areas of your home. Continue to restrict access to furniture until he or she is completely settled in.

It is not recommended to allow your new dog sleep in your bed until he or she has completely decompressed! This can be very confusing for a new dog and it's best for them to sleep in their crate, maybe even forever. When properly crate trained, most dogs love sleeping in one.

Set up a crate in your dog's safe area. If you use a wire crate, cover it with a crate cover or blanket to make it cozy and dark. It's best to choose a corner of the room and have the open side with the door facing out to where he or she can see and hear what's going on. The crate should be large enough for your dog to stand up and turn completely around without bumping into the sides or top. Place a soft bed or several soft blankets in the crate for comfort. (see crate training document for more info on crate training).

Establish a feeding routine by giving your dog a morning meal and an evening meal. Set up his or her food & water in a quiet corner of a room with low foot traffic, away from your dining area. You can even start feeding your new dog in the crate which will add to the feeling that mealtimes AND the crate are safe, enjoyable, and private.

Have lots of soft, small, "high value" (extra special) treats on hand at all times. Carry them in a pocket or pouch or place cups or bowls of these strategically around the house, that way you always have training treats nearby to reward your dog for good behavior. Avoid saying "NO", as this is way too general of a term and dogs absolutely do not know what it means. (they may learn to stop a behavior when you say it, but they're responding to the stern tone, not the word itself. To really train, we need to always be clear about exactly what we want from a dog. So concentrate on ignoring unwanted any behavior (turn away, walk away, do not reward it with attention, even speaking) and rewarding desired behavior (praise and treat!).

You can **use food to gently lure your new friend into places or positions** and when they get it right, mark that behavior with a verbal marker like "Good!" or "Yes!" and immediately treats. By trying different treats you can determine what is really motivating.

Tiny bits of hot dog, cheese, freeze dried liver, any soft strong smelling treat that is easy for the dog to swallow without thinking about it.

Avoid using bland milk bone-type dog treats or kibble, as these aren't high value and are too crunchy to be used as training treats.

It's natural to want to show your new friend affection but in the beginning, please keep it at a minimum, until your dog feels completely at ease (see body language handout). Here are some guidelines about affection and body language cues:

Keep in mind that **most dogs do not like close physical contact like hugs or pats on the head!** Humans like hugs; dogs generally do not. Always respect a dog's personal space and let them decide how close they want to be. Allow time for trust to build. Every dog is an individual and will take their own time to become comfortable with their new people and environment. If he or she noses you, leans on you or sits on your feet, by all means, they are asking to be petted!

Don't stare directly at your dog, hover over them, or put your face in his or her face. For humans, looking at the person they are interacting with is considered polite and we also like to smile at each other. For a dog, a direct stare or showing your teeth is threatening. So instead, give a brief look and then look away (later you can even teach your dog the cue "Look!" to encourage making longer eye contact) If you feel like smiling, do so with your mouth closed. Sitting or getting down on the dog's eye level makes you more approachable but just try not to crowd the dog. Sitting beside a dog and giving them your side, rather than coming at them from above or face to face, is comforting for fearful dogs.

A general rule of thumb is to **pet dogs below the mouth line.** Under the chin, the shoulders and sometimes, the sides are all safe areas for most dogs. The best time for petting is when the dog moves closer to you and relaxes. Just as important as safe petting practices, do not allow anyone to pass their hand over the dog's head or back. These types of hand movements can be very scary depending on what your dog was exposed to in the past. If the dog moves away, they are sending a signal that they need more space.

When interacting with your new pet, **always watch their body language.** Do you see the whites of their eyes? Are the pupils dilated? Is the mouth closed or closing? Are the ears pinned back? Are the body and tail stiff? Is your dog panting when he or she is not hot or exercising? Are they licking their lips even though they haven't had any food or

water? These are all signs that the dog is uncomfortable and it's time to give them space. (see body language handout)

Let your family, neighbors and friends know what the rules are. We tend to allow other humans to invade our dogs' space, just because they feel like it. Don't worry about appearing rude or unpleasant--you are your dog's protector and advocate, so it's important to stand up for your dog, even if it means telling a person "Please stop", "Please back away" Or even blocking their access to your dog with your body (people can sometimes be really persistent and stubborn when they want to pet a dog!). Do whatever you need to do to keep your dog from getting anxious.

After your new friend is completely acclimated to their new home and family, you can **start to incorporate more daily exercise.** If you feel that he or she is no longer afraid of new things and won't try to back out of a harness, graduate from the Harness Lead to a front-clip harness (like the Freedom No Pull, Wonder Walker or Halti Harness). Continue to use the leash belt. When the weather is nice, you can both go for long walks.

When your dog is ready to meet new people and dogs, you can go for walks with others (see dog-dog intro handout). It's a great idea to also enroll in a training class at this point, to continue teaching your buddy some new life skills (there are force-free training classes in New Bern and Greenville, please see the list). If your dog is dog-friendly, you may even find a play buddy for him or her and schedule play dates in your yard, at a park or in the yard of a friend or family member.

When it's too hot, too cold, too rainy etc, **be sure to give your dog plenty of mental enrichment activities to do indoors,** like work-to-eat toys and puzzle toys. Other fun activities to do indoors: Nosing or kicking around a Jolly Ball (10" hard plastic ball), chewing on an antler, playing with plush toys (preferably ones without squeakers and only allow them when supervised, take them up and put away when you aren't home).

Dogs are very social creatures and want to be with their two or four-legged families as much as possible, so please **do not tie your dog up outside or leave outdoors in a fenced yard or leave them unsupervised indoors for extended periods of time.**

If you experience any issues or have questions, need access to additional training & behavior info, please don't hesitate to call Heather at 252-643-6436 or email lcspcavolunteer@gmail.com. We have access to hundreds of good articles, books, videos and have many professional fear-free, force-free trainers in our social networks who are always happy to jump in and help!

