

ADOPTING A RESCUE DOG

Adopting a rescue dog is rarely easy due to their background. If they have come from a pound or been abandoned they will be traumatised and if they have come from a breeder they will almost certainly not be socialised. It's important to remember is that virtually ALL problems can be overcome or greatly improved. However this takes TIME and it must be remembered that all dogs learn at a different rate. It is therefore difficult to estimate how long it will take but as a general guide allow 18 months for your dog to settle in, gain confidence and become a happy well adjusted dog.

The first six weeks are probably the most difficult as your dog is adjusting to a completely new environment, new people, sounds and situations. If he/she has come from a breeder he/she may never have had any contact with the outside world. Imagine living in a remote part of Scotland and suddenly moving to the centre of London – what a massive shock that would be to you – it is exactly the same for your dog. Suddenly they have to contend with a whole new world that is normal to you but abnormal to them, so imagine it from their point of view.

Don't overcompensate because of his/her background – he will know he is in a far better place. Dogs don't compare in the same way that humans do. However, they are very quick to take advantage of a situation. Initially allowing bad behaviour makes it far more difficult to correct later. Be firm but fair – NEVER shout. Use the tone of your voice so they understand the difference – a firm 'NO' when necessary so they understand you're not happy with their behaviour – a soft happy tone when you make a fuss of them and are pleased with them.

Take things slowly, step-by-step. Introduce different activities gradually. For example they may be terrified of the vacuum cleaner, so switch it on in another room so they can see it but the noise is muffled and as you're vacuuming, throw some tasty treats on the floor so your dog thinks 'Fantastic, every time that machine comes out I have some lovely treats', so the vacuum cleaner is VERY rewarding! Apply this technique to similar situations but remember if your dog is really frightened, don't stop what you're doing and rush over to him/her and over-reassure him/her as they will think 'I was right to be frightened, they're frightened too!' Continue with what you're doing for a few minutes, switch off and then calmly speak to your dog, if he sees you're not worried, he won't be worried.

Your dog may not be housetrained – remember he is not being naughty – he simply doesn't understand. Despite what you think he doesn't know what 'wee, wee' means. You may think he looks guilty - NO, HE DOESN'T! He just knows you're angry and is worried and confused. He will only make the association if you catch him weeing inside the house – then you can say 'NO' and take him straight outside.

Just as you would potty train a child - you have to housetrain your dog; this takes time. About 20 minutes after eating take him outside, wait for him to perform the required behaviour - as soon as he does give it a name and praise so he makes the association.

Your dog may not be able to cope with difficult situations i.e. excitable children, strangers, other dogs etc. It is your responsibility to protect him from these perceived dangers until he is suitably socialised. As his confidence increases he will find these conditions less threatening.

The relationship built with your rescue dog will be quite unique and well worth all your efforts.