# A NEW DOG IN THE HOUSE!

## FROM SHELTER DOG TO BELOVED FAMILY MEMBER: TIPS FOR SMOOTHING THE TRANSITION

**Congratulations on your new dog!** These guidelines are written to help you learn how to enforce house rules and set limits with your new dog so he can streamline into your family's routine with ease. It's perfectly normal for confident, clever dogs to test the limits a bit to see if they can gain more privileges in their new home. As charming as that optimism may be, a dog without rules can develop bad manners and be less than fun to live with. Fortunately, dogs really do like to please their humans, so the more opportunities we give him to succeed, the quicker they can fall into place as treasured family members. Because pit bull type dogs tend to form very strong bonds with their people, their favorite reward for good behavior is ultimately, your affection and praise. The more you get to know your dog and can show him how to be a good boy, the more he'll want to please you and the happier your relationship will be. Let's get started with teaching your new dog how to fit in with your family!

**1- IN THE BEGINNING**: For at least four weeks (minimum!) keep your new dog confined to his dog crate or on a tie-down when he's not being exercised, fed or obedience trained. The less freedom he has in the beginning, the fewer opportunities he has to develop bad habits before he knows the house rules. Your dog is probably going to cry and bark when he's getting used to confinement. Don't let him guilt you into giving him full house access too soon! Once he knows the rules, he can have all he wants, so remember that this period of confinement doesn't have to last forever. In the meantime, you can quiet him by offering tiring exercise first, then providing chew toys and stuffed kongs inside the crate. Some dogs quiet when you cover their crate with a blanket. It's okay to "Shush!" your dog for complaining loudly - just remember to praise him (softly!) when he finally settles so he learns that you like that behavior.

**2- YOU HOLD HIS PAYCHECK:** Consider the following things privileges and ask your dog to work for each and every reward: Praise, Pats, Treats, Meals, Freedom. Your dog should learn that every great thing that happens to him 1) comes from you 2) after he's done something to impress you. For example, before you let your dog out of his crate or tie-down, ask for some eye contact and a 'Sit.'

**NOTE:** Freedom is any dog's favorite privilege. Make him/her work hard to earn short periods of freedom in your house. As she shows good house manners, you can give him increased house access. Mild mannered dogs may be able to earn freedom in just a few days, while rowdy, untrained dogs may take weeks or months before they can be trusted with full-time freedom. This helps with house training too!

**3- WORK YOUR DOG OFTEN:** Work should include asking a dog to run through his short list of commands – 'Sit' 'Stay' 'Down' 'Watch Me' several times a day. Incorporate these commands into play sessions and meal times and repeat them often until he does them "on a dime." Repetition will reinforce the behavior, and the more fun and happy the sessions are, the quicker your dog will catch on.

**TIP:** New dogs will give you the most attention when they're hungry and after they've been exercised. If your dog is too antsy to follow through with a training session, take him on a vigorous walk or run first. Then, keep training sessions short (5-10 minutes) and exciting. Make it a game!

**4 – MEAL TIME TRAINING**: Meal time is training time. The first few meals should be fed by hand, while reinforcing the 'Sit' and 'Watch Me' command. Your dog will learn quickly that you are in charge of his Universe when he realizes he has to work for each handful of kibble. Even after he knows his commands well, your dog should run through a short obedience routine for every meal. Change the routine often so he learns he has to pay attention and follow distinct directions.

**5 – PET INTRODUCTIONS:** Introduce your new dog to other pets in measured baby steps. Avoid rushed greets, especially nose-to-nose greets. If either of the dogs is socially mature, first intros between two dogs should be on neutral turf. A casual side by side walk is a great way to break the ice and help dogs get used to each other's appearance, scent and body language. Some dogs (younger dogs or very well socialized dogs) can play with their housemates almost immediately; others may take weeks or months before they get to this stage. Some may never get to the point where they can play with other pets. That's okay – For them, just being calm, tolerant and well behaved in the presence of other dogs is a worthwhile goal.

If you stage it well, a good first intro between mature dogs will be rather uneventful. They might only walk side by side together, or see each other from a distance, or through a baby gate. The goal is to let them become familiar with each other without giving them the option of making full contact. If the meeting is boring, or if the dogs present friendly signals to each other, you're on the right track towards more contact. With time, familiarity will lesson the arousal level and pave the way towards a smooth relationship.

Before letting dogs have full contact, make sure both are well exercised and somewhat acquainted. Even better if they both respond to your voice commands. You want the dogs to hear your cues during the intro so you can guide them through their meeting. That responsiveness comes from the leadership role you've established with your dog. Remove all toys and food items. Keep their leashes loose and allow them to move closer, using praise and happy, confident voices for sniffing genitals and back ends.

If you see their bodies stiffen or the hair on their back puff up ('hackles') call them back to you with your happy, confident voice ..."Come here Rex!" and try again another day. If the dogs start to play, use your voice to keep things calm and to prevent them from getting too aroused.

Arguments can break out during those first few play sessions if dogs that don't know each other become offended or defensive. If a scuffle does break out, you haven't failed! You may have just pushed things too fast. It may be best to lower your expectations and take things slower, or hold off on any more greets and call in a trainer to help you. It's not unusual to have a couple of minor squabbles as dogs get to know each other, but it benefits everybody to keep those to a bare minimum.

As a rule, it's always best to end intro sessions when things are going well. With adult dogs, it can be beneficial to keep first intros short - two or three minutes - then end when it's going well. The next time the dogs meet, they'll be able to spend even more time together. Don't wait until the dogs have played so hard that they become over aroused or so tired that one or both get grumpy. Instead, end the play on a positive note and lavish praise on everybody - including yourself!

If you have a cat or small animal in the house, your new dog should learn that he is not allowed to stare intensely, whine or pull towards it. Distract him with obedience work, and praise him for any calm behavior and relaxed focus. If he can't calm, remove him and try again later - preferably, after he's had some exercise and some more obedience work with you. As with dog/dog intros, you want to set him up for success around the cat and maintain some distance while he gets over the initial excitement blast. Some use a squirt bottle to reinforce the "no staring" law. You can begin short introduction sessions once he loses his intense fascination and can show you some relaxed body language near the cat.

**6 – ROUTINES:** Because animals feel more secure when they have a predictable routine in place, keep the schedule of the new dog and the established pets as consistent as possible, especially in the beginning of your new relationship. Remember to give the established pets more attention and excercise when the new dog comes into the house. Resist the irresistable urge to give the new guy the lion's share of the love at first – it could set up a grudge between your dogs and create a sense of competition.

**7 – INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR** should be marked with a verbal cue - like,"UH OH!" - and removal of the privilege (freedom). For example, if your dog tries to get into the garbage, tell him "Uh Oh!" and take him back to his crate or tie down immediately. The crate is not a punishment, but rather, it's the removal of freedom that makes the point. After a while, just the verbal cue will be enough to get the message across as a 'warning'. Because your dog will want to enjoy more out-time, he'll soon learn how to make better choices and will settle into your household routine and rules.

**TIP** - Any overly aggressive display towards another dog in the household should be marked with a firm verbal correction. Depending on the severity of the altercation - dogs should be put into a long down stay (time out!), or separated to their crates (freedom lost!). Then, work to figure out what caused the spat so you can manage them better the next time they're in a similar situation. (See #10)

Although it's not unsual for housemate dogs to argue, it's the job of every dog owner to prevent problems through smart management and rules. What dogs do when you're not around may be a different story. Especially when dogs are getting to know each other, it's wise to separate pets from each other when you aren't around to police their interactions.

**8- BED TIME:** Don't let the dog sleep on the bed - and in some cases, on the furniture - while you're establishing the household routine with your new pet, and remove this privilege if you notice that he's starting to ignore rules that he once knew. Getting such a prized position on the bed or sofa gives many dogs the idea that they've achieved a very important station in life. Since this kind of status can create spoiled dog behavior, it's a privilege that should be earned, not given freely. In our home, our female pit bull was only allowed to sleep in the bed once she was following our rules to a T. Because she was intolerant of other dogs when we first adopted her, she needed to demonstrate that she respected the house rules first, including our rules about other dogs. Whenever she misbehaved with another dog, she was banished from the bed - and we immediately saw much improved behavior. A reminder to us how valuable this resource is to our pets. Use it wisely!

**TIP:** All dogs love having a competent leader. One way to communicate your status as Job Boss to a new or confused dog is by enforcing long down stays. Ask your dog to lay next to you for up 15-20 minutes while you're on the computer or watching television, etc. You may have to stand on the dog's leash at first to keep him in his down. Praise him lavishly after giving him the release command.

**9- TUG-O-WAR:** Avoid tug-of-war games until your role as leader is firmly established, and then, only play if the "OFF!" or "DROP!" command is well respected.

**TIP:** Watch to make sure that tug-o-war games between two dogs don't escalate into trouble. Dogs can be easily excited by tug and can spark into a fight very quickly.

**10 – FIGHT TRIGGERS:** Be aware of other common 'triggers' that may cause tension between two or more dogs in your household. Prized chew toys, food and even attention from favorite people are prized resources that can cause competition and conflict between two or more dogs. Other common triggers: excitement created by a ringing doorbell or chattering squirrel can amp two dogs up to the point where they may accidentally bump and redirect on each other. If you see the dogs getting over charged, it's time to step in and make everybody settle down, using a verbal command or a time out in the crate.

**11 – CLASSES:** Enroll in an obedience class as soon as you can to help you establish your relationship with your dog and to work out your communication style. Your dog will love when you become his confident leader. Consider working towards your Canine Good Citizen Certificate (CGC) to help your dog earn respect from others who may unnecessarily fear his breed.

**12 – REPETITION:** Since dogs learn from repetition, don't be discouraged if your dog misbehaves just when you thought you had the rules all squared away. Most dogs need to have a new rule repeated many times before they truly incorporate them into their everyday behavior…and then, you can bet they will certainly test you now and again to make sure that same rule still applies! As frustrating as this can be, it demonstrates the intelligence, the tenacity, the humor and the bravado of this mischievous but big hearted animal.

ENJOY YOUR NEW COMPANION!

**For more information on ways to enjoy your pet, visit BADRAP.org**