



# INFORMATION SHEET

## THE FIRST FEW DAYS - SET UP FOR SUCCESS!

When you take home a new dog or puppy from the Shelter, remember that the first few days in a new home can be stressful for a dog. They don't know the family, the house, the yard, the neighbourhood noises and smells, or other pets. Adopted adult dogs may find your home to be a very different place to what they are used to.



There are some things we can do to help them settle in and feel safe in those first few days. Keep in mind though, that it generally takes about three to four weeks for a dog or puppy to start to feel 'at home'.

### Dog proof your home

This is an activity you should do before you get your dog or puppy home. We know with puppies that they aren't toilet trained, or chew trained, or house trained, and some adult dogs might also need some degree of house training.

It's best to pick everything up or put it away. Check for exposed power cords that could be chewed and consider turning power switches off when the dog or puppy is unsupervised. As you get to know your new dog, as you train them, and provide for their needs (e.g. chew toys such as human-grade raw meaty bones, stuffed Kongs, pigs ears and exercise through games and daily walks), you can then start to put those things back if it's safe to do so.

### Toilet training

Start toilet training as soon as you get your puppy home. While most adult dogs are already toilet trained, some may need further training. Remember that toileting training takes a lot of time and patience and every puppy or dog is bound to make at least a few mistakes during the learning process.



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To make the process of toilet training successful and as efficient as possible, you need to use **reward-based positive reinforcement training**.

The first step is to give your dog plenty of opportunities to go outside to the toilet area. The second is to reward the dog every time (or as often as possible) they toilet in the right spot.

The reward must occur immediately after the event (within a few seconds), not when the dog comes back inside, as the dog will not make an association between going to the toilet in the right spot and the reward unless it is given straight afterwards.

The reward can be in the form of praise (a pat on the chest or saying 'good' dog in a pleasant tone of voice), offering a food treat or giving the dog their favourite chew toy. Rewards reinforce the behaviour in a kind way, and make it much more likely the dog will go in the right spot again.

Positive reinforcement also involves ignoring 'unwanted' toileting - i.e. if the dog goes to the toilet in the wrong spot it is best to display no reaction at all. You should clean the area thoroughly with a non-ammonia based cleaning product (these can be found at your local veterinary clinic or animal supplies store) to take away the scent and reduce the likelihood of the dog using the same place again next time.

Dogs are likely to have at least a few toileting mistakes during the learning process, ignore these and continue to take your dog to the right toilet spot and reward them when they get it right.

Old-fashioned responses such as 'rubbing the dog's nose in it' or administering any form of punishment will not teach the dog anything, in fact it may actually delay the learning process. The dog may instead learn that toileting in front of the owner is inappropriate and this then makes rewarding toileting (when they do go in the right spot) difficult.

It is very important to note that young puppies often do not have full control over their urination until they are a bit older. That is, urination is a developmental process, so very young puppies can have a toileting mistake without being able to prevent or control it.



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See: [How can I toilet train my puppy/dog?](#)

The best environment to provide for your dog or puppy is an error free one that doesn't allow them to make mistakes.

## Children

Whilst the adoption of a new pet is a very exciting event for children, their enthusiasm must be supervised. It is essential that a new dog is not crowded by children or forced to interact with them. When it is time for the children to meet the dog make sure everyone is calm and quiet with a small treat on the palm of their open hand, and one at a time they may call the dog or puppy over. Teach the children how to pat and stroke the dog safely by gently patting the dog on the chest, and not on the top of its head or tail. Rewarding the dog for calm behaviour with a food treat helps to reinforce calm behaviour around children and also associates children with something positive. Then take the focus off the dog by giving the children another activity. This way the dog can get to know the children at a pace it is comfortable with.

**Children must always be directly supervised with dogs.** Always ensure the dog can get away from the children if they want to and do not force any interactions. Children should avoid hugging dogs as this can make the dog feel trapped.

Teach the children that when the dog is sleeping or even just lying on its bed, that it is to be left alone.

Just as dogs need to be taught how to behave around children, children also need to be taught how to behave around dogs. One of the first lessons is to teach children to respect dogs and not treat them as a toy. Remember, children should never be left alone unsupervised with a dog or puppy.

See: [Will my new-born baby be safe around my dog?](#)



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## Home Alone

It is always a good idea, if commitments allow, to take a few days off work or at least have the weekend to help settle a new dog or puppy into your home.

When you first bring your dog home, you need to spend time together, for example playing games in the yard, and just being with your dog while they explore their new home. When you're not at home, provide a safe, comfortable and escape-proof housing area for your dog. Include a comfortable sleeping area, drinking water and chew toys. This area may be inside or another suitable area at your place.

The first time you leave your dog unsupervised in the back yard, do it while you are home and give them something to do to keep them there, such as a raw meaty bone (always ensure raw meat/raw bones are human-grade) or stuffed Kong. Watch your dog from inside your house. Over the next few days, gradually increase the time that the dog is left unsupervised in the yard. Always give your dog an activity to do, such as a treasure hunt for food treats, a raw meaty bone, a stuffed Kong, or a treat ball. If possible come home at lunch time to give the dog some company and to leave them with another activity for the afternoon.

It's also a good idea to exercise your dog before leaving them on their own for a time, this can help to expend some of their energy, tire them out and make it less likely they'll put that energy into fretting about where you are. **Note** dogs should not be exercised immediately before or after eating as it can cause problems such as bloat (which can be fatal), particularly in deep-chested dogs.

## Consistent reward-based training

Reward-based training is the most humane and effective way to train dogs. This type of training sets the dog up to succeed, and then rewards them for performing the 'good' behaviour (positive reinforcement). Rewards may be in the form of a food treat or favourite chew toy, to be given when the dog performs the 'good' behaviour.



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Reward-based training is enjoyable for the dog and positively enhances the relationship bond between the dog and handler. Consistency is also key, so it's important to make sure the whole family knows how to reward 'good' behaviour and ignore 'unwanted' behaviour. Teaching the dog the household rules will enable the family and the dog to live in harmony together.

This article contains an example of what to do if a dog is jumping up to greet people: [What is reward-based dog training and why does the RSPCA support it?](#)

## Sleeping area

It's important to provide a safe, secure and comfortable sleeping area for your new dog. Most dogs prefer to sleep indoors and preferably in the same room as their owners as they are social animals and like their owner's company. If your dog indicates that they would prefer to sleep indoors and where this is safe to do so you may decide to allow your dog to sleep indoors (avoid leaving a dog with children unsupervised).

Before putting the dog or puppy to bed, make sure they have been fed and have had opportunities to go to the toilet before bedtime.

You can also incorporate exercise and play into the pre-bedtime routine. This can help to tire the dog out and make it more likely they will settle down for sleep. Just remember that dogs should not be exercised immediately before or after eating as it can cause problems such as bloat (which can be fatal), particularly in deep-chested dogs.

If you have a puppy or dog, and it cries during the middle of the night (e.g. it has woken from sleep), you need to get up and take it outside for a toilet break. Remember to reward them when they go to the toilet in the right spot.

Be prepared, let your neighbours know that you are bringing a new dog or puppy home and there may be some settling in issues.



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## Feeding

For dietary information see the RSPCA Australia knowledgebase:

[What should I feed my puppy?](#)

[What should I feed my dog?](#)

For more pet care information see the [RSPCA Australia knowledgebase](#)

Please contact your local RSPCA for advice. Contact details are available here: <http://www.rspca.org.au/contact-us>

We are here to help you and your dog, and just like you, we want this adoption to work out. It is much better to call and address any issues early on, than to struggle on and have them escalate.

Enjoy many happy times with your new best friend!