

Resocializing the Rescue Dog

by Marjorie Satterfield

Rescued, pre-owned, abandoned, found you, selected from a shelter; second hand dogs. All of these dogs have something in common. They are lucky to have someone kind to take them in and an even greater need of a secure, loving, permanent home. When selecting your canine companion, common sense dictates the family discuss what kind of dog would be best suited to a certain lifestyle. (If the canine friend finds you, this won't be necessary.) If looking for a pure-bred dog, call the local breed clubs as most run rescue groups. Don't expect to adopt a puppy under 8 months of age. Most dogs are surrendered at 8 to 20 months of age. If searching for a mixed breed, younger puppies are more readily available. Most shelters also have a return policy.

All pre-owned dogs come with emotional baggage. They may have been abused physically as well as emotionally. They may not physically feel well, or may have been injured. It's a challenge to take all of this into account but not let it overshadow making adoption successful. Here are a few suggestions to help integrate the rescue dog into the family.

The dog needs a crate, first and foremost, for housebreaking problem prevention and travel. House-training is best achieved with the use of a crate. It is the only method guaranteed to get the job done, no matter what the age of the dog. The dog also needs a crate for transportation. (Even the Hilton Hotel will take dogs that come with their crates.) Use a crate for chewing prevention, an untrained, anxious dog can ruin your house if left loose unattended. Give the canine friend a room with a view. Every dog needs a place to call his own, and someplace to be sent when he is rotten.

Crating an unmonitored dog, can prevent expensive heartbreaking, needless destruction.

The dog needs a bond with the human companion. Make time for the new dog. Include the dog when cooking, writing letters, or doing lawn work. Dogs need quiet times to absorb things in silence. They need time to connect and become attached. The dog needs patience, affection, and quiet firmness. Rules and regulations will make the dog secure. "Fido" needs reasons to feel proud of himself again, and work is a great way to achieve this as it's the best medicine for anxious, insecure creatures. Obedience classes are a must. Obedience instruction builds a dog's confidence, employs the owner as pack leader, and results in an easy to live with dog. (Expect to attend more than one nine week session.)

The dog needs a diet of dog food. The dog needs a sensible, balanced diet made especially for his species-dog food. The dog does not need shrimp and lobster sauce, chocolate chip cookies, beer or french fries. Ninety percent of the canine diet should be nutritionally complete DRY dog food. If it suits you, flavor the dry food with a little canned dog food or homemade chicken or beef broth. Most dogs, especially large dogs, appreciate two meals a day.

Groom for mutual relaxation. A clean dog, who is free of parasites and tangles, will feel and look better. When his coat is clean and healthy, he'll likely get more attention.

The dog needs time to sniff, roll around in the grass, swim, dig to China, lie around and watch the sun go down. A rescue dog needs time to be alone and time with a human companion. He needs company so let him sleep in your room.

You can give the dog a free eight hours of your time by letting it sleep in your room. He's lonely sometimes and needs quiet company. He is also a pack animal. If it pleases you and if he's not aggressive, sure, let him sleep on the bed. Take time to teach the "invitation only" method. A command will surely get him up lickety split.

Appropriate eye contact is necessary. In the wild, eye contact usually keeps the packs in line. It maintains order, avoids conflict and is a speedy, silent reminder of who is the boss.

Proper socialization insures a well-balanced, flexible animal who can take all kinds of surprises in stride. It results in a dog who can tag along to get the morning paper, a dog who is trustworthy with children, and a dog from whom you can take a bone. This is the dog you can offer a lasting place in your home and heart.

Realistically speaking, the rehabilitation of a rescue dog could take up to a year. Be sure to get professional help. Dogs aren't born bad. Given the right upbringing, or re-upbringing, any breed or mixed breed can be a solid, trustworthy, gently canine citizen, a reliable pet, and a loving companion.

Award winning scholar, Marjorie Satterfield, has been training dogs for 16 years. She and her family share their home with dogs, cats, and a cockatiel. Her canine behaviorism business is "Happy Tails".