

# ADOPTION HAND OUT



## CONGRATULATIONS ON ADOPTING YOUR GREAT DOG!

Bringing a dog or puppy into your home can be a wonderful experience. Your new family member will need your patience and understanding during this transition. Please remember that your new companion has been through many new experiences lately. Many of the dogs come to us from the South, riding in a USDA approved transport truck. After their long journey, MA state law requires that they get a vet visit, receive a health certificate, and stay at our quarantine facility for 48 hours where their needs are attended to by our loving staff. From there they either go to their forever homes, or to foster homes.

### BRINGING YOUR DOG HOME

Once your new companion is home it may take him or her a few days to settle in and adjust, and for you to see their true personality shine through. It is possible your dog has never seen stairs before, or not had a lot of experience in a loving home. Keep this in mind as you introduce your dog or puppy to new people and new things. Sometimes new things can be scary for them. We suggest that you let your dog take the first week with you to adjust and get to know your family. Try not to overwhelm them with a lot of new people and new situations in the first couple weeks.

### ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR VETERINARIAN

It is important for both you and your new family member to establish a relationship with his or her veterinarian. Even though your dog has had a check up with our veterinarian on arrival, we suggest that you have them seen by their own vet within a couple weeks of taking them home. Some of the puppies and adult dogs may need time sensitive booster shots to be fully vaccinated.

It is also highly recommended that you bring a stool sample with you to your vet. Although a stool sample was tested and came back negative prior to your dog's arrival, it can't hurt to check a second one. The dogs have also been dewormed

prior to arrival. If you do see worms in your dog's feces prior to your first vet visit, you should bring the sample to your vet so they can determine which type of worm it is and match you with the best deworming medication. It is not unusual for puppies and dogs to get worms, and they are easily treated.



Your veterinarian will also go over preventive care such as monthly heart worm pills and flea and tick prevention. Your monthly heart worm medication will act as a general dewormer as well. Additional vaccines may be recommended.

It is a good idea to try and make your vet visits a positive experience by bringing along your dog's favorite treats. Have the veterinary staff feed him while he is there, and you can feed him as well if he is a bit nervous while waiting.

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## CHANGING DIET

While at our isolation facility your Great Dog has been eating Wellness Brand dog food. If you pick your new dog up from our isolation facility you will receive a complimentary trial bag of food. If you plan on changing to a different food, it is important to mix the old food in with the new food, and switch over slowly to avoid stomach upset. Start by mixing 3/4 old food with 1/4 new food, then 1/2 old food 1/2 new food, then 1/4 old food, 3/4 new food until you are switched over to the new food completely.

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## SOCIALIZATION AND HANDLING

Puppies have a window of socialization where they are most open to being exposed to new experiences, people, and objects. This window of socialization is generally from 8 weeks to 16 weeks of age. It is important to take advantage of this window to help your dog become a well adjusted adult, fostering as many positive experiences during this sensitive period as possible. Please discuss with your veterinarian which vaccines they recommend before your dog may meet unfamiliar dogs.

Try to think of as many things as you can that your dog may be exposed to over his/her lifetime, some examples are: stairs, umbrellas, winter coats, hats, gloves, men with beards, hooded sweatshirts, people of different ages and races, crutches, wheel chairs, walkers...

The more exposure the better- but, always have high value food rewards on hand to help your dog associate these new and potentially frightening things/experiences with something positive.

If your puppy seems nervous, don't push him/her to get too close to what they are afraid of, instead, let them approach on their own terms. Encourage them and feed them as they make positive progress. You are your dog's advocate and guardian, stick up for them if you need to, they aren't always understood when they try to use their body language to express their feelings.

Also take this time to get your dog used to all different kinds of handling- make it fun! Feed them while you touch their paws, press on their toes (as would be done during a nail trim), look in their mouths, play with their ears, etc. This will make vet visits, and giving medications if needed in the future, less scary and more routine.

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## DESENSITIZATION

Don't despair if your dog is older than 16 weeks, there is a well adjusted, happy, life in their future too if you are willing to work with them a little. Helping them adjust to new things, or scary things, isn't all that different from what you would do with a puppy during the socialization period, it just may take a little more time and patience.

Most instances of "aggression" in dogs are actually caused by fear. When dogs are pushed to or past their "threshold", (the point where they feel threatened enough to act out in order to protect themselves or resources they deem valuable), is when we most often see aggressive behavior. Threshold distances and reactions vary from dog to dog- just as it would in a human. (You may be perfectly fine seeing a spider from a foot away, but your best friend may run screaming or swat at it).

Once we have determined where the dog's threshold is, we do our best to avoid it. Instead, we slowly introduce the dog to the thing that makes it anxious by feeding treats and walking away if we see signs of stress (to be listed later). In this way we change the dog's mindset- "seeing other dogs while on leash means I get food! And, when I start to feel nervous, my human lets me move away and get more spaces or feel comfortable again! Seeing other dogs (kids, men with beards, vacuum cleaners, etc.) isn't so bad after all!"

Putting some time in to help our dogs feel more at ease in the world and learn to trust us is time well spent and will only increase your bond with your new best friend.

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## SIGNS OF STRESS

Many people are aware of some of the signs of stress in a dog, but there are many other more subtle signs that will help you communicate and train your new dog.

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### Commonly Known Signs of Stress and Appeasement

- Tucked tail
- Shaking
- Cowering
- Growling

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### Less Commonly Known Signs of Stress and Appeasement

- Urine Marking
- Panting
- Shedding
- Pinned ears
- Licking lips and/or nose
- Refusal of food
- Yawning when not tired

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### Avoidance Behaviors

- Turning head away
- Inattention
- Looking away
- Licking genitals
- Excessive sniffing

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### Watch Out, You've Gone Too Far (or are about to)!

- Freezing
- Freezing in combination with “whale eye” when the dog looks at you out of the corner of its eye and you can see the whites of the eye.
- Growling in combination with freezing and/or whale eye.



A good example of “whale eye” in combination with “freezing”. How does the dog above feel about the pesky puppy barking at him outside of the photo, who is the object of his attention? While his lips aren't raised, he is actually growling as well.

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## LEARNING THEORY AND FINDING A TRAINER THAT FITS YOU AND YOUR DOG'S NEEDS

While there are many training methods available, it is important to make sure that you find the trainer/training class that uses the least force possible to train your dog. Dogs and other animals learn in the same basic manner that people do, and positive reinforcement is scientifically proven to be the best way to teach any living being. Not only do the dogs learn quickly, they enjoy learning, and it also helps build the bond between dog and human.

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### A quick note on some basic learning theory terms:

- Positive reinforcement, by definition, is adding something desirable to increase the occurrence of a specific behavior.
- We use whatever motivates the dog, whether it be food, a tennis ball, or praise, to reinforce behaviors that we like, and want the dog to repeat.
- Negative punishment, by definition, is taking away something desirable to decrease the occurrence of a specific behavior.
- We ignore, or remove our attention from the dog when it behaves in a way that it not desirable.
- This decreases the behaviors that we don't like, without physically punishing the dog, or having to use physical force.
- Positive Punishment, by definition, is the addition of a stimulus that causes pain or is unpleasant in some way, as a method to stop a dog from repeating a certain behavior. While this can seem like a “quick fix”, it is not as helpful in changing behavior because while they now know what you DON'T want them to do, they have no idea what they SHOULD DO instead, and will often repeat the same behavior again even though they will be punished for it. Also, often over time, more and more physical force is often needed to get the same results. This type of training can be damaging to both the dog and to the relationship between dog and human.
- Negative punishment, by definition is the addition of a continued unpleasant stimulus that is then removed when the desirable behavior is exhibited. This type of training has the same issues as positive punishment and is not recommended.

Hopefully this basic knowledge of Learning Theory will help you in your understanding of your new dog.

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**For any behavior related questions, please contact your adoption coordinator who will put you in touch with our behavior consultant.**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCES FOR BASIC TRAINING ISSUES

### House Training

Today's preferred method of house training is crate training. A crate used for house training should be just large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around and lie down in. Dogs typically won't soil in the same area that they sleep.

Training pads and papers are not recommended as this sends a mixed signal- it's okay to go to the bathroom in the house "sometimes". It is best to send a clear message.

Keep a close eye on your dog/puppy in the house, if they start sniffing around looking for a place to void, take them outside. When they do go to the bathroom outside praise them excitedly and feed them a treat.

If they have an accident in the house, whoops! there is not much you can do about it after the fact. But, if you catch them in the act, you can make a loud noise to disrupt them and promptly bring him/her outside. Praise them as described above if they finish what they started inside, outside.

The umbilical method- this is a handy way to make sure your dog doesn't go out of sight to go the bathroom when you are not paying attention. Use their leash to attach them to your belt loop or keep them attached to your chair.

### Puppy Biting and Chewing

Teething puppies will be nippy, and they will chew on various objects. Puppies play and wrestle with their mouths. While this is normal behavior, those sharp puppy teeth can be painful!

Some ways to deal with puppy biting- make a yelping noise if they nibble too hard. This is how puppies signal to each other that a bite is too rough, and most puppies respond quite well, and will remove their mouths when they hear it. Holding still- a moving target is more fun than one that doesn't respond. While this can be difficult to do, it is effective. If standing still is not an option, remove yourself from the room the puppy is in. They will learn that rough play makes their person disappear. This is a way of using negative reinforcement to change the behavior. An alternative is to remove the puppy. Just as young children sometimes get over tired and act up, puppies do as well, and sometimes guiding them quietly to their crates for a time out and a nap is the best course of action. Other options are redirecting the play, instead of wrestling, get a ball and play fetch, or give the dog an appropriate chew toy such as a frozen Kong or bully stick.



**THANK YOU FOR  
OPENING YOUR HEART AND HOME  
TO ADOPT A GREAT DOG!**