



Hearts & Bones Rescue

Dos and Don'ts of Decompression for a New Dog

By Natasha Domanski, Urban-K9 Dog Training

CONGRATULATIONS! You are doing an amazing thing for the life of a sweet dog and now have the honor of being their family, best friend, leader, and entire world.

Your main goals for the first few months are to keep this pup safe AND to introduce some structure in order to help them acclimate to their new environment.

This entire experience will read as **“structure is love”**. Many nervous dogs or dogs in transition appreciate structure and predictability. If you show them this from day one, they will ultimately feel secure in your home and neighborhood. By working together with your dog, your success rate in building a strong relationship will be so much higher, and it will help to avoid challenging behaviors down the road.



What to do when you get home

1. Walk the dog before you bring them into your home (with their equipment backed-up) and give them water as they arrive. They have likely been on transport from the south, or an adoption event, and it has been a long, exhausting day.
2. Resist the urge to cuddle the dog and gently lead them to their crate, allowing them to decompress in a safe place. Make sure the crate is placed somewhere they can watch you. A 15-20 minute rest is required for them to calmly take in their new surroundings. During this time, your new dog is watching, listening, sniffing, and absorbing information at a safe distance. It's a nicer way to ease into this overwhelming new place and person.
3. Take them on a short walk again after crate time, as they are likely to potty. If you live in an urban area, try to direct them to a grassy/dirt patch, as even a housetrained dog will find the cement confusing and will hold their potty instead. Make sure you bring treats and give high praise for any outside potties!
4. When you return from your walk, allow your dog to patrol their new home, guiding them with a leash and positive reinforcement. Then, back to the crate. Even if your dog doesn't seem tired, they need their crate to continue absorbing and decompressing.
5. Continue this process with increasingly longer lengths of time outside of the crate. As the day progresses, try to get them on a regular walking schedule so they may predict the time they can go to the bathroom. Begin with walks once per hour and slowly stretch the time between walks from there.
6. Lastly, **remember**: You have been waiting for this day for a long time, and your excitement is wonderful! But your dog has no idea what's happening. They will likely be extremely tired, confused, nervous, and even scared, and they will be grateful to you for the chance to safely rest and adjust.

There are a few **VERY** important rules to follow in the first months to set you and your new dog up for success:

- No furniture for the dogs. You may be okay with it until the unknowing pup potties on your couch or bed. OR you may be sending them mixed signals about who is alpha. We want to show them as much as we can that **not everything that's mine is yours**. Setting this boundary during the decompression phase is the easiest way to assert yourself as alpha from the first day. They will learn to look to you for guidance, which is what they want and need.
- If you are busy, the dog **MUST** be in the crate. This means while you are at work, while you are in the shower, while you are on your Peloton, etc. For the pup's safety, you must have eyes on them the entire time they are free roaming in your home. This may last a few months, or it may last always, depending on the dog's temperament.

Just like with house training, if your dog was crate trained previously, it may not translate to their new home. Dogs are den animals and generally love having their own space to retreat to. To help them learn that their new crate is their "bedroom", feed them all of their meals in the crate with the door closed. If you feel that they are still unable to relax in the crate, please consult crate training rules with a Hearts & Bones team member or post on the Facebook group for support.

New dogs shouldn't be on your furniture, but that doesn't mean you can't treat them to some canine-only furniture. Dogs loving having a cozy spot all their own – just check out alum Nash (right) feeling totally relaxed in the stylish dog bed his mom custom built for him.



Do

Let them take their time sniffing your things while you watch them

Use the crate and the leash as a way to show them there are boundaries in this space

Say their new name often with a positive tone

Bear in mind that making a schedule for them will likely change your schedule, and be prepared to adapt to it

Establish a routine for crate time, walk time, meals, and bedtime – and make sure that everyone in the home commits to the same routine for the dog

Start some fun training commands like sit, paw, look – anything that helps you bond

It is true what they say about decompression

It takes **3 days** for the dog to relax,

3 weeks for them to understand a pattern aka the way things work in your home and routine,

and **3 months** for them to be fully acclimated and comfortable around you



Don't

Don't overstimulate the dog when you arrive home! This is the most frequent and biggest mistake that new dog owners make.

"We were so excited about having a dog that everyone was smothering him too much – that really freaked him out."

– Adopter of Milo, summer 2020

Don't immediately introduce them to other animals. Give them three days to decompress before intros. This means neighbors' or relatives' dogs or other types of animals in the house (i.e.: turtles, birds, cats).

Don't let them up on furniture during the first months of decompression. Keep in mind that for some dogs, this may need to be a lifetime rule.

Don't immediately bring them to a family member or friend's house or have people over. It is critical not to confuse them by introducing them to other people – they need to bond to you first.

Do NOT have them off leash until you have owned them for 6 months and feel fully confident in their recall. Before 6 months of ownership – and for many, long after – rescue dogs are what we refer to as a "flight risk". No matter how much they may love you, there is still the possibility that they will run, especially if they are frightened suddenly (often inexplicably). We do not want that experience for any of you.

Don't rush anything. The best thing you can do for your new family member is to take it slow, give them space, and try to go at their speed.

And don't panic! We'll be honest: The first few weeks – and for some, months – can be tough. You may feel like you made the wrong decision, or that your new dog doesn't fit into your schedule or routine. Give your dog time to learn the structure that YOU set for them. Try to imagine how scary this time must be for them. They've been taken away from everything they've ever known and thrown into a new place with zero information! With your patience and guidance, they will become a confident and loving dog in no time.

Now – give them those cuddles when they're finally ready, and post those pups on social media! Your incredible new journey together has begun. And remember: we're here for you every step of the way!

Thanks, H&Bs!!!