

Your New Dog: The Transition Period

Congratulations! Adopting a new dog is a very exciting and wonderful time.

What is the transition period?

The transition period is the "getting to know you" time for your new dog and your family. This time can be very exciting but at the same time you should expect a fair amount of disruption to your peaceful life during the transition.

How long will it take?

The transition time is different for each dog and family. It can take from weeks to months. Each dog has a different background. He may have come from a loving home or he may have no known history at all. Some dogs settle in with very little trouble while others exhibit stress and need more help. Dogs that have had very little training will take longer to fit in and need more help. If you have adopted a puppy you should expect to spend a year of transition, socialization and training.

Day One

The day your new dog arrives the excitement and anticipation can be overwhelming for both you and your new dog. Let us look at the day from the dog's point of view. In the last month or two he has probably experienced several stressful situations such as being alone on the street, time in a shelter, removal from his family, vet visits and surgery. The day he arrives, he has probably traveled far with many new faces along the way. He has probably just figured out his "place" within the foster family and now his world is changing again. This change can be quite a sensory over load.

From Day One Forward

Does your new dog "know" that he is about to begin a brand new life with you? No. Does he "know" that this is his forever home? No. For the moment, you and your family are strangers. Introductions should go slowly. Instead of rushing up to him and putting your hands all over his head (that's exactly

what you would LOVE to do but on "planet dog" that would be a very rude introduction), call him to you while holding your hand out for him to sniff. If there are several family members, take turns letting him approach each person at his own pace. Avoid swarming around him and petting him on top of his head. Respect his need for personal space and do not hug him at this point. In human terms, picture Auntie coming for a visit and greeting little Tommy by grabbing his cheeks while exclaiming, "My how you have grown!" and planting a kiss on his forehead. To your new dog (and little Tommy) it is an issue of space and comfort level. Most Springers enjoy the attention of everyone, while others will enjoy and even beg for petting and cuddling once they get to know someone. On this day of sensory overload and stress it is best to take introductions slowly.

My New Backyard

Begin by giving your new dog plenty of time to check out his new yard. If the yard is fenced, let him off the leash but do not leave him alone. If the yard is not fenced then walk him around the yard and let him sniff out the new turf. Don't rush him especially if he has been on a long transport to get to you. Give him ample opportunity to eliminate. Rides in the car are usually followed by a bowel movement. Ask your transport connection if he has eliminated yet today. Once he settles down, bring him into the house. You will want to do this on a leash so that you can gently guide him on a tour of his new home. ·

If you have a cat, please read the file on introducing your new dog to your cat.

If you already have a dog, please read the file on introducing your new dog to your dog.

Some male dogs, in the excitement of the first day, will "mark" your house. Because he has been given ample opportunity to mark the yard, his bladder should be fairly empty. Interrupt him by saying "No!" Use the leash to guide him to the door to the yard and say "Outside!" in a neutral voice. Be sure to clean and deodorize the spot. Use an odor neutralizer.

Take him outside every two hours even if he is house trained. When dogs are nervous, stressed or excited they will pant more, drink more and, you guessed it, urinate more. Taking him out to his yard frequently will help to set up his new routine by repeatedly showing him the correct door and area to eliminate thus avoiding an accident. Use a word in an upbeat tone of voice to indicate what you want, "outside?" or "Go potty" for example. Don't forget to praise him when he eliminates in the yard.

Signs of Stress

Dogs deal with stress in different ways. Stay calm and watch for signs of stress that may include excessive drinking, pacing, over active "out of control" behavior, attaching to one member of the family, trying to escape, hiding.

Take extra precautions especially in the first few days. Keep his identification tags on him and be careful to keep him secure in the yard or house until he understands that this is "home".

Transition Tips

Dogs are calmer and feel more secure when they know what to expect. Keep your dog's routine as predictable as possible especially in the first few weeks. Arrange to be home for a few days to help him settle in.

Wait a few weeks before taking him all over town, to a dog park or to a PetSmart. Give him time to settle down and get to know you, first.

Develop a vocabulary to communicate with him by saying one word or short phrase every time a specific action is taken. For example, many dogs quickly learn that "ride" or "car" means that he is going for a ride in the car.

In the confusion of being in a new home, some dogs will be reserved and on good behavior called the "honeymoon period". These dogs will handle stress by being cautious and responsive and seem perfect. Others will test the limits of the new environment and seem out of control or become unhousetrained. In both cases once the dog relaxes in the new home his behavior will change and the honeymoon is over. It is up to you, the

benevolent leader, to show the way. After a period of weeks or months the dog with reserved, good behavior will relax and begin to show more of his personality ("He's never done that before!"), while the "tester" will have tried one of everything and, with your leadership, will have figured out what works and what doesn't and what you expect.

Give him a "place" of his own away from the household traffic to rest. Instruct children to leave him alone when he is there.

Training Tips

Before your dog arrives, have a family meeting and decide what your house rules will be. To be fair to the dog, all members need to stick to the rules FOREVER. Is he allowed to beg at the table? If you are inconsistent then the dog will assume that you all have no idea what you want and he will choose to do whatever HE wants. He will ALWAYS choose to beg at the table. Dogs need to know what to expect so as a family group you must all send the same message.

Begin enforcing these rules from the first day. If you let your Springer "run wild" for the first week or so because he is new, he will have a harder time following the rules and living up to your expectations.

Invest in a book on positive reward training and plan to take him through basic obedience after he has been with you for a month or two.

What your dog "knows" is that good things happen and bad things happen. He would rather have the good things and will work to make them happen. If we could read his mind he might think "Hmm, when I do this, these humans act REALLY happy and pet me and give me a TREAT!!! I think I'll do that AGAIN!!!"

Dogs live "in the moment" so any praise or correction must be exactly at the moment the behavior happens not two minutes later. Praise should be lavish and possibly include a treat and a correction should be a simple "No!" or "Too bad" followed by no treat or attention. He will notice the difference. The presence or absence of praise and treat can be a very powerful training tool and allows your dog to participate in the learning process. If a dolphin can

learn to jump through a hoop, there is no limit to what you and your dog can accomplish!

Be Prepared

Before you bring him home have a plan to confine him when you are away. Even if he was not confined in his previous home, he should be confined during the transition. Too much freedom when he is alone may also add stress. The type of confinement depends on the dog. Talk this over with his foster family.

Don't be surprised if he tries some "naughty" behavior in the first weeks or months. Help him by limiting his opportunities for mischief. For example, keep the kitchen counters free of food. Springers are notorious for counter surfing and once he succeeds in stealing food he will be ever hopeful that he will succeed again. The key is not to let it happen the first time. If he is never successful his expectations will decrease.

Be Patient

Be patient with your new dog especially if you find that he does not seem to measure up to your expectations. Relationships take time to develop. You may need to adjust your training style to meet the needs of his personality.

Over time that bond between you and your dog will form and you will wonder how you ever lived without him.

If you have any questions, please email MAESSR at springerrsq@yahoo.com.