
Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, Inc.

Your Rescue Dog

GRRoW Hotline: 888-655-4753

Your rescue dog: Think about his recent experiences. What do we know about your dog? Chances are he has been through a lot in the weeks or months prior to your adopting him. Was he a stray who spent time in an impound facility? Was he surrendered by owners who didn't have time for him? Was he confiscated due to improper care? Whatever the situation, there has been a lot of change and confusion in his life lately.

When you take a new "previously owned" dog home, you need to give him time to settle in and adjust. Chances are that you will not see this dog's true personality for a week or two as he begins to settle in and incorporate himself into your "pack." Make sure he gets lots of attention from you, but also give him time to be by himself and begin to get accustomed to his new surroundings. A crate is a wonderful tool for helping him settle in and for allowing you to control his access to possible trouble in your home while you learn more about him. Dogs are naturally den animals, and a crate will become their "safe haven" if used correctly. A crate should not be used as punishment or "doggie jail." A crate is perfect for a few hours while you are shopping or going to the zoo with the family, as well as for nighttime sleeping. An entire workday is a bit long for crating, so look for an optional way to keep your dog safe and out of trouble while you are at work. A laundry room or kitchen, which you can "dog-proof" are good choices. Be sure he has access to water and interesting toys. Please understand that some housebreaking lapses are common for a dog in a new environment, even one who is truly housebroken. Be patient.



Dogs feel comfortable with a schedule, so try to reduce your new dog's stress by forming a regular schedule right away. Feeding times, play times, potty times, crate time should all happen in an order he can anticipate. Do not allow children to overwhelm your dog with attention, though this is often difficult since they are so excited to have this wonderful new addition to the family. But teaching children to respect the dog's space and privacy now will head off possibly tragic results later. Also, don't invite all your neighbors and relatives and all the kids' friends over to "meet" the new dog during the first few days. A new home is stressful enough, without swarms of new people constantly overwhelming him.

Take your dog to the vet within a few days of adopting him. While an animal might be showing no signs of illness while in foster care, stress can make him vulnerable to things which he might otherwise be able to fight off. Be sure any needed vaccinations are updated, and get a thorough physical. Catching a condition early can save a lot of serious problems later.

Introduction to other pets can be tricky. If possible, it is a good idea for the new dog and any resident dogs to meet for the first time on "neutral ground." This might be a park or a friend's yard. The first meeting should be on leash. Once home, keep the dogs separated as much as possible the first day or two with periods of time together with close supervision, possibly with one dog on a trailing leash so you can grab it and gain control if necessary. Don't "play favorites" or coddle either dog.

Dogs are pack animals, and they need to know who is "top dog." That should, without a doubt, be you, in your role as pack leader. But the dogs also need to know where they rank in relation to each other. There is likely to be some posturing and possibly even confrontation between them in the first days or weeks, but that is normal. Typically, a confrontation or scuffle between dogs looks and sounds much worse than it is, and some behaviorists will even tell you to let them "sort it out" for themselves, because once they know who is who, they will settle into contented pack life. However, it is awfully hard to sit and watch your dogs fight and possibly cause some injury to each other. The best bet is to supervise closely and try to diffuse a situation before it escalates to a fight. Break eye contact between the dogs, distract them with toys or activity. But on some level they do have to "sort it out," because the pack order must be clear to them before they can relax. Once you see who outranks who, accept their decision. Don't confuse them by trying

to “help” the lower ranked dog, giving it special attention or extra treats. That can just cause that dog to feel in a position to challenge the other dog for dominance, or make the dominant dog feel it needs to “remind the other dog who’s boss.”

Cats in the home should also be considered. Keep the dog away from the cat as much as possible at first. Again, introductions should occur with the dog on leash. Be sure the cat has a way to “get away,” either into a room the dog can’t access, to the top of furniture, etc. Be aware that dogs frequently will “snack” out of kitty litter boxes, so put that in an area the dog cannot access. Also, be sure not to use “clumping” cat litter if the dog does occasionally get into the box, as that type can form clumps in the dog’s intestines, causing major medical problems.



A tired dog is a well-behaved dog. If a dog begins chewing up the house, digging canyons in the yard, or barking like an idiot, chances are that he is bored and under-stimulated. Dogs need varying amounts of exercise, but odds are that a stroll through the neighborhood is not enough for a young, healthy dog, just as it wouldn’t be for a four year old child. Most dogs need periods of vigorous play each day. This might include “fetch” or other running games. Just being put out in the yard is not exercise. Most dogs will walk around a bit, probably relieve themselves, check the view from the fence, then settle under a nice tree and wait for you to bring him in. So get out there and play with him.

Mental stimulation is also very good, such as teaching tricks or doing obedience exercises, and the interaction is critical in forming your bond with your new dog. In fact, an obedience class is strongly encouraged for you and your new dog. It will teach you to communicate better, how to make your expectations clear, how to correct appropriately, and reinforce your pack leadership....plus it is a lot of fun!

Indoors, toys are very important. Dogs need to chew, and they need some activity to keep them occupied while you are away. Kong toys with peanut butter smeared inside or a dog biscuit wedged in it, appropriately sized raw beef shanks with the marrow inside, or Nylabones can provide a dog with a “project” for the day. Don’t leave rawhides or squeaky toys out for the dog to play with unsupervised, or any other toy that might “chunk” or come apart, forming a choking hazard.

Dogs and children can be a wonderful relationship, but it can also be very tragic. To help prevent incidents which might cause injury to either the dog or the child, it is important to NEVER leave ANY dog alone with a preschool child. EVER. Dogs will rarely accept prepubescent children (say, under 12 or 13 or so) as authority figures, and a child trying to discipline a dog as he has seen you do can result in tragedy. Also, children behave in ways that dogs consider very rude. They approach dogs straight on from the front, they make a lot of eye contact, they hug dog around the neck (yes, this is rude to a dog), they pet by reaching directly over the head, they might run away squealing which could stimulate a “prey” response in a dog, they fall down and cry which might also stimulate a prey response, and they often do inappropriate things like startle a sleeping dog, poke eyes and ears, grab feet or pull tails. They don’t always know to obey a dog’s “warning signs” like a stiff posture, walking away or growling. A dog’s only real defense is to bite, and if he feels he is given no choice, that is what he will do. It won’t be the dog’s fault, but he will be the one who must pay the price. There is no such thing as a dog who will not bite. If you believe there is, you are putting the child and the dog at risk.

Dogs from uncertain backgrounds require a little extra observation and understanding. Watch and see how he responds to various situations. Often you will note such things as a dog shying away from a raised hand, being afraid of feet or boots, going in a panic over certain sounds, or getting very upset if family members argue. If a dog was abused or traumatized by any of these things, it will take time and patience to teach him to trust again, and to feel secure.

No dog should be allowed to run at large for any reason, and a new canine family member must be treated as if it would run away until you know absolutely, positively for certain that he will not. Again, this is where obedience class can help by teaching you to train your dog to reliably come when called. Take your new dog outside on a leash if you do not have a fence (and even if you do, if there is a possibility that he might be a fence-jumper). You can also use a 26-foot Flexi Leash or a 50 foot training line to let him get some exercise while still maintaining control. You might also look for places in your neighborhood that have fenced areas he can enjoy. This might be an off-leash dog park, a fenced basketball or tennis court, an

outdoor hockey rink in summer, etc. In any case, be sure to get your dog an ID tag as soon as possible after you adopt him! The early days of his adoption are the days in which he is most likely to roam, and ID tags greatly increase your chances of getting him back.

If the dog turns out to be a “runner,” it is your responsibility to find a way to contain him on your property. Fencing all or part of your yard, a cable-trolley tie out (for brief unsupervised periods), or in some cases an “invisible fence.” The thing to remember about invisible fences is that they do not work for all dogs, and the training you put into it is critical. The best systems are that in which a company representative comes out and instructs you on the training method, and then you work slowly with the dog, teaching him the boundaries. But some dogs have high prey drives or are not phased by the relatively mild jolt that the fence provides. And if a dog sees a squirrel or kid on a bike and runs through the shock, he is then unable to return to the yard. Also, an invisible fence does not protect him from strange dogs entering the yard, doesn’t keep children from entering “his territory” to pet him, and in many jurisdictions does not satisfy the legal requirement to “contain” your dog. For many dogs, an invisible fence is a good choice for keeping a dog home. For others it is worse than useless.



If problems arise, you should consult a qualified obedience instructor, behaviorist and/or veterinarian, depending on the nature of the problem. Remember that it is much, much easier to prevent problems from the start than to try to fix them later. Give your dog plenty of attention, guidance, training and love, and you will likely have a long, happy life together.

Recommended Reading:

Second-Hand Dog, by Carol Lea Benjamin, Howell Book House, copyright 1988.

Choosing & Caring for a Shelter Dog: A Complete Guide to Help You Rescue and Rehome a Dog, by Bob Christiansen, Canine Learning Center, copyright 1996.

The Adoption Option: Choosing & Raising the Shelter Dog For You, by Eliza Rubenstein, Howell Book House, copyright 1996.

Dog Adoption: A Guide to Choosing the Perfect “Preowned” Dog from Breeders, Dog Tracks, Purebred Rescue & Shelters, by Joan Hustace Walker, ICS Books, copyright 1996.

Save That Dog! by Liz Palika, Howell Book House, copyright 1997.