

Two Weeks! Give 'em a break!

The typical action once you have a new dog is to show them off to your friends, neighbors and family. You want to take him or her everywhere with you. You want them to immediately play with your or your friends & neighbor's dog and become buddies. The reality is, your new dog is scared and confused and may very well react out of fear. Take a step back and don't rush to do any of this. Your new dog needs TIME to adjust and start to feel comfortable and safe and to learn his or her **new home** isn't a scary or unsafe place.

By moving too fast and pushing the new dog to acclimate to their new home, environment and routines, you risk a fear-based reaction resulting in snarling, growling, lunging and fights. Your new dog may feel threatened and feel he or she has to defend themselves. Then in about two weeks the rescue gets a call hearing 'I think we will have to return the dog'; 'The new dog barked and nipped at my kid'; 'There was a dog fight, what do we do?'"

Ok folks here it comes, the key to success with a new dog that came from unknown background or not so good home. **Doggy shut down!** Giving the new dog time to adjust to you and your family and your current dogs in their new environment is the key.

Why A Two-Week Shut Down?

The Two Week Shut Down is a time familiar to a dog's mind, as it mimics the whelping box when first born before the puppy's eyes are open and it relies totally on the mother's ability to take care of it. By smelling, sensing and listening, the puppy starts his journey into the new scary world. New adult dogs come into our home the same way, 'a journey into a new and scary world' By giving the dog a 'time out' the dog can learn its new world, its new people and begin to relax and blossom under the care of the new care giver.

We all want to run out with our new dog, show everyone our new pet we forget that even an adult dog is now back to a puppy newborn like mind. Everything is new, the voices speak are a new language, cars might be new, leashes and handling under nice people might be new.

Even petting and acceptance of a pet is stressful on a new dog. The dog thinks '*Who are you? Where did you come from? Where are we going? What is expected of me?*' Just like a new born baby, we wouldn't rush out and pass the baby from person to person. We set up a stable and safe environment. Our new dogs are just like our newborn baby. We need to give the rescue dog a bit of time to heal, mentally and physically.

Step back for a minute and think how you might feel if you were never going to go back to your '*home*' and that you were expected to live with new people who didn't understand your language. What if these new people took you to all sorts of different places expecting you to greet everyone happily and feel comfortable with an overload of attention all at one time? How might you feel after all of that, to have to go to your new home and interact with a bunch of strangers? It's very likely that you'd feel exhausted, overwhelmed, and ready to retreat but you really have no place to go to. You might begin to act out and yell at people for coddling you and insisting that you do this and do that.

Well, many dogs are put in the very same position and the only way they know how to get their point across is to act out or misbehave. The dog may act out by nipping at children because he didn't understand them and was corrected harshly before knowing how to be around them. Growling when being moved off furniture - he didn't know he couldn't be there. *What is expected? Where am I allowed?*

They may start fights with the other animals in the home – *‘that dog was giving me the evil eye my new humans are not leaders; I have to defend myself’*

The ‘How To’ for A Two-Week Shutdown

For the first two weeks, (sometimes even longer depending on the dog) a dog takes in the new environment, wondering who these people are, who these dogs are. By pushing a dog too fast and throwing too much at the dog all at once, we don’t look like leaders and the dog can feel it has to defend itself. We coo, coddle, and drag the dog to home to home, person to person and the dog has no idea who we are or what’s going on, let alone what’s expected of him or her.

A great way of thinking of this time is a line I stole from a friend; *‘this is the dating period not the honeymoon’*. When you first met your mate, you were on your best behavior. You weren’t relaxed enough to be all of yourself, were you? Think of the things you do physically once you get to know a person. You wouldn’t run up to a stranger and hug them and squeeze them, would you? Imagine, if on the first date this new person was all over you touching you and having their friends hug you and pat you on top of the head, and jostle your shoulders, then whisked you off to another stranger’s home and he did the same thing. Would you think this person normal and safe? Would you feel invaded and defensive and begin to get a bit snarky yourself? Wouldn’t you think to push these people away? Yet we do this to our dogs, and then get upset or worried that they aren’t relaxed and accepting of everything instantly. Why do we expect a dog to accept a situation when we ourselves couldn’t?

By shutting down the dog, it gives the dog time to meet you, see you, hear you and take in the new sounds and smells of your home.

* **Crate** the dog in a room by itself if possible. (Believe me, dogs are sensory animals, they know more than you think without seeing it).

* **Leash** (so I don’t have to correct it...I don’t have that right yet!) This also teaches the new safe zone for the dog is around you and the humans in the home. Leash the dog right to your belt or under a piece of furniture. And this also stops the dog from reacting if you have to get him off of something like the couch, you are not reaching in and grabbing onto him, just tug gently on the leash, say ‘come on’ or ‘off’ and there you go, no conflict.

* **No obedience and training** at first, just fun exercise and maybe throw some toys for fun, leash the dog if you don’t have a fence outside use lunge lines if you have too big a yard. But don’t leave your yard, AT ALL. No car rides, no other dogs, (unless crated beside them), no pet stores, no walks. Nothing but me, my home, my yard. (Unless of course the dog needs to go to the veterinarian)

* **Don’t go crazy** petting and handling the dog. Even petting and being ‘out’ in the home puts pressure on a dog because everything is so new. Allowing the dog time to absorb and the decision to come to YOU for pets and affection can do a lot in taking pressure off a new dog.

* **Exercise** - but in your yard! All dogs need to burn off energy. Do fun toss the ball games in your yard or on a lunge line if no fence. Remember to just have fun, let the dog run and explore.

* **Again- no walks yet!** Walks are stressful because there is so much coming at you. Being a new person to this dog you have no clue how the dog will react during a walk. The dog may react to something and we start correcting it with the leash and we just created a VERY STRESSFUL moment to the dog in what should be a fun and happy walk.

Teach the dog by doing the shutdown, that you are the one to look to, that you are now here for the dog. He can trust in you and look to you as its new leader. Then on walks you will see the dog look to you when he sees something like a kid or a dog to see what your reaction is, lessening his mind about having to defend or control the environment, he can now relax and enjoy the walk more.

- **In the house, have the dog out only for about 20-40 minutes** post exercise/yard times and always on a leash. Then put the dog in a crate or separate room. Let it absorb and process everything. Even if just for a little bit. If the dog goes to his crate on his own, he's telling you '*I need time to myself*'. Allow him this time. By having the dog out for long periods of time we are forcing the dog to keep accepting all new things. By putting the dog away, we are asking him to accept a few things, then go think and absorb, when we get him out later, we introduce a few more things, so the three new things are three new things, not 3 x 3 x 3 that can possibly cause the dog to shut down.
- **No new buddies!** Do not introduce the new dog to your dog or new dogs for these two weeks. They can be side by side in crates if you cannot totally separate, (not nose to nose for they can feel defensive). Some dogs will bond instantly with the other dogs if we don't bond **FIRST** with the dog, and this can lead to some other issues, as the dog will look to the other dog(s) for guidance and not YOU.

***Ignore Bad behavior** - Ignore crying and/or barking. If you run to the dog each time they bark, whine, or cry, you are teaching the dog that doing those things gets your attention. The dog must learn to be secure when you are not there. Use the leash to correct jumping, exploring counters, etc.

*** Gently Praise Good behavior** - ex. Dog is sitting nicely next to you, touch or softly pet the dog '*good boy/girl*' let them know you appreciate good behavior. This makes naughty behavior not so fun if you ignore that but praise the good.

Literally, in two weeks you will see a change in the dog and begin to see its honest and true personality. Just like a house guest, they are well behaved and literally shut down themselves these first few weeks, then later they relax and their true personality begins to shine through.

So please, for your new dog, give him/her the time to learn who you are as you are learning who they are. This method works on shy dogs, confident dogs, abuse cases, chained dogs that come in, rowdy dogs, all temperaments. It isn't just the big bully smiles, it's the expression, the way they start to look at you for guidance as you gain their trust and show them calmly and fairly what this new world is like, they literally relax and feel safe.

There is no need to force upon them that we are the leader. With easy guidance, patience and showing them what we do want them to do in their new home instead of correcting them when they do wrong, we instill that we are their leader.

So please for the sake of your new dog, slow down. Way down. Give them a chance to show you who they can be.

The key to successfully integrating your new dog into your home is:

- Patience
- Time

Remember these two things and don't give up! You'll be glad you stayed the course!