

Introductions, Please: Helping Foster Dogs Adjust to Temporary Homes

BY MELISSA BAHLEDA, M.A.T., C.B.C.

Fostering dogs can be a rewarding experience or a disastrous one. It all depends on how well you prepare. Carefully introducing your own animals to your new temporary residents is key to retaining a harmonious household, and housetraining your foster dogs will keep that household smelling sweet and improve the dogs' chances for successful adoption. What follows is some advice on both. For more information on crate training and other behavior issues, visit www.petsforlife.org.

Avoiding Fostering Fisticuffs

While disagreements and quests for power are unavoidable when bringing a foster animal into a household already claimed by other pets, you can avoid injuries and stress by stopping fights before they ever begin.

If you plan to foster, your own pets must be non-aggressive and subjected to as little stress as possible. If they display any aggression toward people or animals, contact a good trainer or behavior counselor for advice on behavior modification before even thinking about becoming a foster parent. Consider that the safest scenario may be not to foster at all. If, on the other hand, your pets are calm, friendly, well-socialized, healthy, and behaviorally sound, they can help you with the fostering experience by providing a model of positive behavior.

Whether you're able to bring your pets to the shelter to meet their future roommate (the preferable location whenever possible) or whether they'll be introduced outdoors on neutral ground, here are a few ideas for ensuring harmony in your animal kingdom:

Exercise restraint. When introducing foster dogs to your own animals, all the

dogs should be leashed and able to meet on neutral territory if possible. Resident cats being introduced to a new dog for the first time should have access to escape routes or high perches that dogs can't reach. It is important to remain calm and confident in your handling skills; if the dogs or cats sense that you are nervous or scared, they are also more likely to be nervous and scared and therefore more defensive. If your dogs are leashed, don't tug or pull at them constantly; a dog must be given the freedom to socialize with the other dog, and dogs should be pulled away only if they give an indication that a fight is about to occur (frozen body posture, raised hackles, snarling, growling, or snapping).

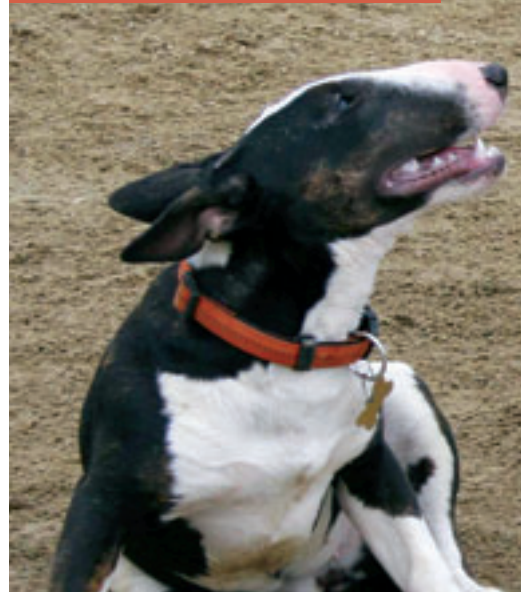
Observe the signals. Because "reading" a dog or cat's behavior is key to preventing fights, it's essential to familiarize yourself with canine or feline behavior and body language *before* engaging in this process. If a serious fight is going to occur, chances are you will know it in the first few minutes of the animals' interaction. If either animal becomes frightened, stressed, or aggressive, remove both animals from the situation immediately.

Bestow praise, but stay guarded. Once you've determined that the new dog and resident pets are getting along, praise them for this positive behavior and allow them to continue to interact. Don't forget, however, that a foster pet is basically an unknown entity, and no matter how well the animals seem to be getting along, you should never leave any foster animal alone and unattended with other pets and children.

Break up fights safely. If a fight does occur, do not put yourself between the fighting animals! This is a recipe for disaster—and one of the easiest ways to get bitten. Instead, distract the animals by dousing them with water or making a loud, startling noise, such as banging on a large pot. Once the animals are separated and you can safely handle them, leash or crate them to prevent another fight, and call your shelter, trainer, or veterinarian for assistance.

Set aside time for your own pets. Once your resident animals and temporary houseguest have begun settling in comfortably together, allow your pets to socialize with foster animals, but also try to plan activities that involve only you and your immediate furry family. This helps prevent your pets from harboring resentment toward your foster dog.

This article, written as a companion piece to the features that start on page 20, is intended for distribution to new volunteers and other members of the public who are interested in fostering dogs. Author Melissa Bahleda is a certified canine trainer and behavior counselor.





INDIA LAWSON



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Proper Potty Training

Housetraining your foster dog or puppy will be a priority. Even dogs who've had previous training may need to start from scratch, as life in the shelter sometimes causes them to abandon their house-trained ways. Two rules are key:

Rule #1: Do not paper train unless you are willing to spend a great deal of time and effort deprogramming and then reprogramming the dog at a later stage. Dogs develop a “substrate preference,” an inclination for using a particular kind of surface on which to relieve themselves. So if you must paper train, scatter leaves, grass, and dirt on the paper to ease the dog's transition to outdoor elimination.

Rule #2: Never hit the dog or rub his nose in his mess. This will only traumatize the dog and make him think that he just shouldn't “go” in front of you. After all, at first, he may have no idea that he is not supposed to relieve himself in your house.

Now you know what *not* to do. But what *should* you do to train your new friend in a positive manner?

Watch for the squat. The best housetraining involves crate training, patience, and most of all, vigilance. Dogs and puppies will usually spend some time sniffing around, and then they'll either lift a leg or squat to urinate and defecate. Remember, for the first one to two weeks, your foster dog must be supervised constantly, so watch him closely when he is out of his crate. If he starts sniffing around and seems to look for “his spot,” squats, or goes to the door and cries, take him outside immediately. If he goes, praise him profusely, for he has done a great thing. Encourage him to relieve himself outdoors by giving an elimination command (“Go potty!” or “Go pee!”), and use this command every time you walk him outside, praising him every time he goes.

Make brief use of the crate. If, after several minutes, he has still not gone, take him back inside, place him back in a dog crate for another 20 to 30 minutes, and

then take him outside again and repeat the process. The dog should not be allowed to roam freely in your house until he has relieved himself outside, and within days, he should catch on to the fact that he is free to play in the house and socialize with you only when he has “gone potty” outside. For an older puppy or mature dog, placing a bell on your doorknob and encouraging him to ring the bell before you take him outside will also give him a way to let you know when he needs to go out.

Catch him in the act. If it is too late and the dog has already done his business in the middle of your living room floor, do not overreact. (Remember Rule #2.) Point to the mess, tell him “No” or “Uh-Uh” without yelling, take him outside, and encourage outdoor elimination.

If you can catch the dog in the act, startle him (clap your hands and say “Hey!” or “What are you doing?”) and take him outside. If you can get him to finish outside, you have just had a golden opportunity to teach him exactly what you want and exactly what you don't want. Lots of praise is in order!

Control odors. Some dogs, including unneutered and recently neutered males—and dogs who have been chained in the past or have been kept exclusively outdoors—may be resistant to your housetraining attempts, especially if other dogs have eliminated inside your house in the past. Use an enzymatic cleaner to thoroughly clean any previously soiled areas before bringing your foster dog home, or keep the dog out of areas where old odors may encourage him.

Monitor health. If the dog is still soiling your house after two weeks of vigilant housetraining, or if he begins to eliminate in the crate, call the shelter or your veterinarian for assistance, as the dog may have a health problem that's preventing successful housetraining. 🐾