

Decompression Protocol

Congratulations on your adoption! The key to success will depend on you providing a safe and low-stress environment. One of the easiest ways you can ensure a low-stress home for your new pet is to wait a week or two before introducing other friends or animals. Chances are good that moving from elsewhere to your home, meeting new companions, and getting used to their new environment will be more than enough to take in without the stress of adding more people or animals to the mix.

Avoid taking your new friend on walks through your neighborhood for at least a week or two. 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 housemate, you can provide your dog with enrichment activities.

As soon as possible, **take your new dog to the area where you want them to eliminate.** Let them sniff as long as they want to gather information and maybe give them a small treat to make a positive association. If they eliminate right away have a small party with treats and lots of praise.

You can **provide your new dog an area in your home where they will feel safe.** Options to consider would include selecting a place with an easy to clean flooring material like tile or linoleum in case of accidents. If that is not a good option because of carpet you can get a sheet of plywood and cover it with plastic as a temporary solution. Remember that accidents are likely and that the first thing to check should it reoccur will be medical issues. 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 on their own. It is all about respecting each other's space; if your dog chooses to hang out by themselves for a while it is important that they have that choice. You can begin allowing supervised visits to other areas of your home once you are sure your new friend is housebroken.

Initially **limiting access to your home to one or two rooms** will help to avoid overwhelming your new friend and will also help to reduce accidents.

This is a good time to **introduce using a crate in your dog's safe area.** You can even start feeding your new dog in the crate at meal times so that it becomes a safe, fun, and private place to hang out. Become familiar with how to properly crate train a dog and do not close the door unless you are sure the dog is already crate trained.

Avoid giving your new friend obedience commands. Imagine having multiple people ordering you around in a language you do not understand, all with different voice ranges and volumes. This is a surefire way to increase stress, the opposite of what you want to

do. Instead, it is okay to lure your new friend into places or positions you would prefer and, when they get it right, you can reinforce that behavior by using kibble with a mixture of training treats and/or using a verbal marker like saying the word yes. By trying different treats you can determine what is really motivating.

It is natural to want to show your new friend affection. Keep in mind **most dogs do not like close physical contact like hugs** which is no surprise since a hug in dog language is interpreted as either aggression or sexual behavior. Most humans like hugs; dogs do not. Always respect their space and let the dog 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 feel comfortable in their new environment. Check out this video as a reference: [Does your dog really want to be pet?](#)

Dogs are very good at picking up on visual cues. **Do not allow anyone to stare directly at your dog or hover over them in a stooped position.** For humans, looking at the person they are interacting with is considered polite. For a dog, a direct stare is an implied threat. Instead, encourage a brief look and then looking away. Sitting or getting down on the dog's eye level makes humans more approachable.

Establish rules for good contact and bad contact that all members of your household will follow. A general rule of thumb is to **keep any petting below the mouth line.** Under the chin, the chest, and the sides are safe areas for most dogs. The best time for petting is when the dog moves closer 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 new friend was exposed to in the past. If the dog moves away, they are sending a signal that should be respected as a sign 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? These are all signs the dog is uncomfortable and needs more space. Time to back off! Check out these videos for some great information on dog body language: [Understanding Dog Body Language](#); [Understanding Dog Body Language Part 2](#)

After your new friend is acclimated to their new home and family, **make sure they are getting enough mental and physical exercise.** They will need a bare minimum of 30 minutes from you per day. You can play fetch, go for long walks or participate in sports like agility. It will be very important to interact with your pet directly as well as giving them mental enrichment activities to do independently. Do not tie them up outside or leave them unsupervised for long periods of time. Leaving them with nothing to do is a recipe for creating a problem dog. Dogs are social creatures and want to be with their two or four-legged family almost constantly.

Fun ideas for enrichment games you can do with your dog during the decompression period and beyond:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akGY7BysAwY&t=76s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ALvDXUsDQM&t=84s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJxG--4t3SU&t=6s>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFnWnejG_IU&t=13s