

# The Dos and Don'ts of Decompression for Foster Dogs

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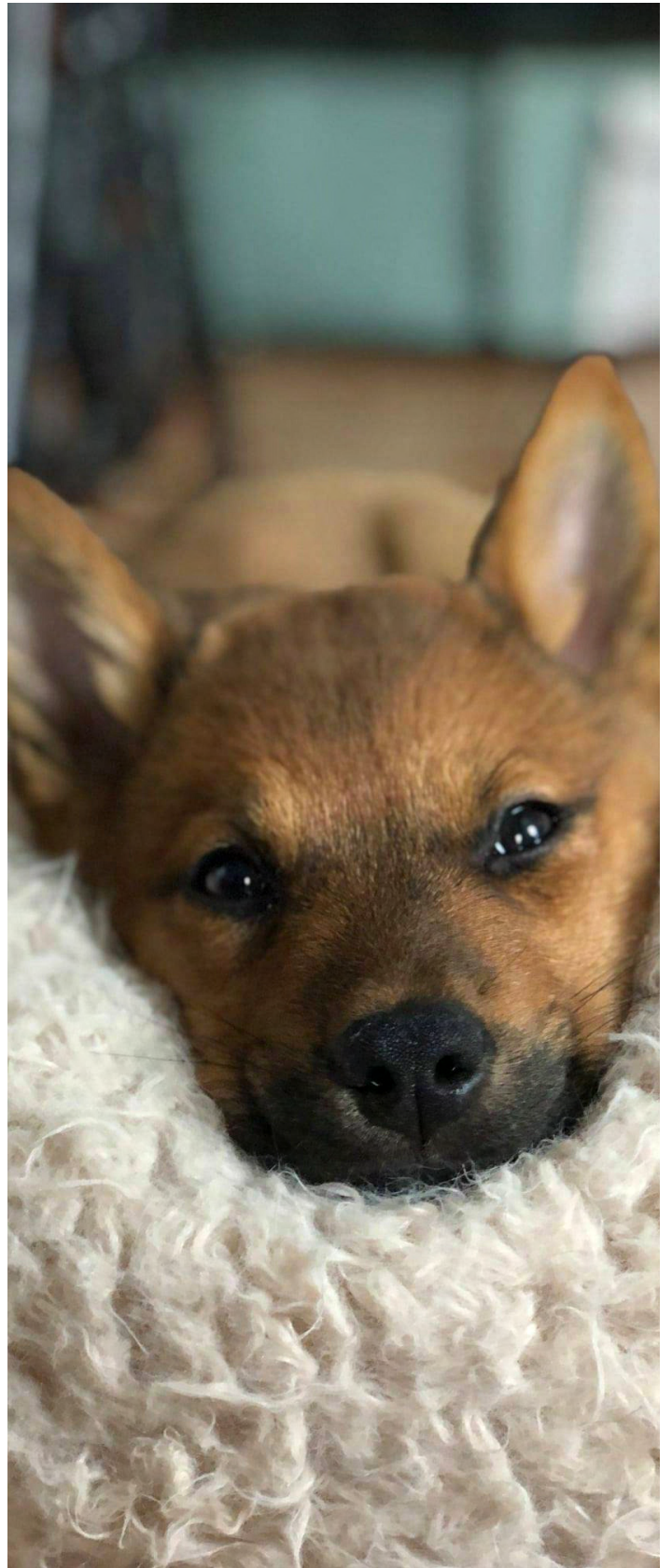


# CONGRATULATIONS!

You are doing an amazing thing for the life of a sweet dog by fostering and now have the honor of being their fearless leader while they adjust to the beginning of their new life. As a foster, you play a key role in setting your foster pup up for success in their forever home. What they learn during their time with you will follow them into the next chapter of their life. Your goal is to make their transition as seamless as possible, and to give them the space and love to begin the difficult process of decompression. This guide will provide you with the tools and knowledge to lead them!

Your main goals for the first week 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. Working with your foster right away improves their success rate in becoming a confident dog, and it will help their future adopters 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.
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 go to the bathroom. 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 going to the bathroom instead. Make sure you bring treats and give high praise for any outside bathroom action!
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 and slowly rest and adjust.

# There are a few very important rules to follow while the foster dog is in your care to set you both up for success:

- No furniture for the dogs. You may be okay with it until the unknowing pup has an accident on your couch or bed. OR you may be sending them mixed signals about who is in charge (you). 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 their leader 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, in the shower, or exercising, 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 always be the case, depending on the dog's temperament.
- Your foster dog **must** be crated at night. This keeps the dog from developing separation anxiety and also protects them from getting into anything that could harm them, i.e. eating a sock.

Remember:

Just like with housetraining, 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.

## It is true what they say about decompression:

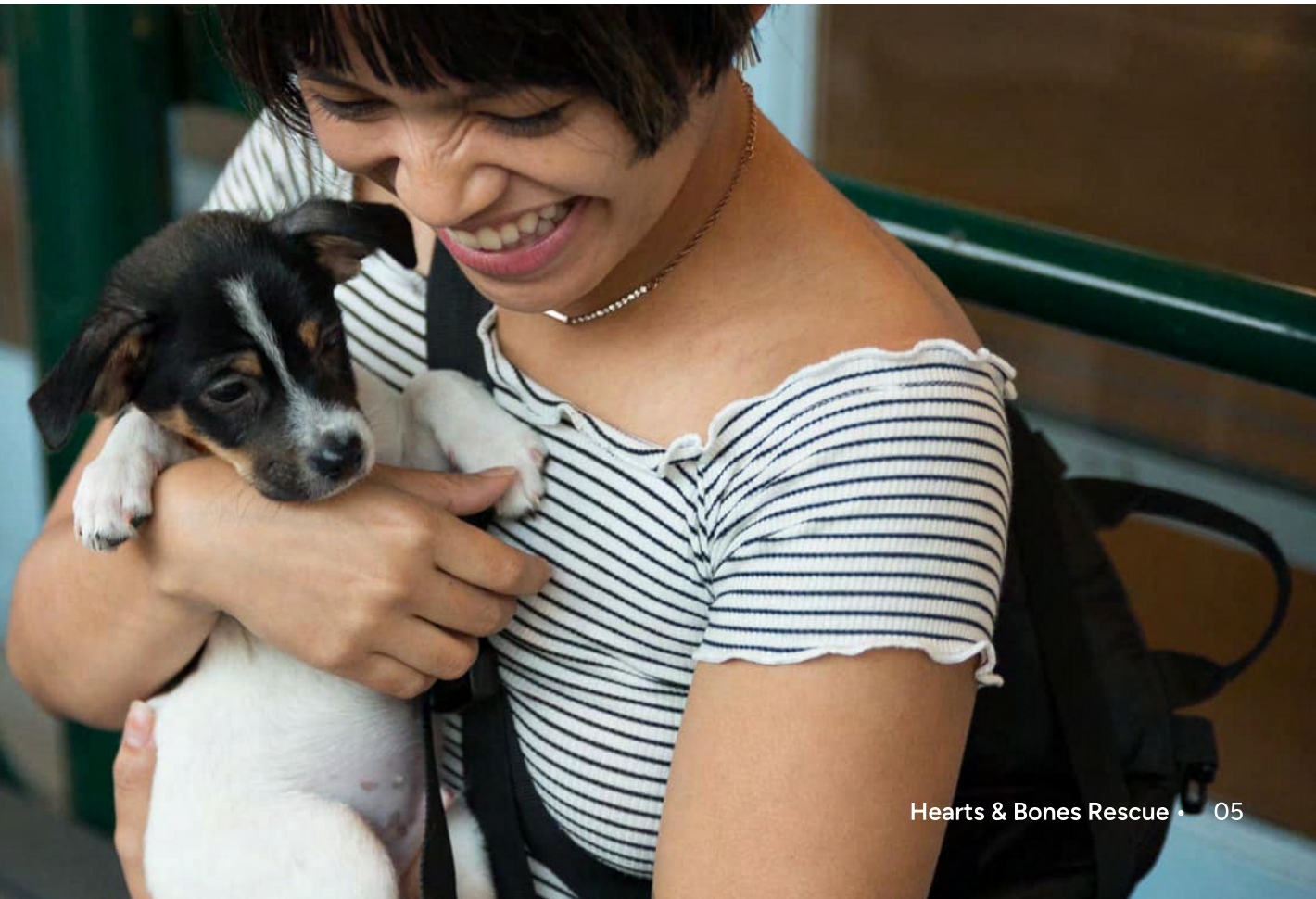
It takes **3 days** for the dog to relax, **3 weeks** for them to understand a a routine and pattern in the way things work in your home, and **3 months** for them to be fully acclimated and comfortable around you.

Keep in mind that for some dogs, it can take even longer!

**Since most foster dogs will only be in your care for a few weeks, it's important to set the decompression structure. This way, when they do find their forever home, they're already prepared with understanding the base rules:**

## **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 and rituals around crate time, walk time, meals, and bedtime – and make sure that everyone in the home commits to the same system for the dog;
- Start some training commands like sit, touch, look – anything that keeps them stimulated and helps you bond and your communication foundation with your foster dog.



## Don't

- **Don't overstimulate the dog when you arrive home.**
- Don't immediately introduce them to other animals.
- Give them at least three days to decompress before intros. This means neighbors' or relatives' dogs or other animals in the house (i.e.: turtles, birds, cats).
- Don't let them up on furniture during the first days of decompression.
- 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.
- **Never** have them off leash outside. Rescue dogs are what we refer to as a “flight risk”. No matter how obedient they seem or 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, and keeping our pups safe is our highest priority.
- **Don't rush anything.** The best thing you can do for your foster dog 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 days can be hard. You may feel like your foster dog is too much for you to handle. Give the 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.

Your incredible journey as a foster parent has begun and we can't wait to see your foster pup blossom in your care. Fostering is one of the most rewarding things you can do, and by opening your home to a pup in need, you've allowed us to save another one.

**Remember: we're here for you every step of the way!**

Thank you for saving a life in need!  
The Hearts & Bones Rescue Team

