

Adopting a Hoarded Dog

Dogs that come from hoarding situations have spent most of their lives with other dogs and many times have had very little contact with people. They can be fearful in new situations, especially when meeting new people. They are also not house broken and many of them do not know how to walk on a leash. However with time, patience, and positive reinforcement training techniques like clicker training, these dogs will experience a reduction in their stress and become a part of the family.

What to expect

- **When you first get your new dog home, she may be fearful and want to either hide or be quick to bolt.**

Due to a lack of socialization, hoarded dogs can be very fearful of people, noises, and sudden movements. When afraid, your new dog may place herself in a corner, under the kitchen table, or in a back room. The best way to help her when you find her in these places, is to get down at her level and encourage her to approach, using high value treats. **Do not** pull her out from these places for that may cause her to panic and result in a bite.

Your new dog may also try to bolt when afraid. A securely fence yard is extremely important, as is a leash. **Do not** let your new dog off leash when in new areas. A hoarded dog knows nothing about the dangers of traffic, nothing about survival, and they will not wander up to a neighbor for help.

- **She may always be fearful of new situations and new people.**

Hoarded dogs may always be nervous when new people come over, when loud noises occur, or when coming across novel items. You can however help your new dog work through her fear and recover quicker. The best way to help her is by using positive reinforcement training techniques (see our handouts: “Positive Reinforcement: Training Your dog with Treats and Praise” and “Dog Clicker Training”). By pairing treats with people, noises, and novel items, like the vacuum cleaner or a car, you can create positive associations with them. There are also several stress reducing products that can help your new dog adjust in fearful situations (see our handout: “Stress Relief for Your Pet”).

- **She will eliminate in the house.**

Hoarded dogs have been allowed to eliminate anywhere and everywhere in the house. This can make house training a challenge for them, so expect some accidents. When they occur, clean up the soiled areas with a proper pet stain remover (see our handout: “Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains”). House training your new dog is much like house training a puppy. Consistency, positive reinforcement, and constant observation are key (see our handout: “Housetraining Your Puppy”).

- **She may not walk well on leash.**

Many hoarded dogs have never been on a leash and that feeling of restraint on the end of a leash may be terrifying. Leash training should be gradual and should ALWAYS be done in a securely fenced area. It will also require both patience and positive reinforcement.

A slip leash is recommended, to keep your dog from slipping her collar when afraid. A slip leash will also be easier to put on and less intimidating because you will not have to hover over your dog to clip the leash onto her collar. Use treats when slipping the leash on to make a better association. Once the leash is on, allow your dog to drag it around behind her. ALWAYS supervise her when the leash is dragging to prevent her from getting caught up. As she starts to get more comfortable with the leash on, you can start to carry the leash as she walks around, but make sure to keep the leash loose as you walk with her. From there you can start to add some tension to the leash. Once walking on leash, use treats to encourage her to follow you. You can also use clicker training to reinforce confident behaviors when on leash.

- **She may never enjoy being picked up.**

Due to the lack of handling, hoarded dogs are not used to being handled and may struggle when picked up. It may be easy to pick up your new dog to take her outside but you should only be picking her up if she is less than 25lbs. Over 25lbs can result in injury to both you and your new dog. If she struggles when picked up however, **do not** force the issue; rather encourage her outside using treats. You can also use treats to make a better association to being handled. To do this, pair any handling with the treats. Remember though, to keep the handling to a minimum and build up to more as she becomes more comfortable. Until she becomes more comfortable, you can positively interact with her in other ways though, like clicker training (as mentioned above) and by encouraging her to play with toys.

- **She may do well in a home with other dogs, due to living with so many dogs, but there is no guarantee that she will get along with a new dog.**

Due to the high volume of dogs in a hoarding situation, most of them have spent their entire lives around dogs and prefer the company of dogs. However there are some hoarded dogs that show evidence of dog fights when they arrive at the shelter and would do best in a home without another dog. Keep in mind though that even a dog that enjoys the company of other dogs, may still not do well with every new dog. With proper introduction techniques, going slow, and using positive reinforcement however, a hoarded dog can learn to co-exist with a new dog but again there are no guarantees. See our handout: "Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Dog" for proper introduction techniques.

What not to do

- Never force your dog to spend time with her new family or new people. Allow her the choice to approach and reinforce her for interacting with people.
- Never chase your dog. If you find yourself in a situation where you need to handle your dog for medicating or to take outside, do not chase her around the house to catch her. Instead wait until she has settled somewhere, like her bed and then slowly approach her, getting down at her level. Once you have handled or medicated, then give her some treats or food.
- **Do not encourage her to approach if bad things are going to happen, otherwise she will avoid approaching.**
- Never punish your new dog for house soiling, showing fearful behavior like growling, or any other inappropriate behavior. Punishment will only make your new dog fearful of you and can lead to aggression. See our handout "The Fearful Dog."