

# 5 Ways to Create a Lasting Bond With Your Newly Adopted Dog

You've welcomed an abandoned or shelter pet into your home and heart, but you may feel a tinge of anxiety about whether you've made the right choice. Here's what you need to know to help your new dog feel secure and earn her trust as she settles in to become your four-legged best friend.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Finding the perfect dog to adopt requires choosing wisely, using both your head and your heart
- Once you've made your choice, it's time to focus on patience during the acclimation period — turn your attention to all the things you can do for your new animal companion to ease her transition into a new life with you
- Important ways to develop a strong and lasting bond with your newly adopted dog include creating a safe home environment for him, giving him plenty of plenty of positive attention, and starting obedience training and socialization on day one

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Finding the perfect new furry family member is sometimes a matter of love at first sight. But often it's not so simple, which can fill pet parents with anxiety about making the wrong choice.

In addition, animal shelters aren't the best environments in which to meet a future four-legged best friend. Most dogs in shelter situations are stressed and can't be at their lovable best under such trying circumstances.

It's also important to remember that love at first sight isn't often an accurate measure of the depth of the bond that can develop between a pet and his human over time. As an adopted dog learns to feel safe and loved in a new home, his true character reveals itself, and is often very different from his "shelter personality."

The following are 5 important tips for creating a mutually satisfying and long-lasting bond with your newly adopted dog.

## **Tip #1 — Choose Wisely**

Especially if you're a first-time pet parent, you'll need to do lots of research to understand what type of dog is best suited for your activity level and lifestyle. The pet's age will also be a factor — most puppies naturally require more effort and patience than adult dogs.

Before you decide, talk with knowledgeable shelter employees about what type of dog best suits you. Allow them to point you in a direction, and keep your brain engaged along with your heart so that you can make the best choice for both you and the animal you adopt.

Relinquished pets usually come with information about their previous lifestyle and circumstances that can provide very beneficial clues going forward. For instance, a young dog who grew up in a home with lots of kids will have a very different set of behaviors than an older lapdog who lived with a single senior, or a middle-aged retired racing dog who lived in a kennel outside.

Some shelter pets were strays, so their past circumstances are unknown, and some arrive completely untrained or with behavior problems. This isn't their fault — they depended on humans, and someone along the way let them down.

## **Tip #2 — Create a Safe Home Environment for Your New Dog**

Since all dogs who've been abandoned, relinquished to a shelter, or lived on the street have at least some emotional baggage, it's important to set realistic goals for your new pet — especially if you're dealing with a previously abused or shy dog. Take care not to expect an overnight change in your new furry friend, nor a complete turnaround in a dog who had a rough start in life.

It's important your responses (and everyone's in the home) are metered, calm, consistent and kind during the acclimation process. Recognize that the animal you just brought home is stressed and confused, and needs time to adjust to his new life while you focus on creating trust and a safe environment.

It can take time to help a new pet learn to look at the world differently and develop trust in you. With hard work and commitment, your dog will be transformed into a much-loved member of your family, but he can't be reborn, so always keep that in mind. Here are some general guidelines for creating a safe environment for your new dog:

- Communicate clearly with him and use a low, gentle tone; give him as much physical affection as he's comfortable with
- Respect his boundaries by not forcing anything on him. Allow him to adapt to his new family and life at his own pace. Provide him with his own safe place where he can be alone if he feels like it
- Protect him from whatever he fears, while also creating opportunities for him to be successful and build confidence
- Feed him a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet to minimize physiological stress, and make sure he gets plenty of physical activity, including 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise each day in an environment where he feels comfortable

## **Tip #3 — Let Her Adjust and Give Lots of Positive Attention**

If you work full time and plan to bring your new pet home on a Saturday, then head back to the office on Monday, honestly, you're asking for a problem. It's the very rare dog who can settle into a new life in less than 48 hours or spend 8 to 10 hours alone in a strange new environment without going a little bonkers — especially a dog with some baggage who has just been sprung from a shelter.

I recommend taking at least several days off from work to properly welcome your new pet home and get her acclimated and into a consistent daily routine. Many dogs who've been with their family for years don't cope well when left alone for many hours each day, so it's easy to imagine how difficult it is for a newly adopted shelter pet.

Because your prospective animal companion may come to you with baggage, you should be prepared to put in the time and effort required to help her succeed in your home. To help her adjust with a minimum of stress, consider getting a copy of **[A Sound Beginning](#)** prior to her arrival. You can implement the book's tips and tricks (as well as use the calming and stress-reducing music) immediately upon bringing her home.

The more time you're able to spend with your new furry companion, giving her lots of positive attention and teaching her the rules and routines in her new forever home, the better the outcome for both of you.

## **Tip #4 — Start Obedience Training on His First Day Home**

As soon as your dog comes home with you, you should begin training basic, often life-saving obedience commands like come, sit, stay, and down. You might discover he can already follow basic commands.

You might also find that you need to take it very slow, working on just one command a day or for a couple of days or weeks then moving on to a new command. Training sessions should be fun, short (often less than 5 minutes, initially) and positive, and end on a good note.

Behavior modification using a positive reward system is the key to encouraging good behavior. You may be able to accomplish this on your own, or you may need the help of a positive dog trainer or animal behavior specialist. Just please commit to do it. Be the one human in your dog's life who doesn't let him down. You can find a list of fear-free trainers **[here](#)**.

Studies show that attending obedience classes with your dog builds his trust in you and strengthens the developing bond between you. It helps your canine companion learn desired behaviors, and it helps you understand why he behaves in certain ways. If your dog is having trouble adjusting, however, it's a good idea to wait several weeks before enrolling in formal training classes outside your home.

I also recommend assuming your dog was not socialized by previous owners. At a minimum, he won't arrive socialized to all the stimuli in his new life with you. It will be your responsibility to expose him to all the sights, sounds, smells, and other living creatures in his new environment. Take care not to overwhelm him, though. Let him set the pace and use gentle encouragement if he's especially timid or shy.

## **Tip #5 — Find a Vet Whose Approach Aligns With Yours**

In veterinary medicine, there are allopathic and holistic practitioners. Those who combine the two approaches, like me, are called integrative veterinarians.

Allopathic veterinarians are Doctors of Veterinary Medicine (DVMs) traditionally trained in Western, or conventional, medicine. The general approach of allopathic vets is to be reactive; wait for a problem to show itself then treat symptoms of illness or disease. The primary focus is on treating existing symptoms, not preventing degeneration from occurring.

Holistic veterinarians are also DVMs. They receive the same training from the same institutions as allopathic vets; they receive the same licensing and certification.

Then they go on to pursue additional training in alternative methods of healing, including herbs and nutritional supplements, chiropractic, acupuncture, homeopathy, and nutrition and movement therapy. The focus of holistic veterinarians is to use the least toxic options to encourage a healing response in the body.

Integrative veterinarians bring the philosophies of both Western and holistic medicine to their treatment of patients; using the least toxic options to treat problems, with the goal of preventing disease or degeneration in the first place. This requires a proactive approach and involves designing wellness protocols that reduce disease potential over time. Both types of medicine have practical application in the care of companion animals.

In your search for the right veterinarian, it's important to know which treatment approach you prefer for your new rescue. When you and your veterinarian operate as a proactive team, you're more likely to schedule meaningful wellness checkups, and your pet will receive an optimal level of care with the goal of extending healthspan and lifespan.

## **Sources and References**

[Bark November 2019](#)

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