



SAN FRANCISCO  
SPCA

# Dog Adoption Handbook



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# CONGRATULATIONS!

Dear Dog Adopter,

Congratulations on your new family member! Bringing a new dog into your home—and your life—is a big commitment, one that comes with many benefits and joys. We are thrilled you have decided to take this step.

Pets truly have become part of the American family. A dog's life now plays out in houses and apartments, in parks, and on sidewalks full of people and other dogs. We buy our dogs toys, we have their teeth cleaned, we take them to classes. They accompany us on vacation and to the office.

But amid this loving assimilation of dogs into the core of the family, we tend to forget that dogs are, well, dogs. Not long ago, they were working animals with space to roam, physically taxing jobs, and license to bark, jump, pull, dig, and bite if threatened. We radically changed the environment of dogs in what amounts to an evolutionary blink of an eye, so it's up to us to help them be successful in our world by providing plenty of training, exercise, and outlets for their innate abilities.

Give your dog those things and in return he will give you not only years of love, companionship, and enjoyment, but also better health and a longer life—at least statistically speaking.

For our part, we are committed to helping you make your new family member's transition into your life a success.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Scarlett, DVM  
Co-President



Jason Walthall  
Co-President

## SET UP FOR SUCCESS

### Meeting Your Dog's Needs

Adding any new family member, especially the four-legged kind, requires a certain amount of equipment and some adjustments to your home for everyone's safety and comfort.

Here's a list of must-have supplies for a great start with your new dog:

#### Basics

- Food
- Water bowl
- Bed, blanket, towels
- Crate and/or baby gate
- Long leash, short leash
- Flat collar w/ID tags (to be worn at all times)
- Head halter or anti-pull harness (for walking)
- Poop bags

#### Dog Care

- Dog toothbrush, dog toothpaste
- Nail clippers
- Dog shampoo
- Grooming brush
- Flea control treatment\*

#### Training and Mental Stimulation

- Food dispensing toys (KONG® toys, treat balls)
- Puzzle toys (hide-and-seek, treat wheels)
- Training treats (soft treats, freeze-dried meats)\*
- Plush toys (with or without squeakers), rope toys
- Edible chews (rawhide, bully sticks, pig ears)\*

\*Consult your vet for recommendations

#### Setting Up Your Home

Tempting as it is to give your new dog the run of the house right away, that's too much freedom too soon. Instead, create a safe, confined area—a dog-proofed area—to allow your dog to make a gradual transition to his new home. The dog-proofed area is where your dog will stay when you can't supervise, i.e., whenever you can't keep your eyes on him the entire time. This prevents chewing accidents, house-training accidents, and teaches your dog to relax while alone. Don't worry that this is too strict or in any way mean. Dogs are den animals who enjoy close quarters.

**Where?** The ideal dog-proofed area is easy to clean and easy to close off with a door or baby gate. It should be mostly free of furniture. The best places for a dog-proofed area are the kitchen, laundry room, bathroom, or an empty spare room.

**What?** Furnish the dog-proofed area with a bed or a crate with something soft to sleep on, a water bowl, and several toys, including a chew toy or a KONG stuffed with part of your dog's meal.

## For a Happy and Well-Behaved Dog

### Exercise and Training

A good exercise program means a healthier *and* better-behaved dog. Tired dogs bark less, chew less, sleep more, and rest easier if left home alone. Does that mean you must take up marathon running if you adopt a shepherd or terrier mix? Of course not, but a stroll around the block is not enough.

Here are some options for giving your dog a good, aerobic workout:

- Train your dog to fetch or play Frisbee®.
- Sign up for a dog sport or activity like agility or flyball.
- Let your dog play with other dogs regularly.
- Burn off mental and physical energy with regular obedience training and/or classes.
- Hire a dog walker or enroll your dog in doggy daycare.

Tip: Until your dog's recall is rock-solid, it's best not to let him off leash unless you are in a fenced-in area.

### Mental Stimulation

When it comes to boredom, dogs are a lot like children. Unless you give them something fun to do they will make their own fun. To dogs that often means a scavenger hunt in the trashcan or disemboweling the couch cushions. Instead, give your dog acceptable outlets for his mental energy by providing toys, puzzles, and other brainteasers.

Here are some options\* for exercising your dog's mind:

- Brainteaser toys (Linkables® from Premier®, Canine Genius™ toys, Seek-A-Treat)
- Plush toys (hide-and-seek toys, squeaky toys)
- Edible chews (rawhide, bully stick, pig's ear)
- Obedience training sessions/dog training classes
- Stuffed/frozen/hidden KONG toys

\*Always choose size-appropriate chews or toys and check with your vet before introducing your dog to a new product.

### Tying Dogs Out

We've all seen dogs tied outside of various places throughout the city. While it is a good idea to include your dog in your daily routine and take him places with you, it is not in his best interest to leave him outside and unattended.

Tying dogs out can lead to:

- Stress
- Accidents with other dogs and pedestrians
- Aggression toward other dogs and pedestrians
- Theft of your dog
- Complaints from the public

For more information, see *Avoid Tying Dogs* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## ARRIVING HOME WITH YOUR DOG

### The First Hour

It's important not to give your dog the run of the house—or make him the center of attention—right away. Instead, prepare him for a normal routine from the beginning by introducing him to your home this way:

Step 1. When you arrive home, take your dog out for a walk or bathroom break.

Step 2. Introduce him on leash to his new home, including the dog-proofed area.

Step 3. Give him a chew bone or stuffed KONG and leave him alone in the dog-proofed area for five minutes or less. Then take away the bone or KONG until the next time he's in the dog-proofed area alone.

**Tip:** If he begins to howl, whine, or bark, wait for him to be quiet for at least 10 seconds before you respond. Otherwise, he learns that whining or barking summons you, and he'll bark or cry for longer periods of time.

### The First Day

You probably want to spend every moment with your dog, but that can give you problems in the long run. Dogs are highly social animals and have to be taught to be calm and relaxed when alone, so you need to get your dog used to brief absences within the first few hours of his arrival.

- Leave your dog in his dog-proofed area while you go out or spend time in another part of the house.
- Vary the length of your absences, from 30 seconds to 20 minutes, and repeat them throughout the day. Does your dog seem comfortable? Then increase the amount of time.

**Tip:** It may take several days or weeks for your dog to adjust to his new home.

### The Bedtime Routine

After a bathroom break, put your dog in his crate or dog-proofed area with a chew toy. He may have trouble settling in at first, but should eventually relax and go to sleep.

**Tip:** Harsh as it seems, don't respond if your dog cries or barks. If he gets attention for barking, he'll keep it up longer next time.

### Leaving for the First Time

Just as you can't spend the first 48 hours nonstop with your dog and expect him to be fine when you leave, you can't launch into eight-hour absences from the get-go. Ideally, your dog will never have to be left alone for a full working day. But at a minimum you need to build up to longer absences gradually.

We recommend:

- Giving your dog a vigorous exercise session before leaving him alone.
- Arranging for your dog to get a bathroom break within two to three hours of being left alone for at least the first month.
- Providing plenty of puzzles, brainteasers, and other alone-time activities.
- Using a timed food-dispensing device like the MannersMinder®.

## HOUSE-TRAINING AND THE CRATE

Regardless of your new dog's house-training history, you should allow anywhere from a few weeks to several months for a brushup course. That way you avoid accidents and get off to a great start. To do this, you need to use your dog-proofed area and/or a crate. A crate is a terrific investment for a number of reasons.

A crate can help you with:

**House-training.** Prompts your dog to hold it when unsupervised.

**Chew training.** Stops your dog from chewing anything except legitimate chew toys.

**Settling.** Teaches your dog to settle down when alone and inactive.

**Kenneling.** Your dog may need to stay in a crate during travel or a hospital visit.

If you decide to purchase a crate, get one large enough for your dog to stand up, lie down, and turn around in—but no larger. Otherwise, he might be tempted to use one end as a bathroom and the other as a bed.

### Crate Training Your Dog

Before you start using the crate, you have to give your dog a chance to get used to it. Don't just put him in there and hope he adjusts; that would be traumatic. The crate needs to be a comfy, safe place he loves to spend time in. You can make him feel this way about the crate by using treats, praise, and toys in an easy-to-follow crate training program. Here's how:

#### THE FIRST DAY

1. Throw tiny, yummy treats into the crate. When your dog goes in to get them, praise him.
2. When your dog is happily venturing into the crate, begin practicing closing the door for a few seconds while treating him through the opening. Then let him right back out. Repeat the exercise many times, building up to 10 seconds.

#### THE NEXT FEW DAYS

1. Repeat exercise 2 from above. Then stuff a KONG with extra-special goodies. Put the KONG in the crate and close the door behind your dog as he goes to eat it. Go about your business in the house, then let your dog back out after five minutes. Do this without any fanfare whatsoever.
2. Repeat the exercise several times in the next couple of days using a yummy chew bone. Vary the absences from one to 20 minutes. Ignore your dog if he whines or barks; always wait to let him out until he has been quiet for 10 seconds.

#### LEAVING THE HOUSE

1. Leave your dog in the crate with something delicious in his KONG, then leave the house for brief errands such as collecting your mail or watering the garden.
2. Over the next few sessions, gradually extend the duration of your absences. Go from one minute to five minutes to 10, 15, or 30 minutes. Don't just build your absences upward, though; throw in some shorter ones for variety.

**Tip:** Never leave your dog in the crate longer than three to four hours at a time, except for bedtime.

## **House-Training Your Dog**

Even the smartest, best-trained dog can have accidents, especially when getting used to a new home. The best thing is to treat your newly adopted dog like a puppy for the first weeks or months, at least where house-training is concerned. The key to success is to use your dog-proofed area and/or the crate.

### **Golden Rules of House-Training**

- Until your dog is perfectly house-trained, never leave him alone unless he's in the dog-proofed area or crate. Supervise your dog at all times in the house.
- Take your dog out on leash often. Start by walking him at half-hour intervals.
- If you see your dog sniffing and circling in the house, take him out immediately.
- Praise and reward with a treat when he goes outdoors.

Keep in mind that your dog's size affects how long he can hold it. The smaller the dog, the less time you can expect him to go without a bathroom break.

For detailed instructions, see *House-Training Adult Dog* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

**Tip:** Never yell at or punish your dog for an accident. It will only make him afraid of you, and usually it makes the behavior worse.



## DOG TRAINING AND HOW TO TRAIN

### Practice Positive Reinforcement

Training your dog through positive reinforcement means using your dog's natural motivations to teach him which behaviors you like and which you don't. You can use anything your dog wants: praise, toys, treats, a belly rub, a leash walk, or a thrown ball.

This type of training is based on the fundamental truth that all animals are more likely to repeat a behavior that is reinforced—and less likely to repeat one that isn't. Just like we humans are much more likely to show up for work if we get a steady paycheck, dogs will do exactly what we want them to do if we provide motivation.

### Why It Works So Well

1. Tapping into your dog's innate motivations makes training fun for him—and it helps make you his favorite person on the planet.
2. Making training a game means your dog relaxes and learns faster, whereas fear blocks learning.

One caveat: Knowledge acquisition centers in your dog's brain slow down or shut off completely when he's afraid—risk-avoidance takes the place of problem-solving. So, if your dog is scared or uncomfortable, he can't learn. Find a way to make him comfortable first, and then try again.

### A Word on Punishment

Never use physical punishment. It comes with serious side effects like aggression, fear, and erosion of the trust between you and your dog.

### Unwanted Behaviors

Using positive reinforcement methods doesn't mean you never say "no" to your dog. You just say it in a way he understands instead of using human language.

Either:

**Ignore the behavior.** Don't reinforce or inadvertently reward unwanted behavior.

**Avoid the situation.** Restrict your dog's access to a place, person, or object.

**Redirect him to an alternative behavior and reward those,** for example sitting instead of jumping up.

### Dog Training Principles

These simple principles create a win-win partnership between you and your dog. You get a polite dog, and your dog gets to play with other dogs, chase Frisbees®, and eat his favorite treats.

- Reward behaviors you like. That will make them happen more often.
- Ignore behaviors you don't like. That will make them happen less often.
- Ask your dog to "say please" when he wants something. Ask your dog to sit for doors to be opened, balls to be thrown, leashes to come off at the park, etc. That way, asking politely becomes your dog's main strategy for getting what he wants, instead of pushy behavior.

For more details, see *Nothing in Life is Free* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## **Foundation Behaviors**

Dog training is great for exercise, learning, and enjoyment, and we recommend you make it a regular part of your dog's entire life. For now, the following five behaviors form a great foundation:

- Come when called (recall)
- Sit
- Down
- Stay
- Focus

Teaching your dog these behaviors will make life easier for both you and your dog—and all can be taught within a few months. For do-it-yourself instructions, see the individual handouts in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## **Dog Training Classes**

You can also learn the above behaviors—and many more—from professional dog trainers by signing up for one of the many dog training classes we offer. For example:

- Puppy Manners
- Adolescent Manners
- Just the Basics
- Loose-Leash Walking
- Canine Good Citizen
- Agility, Rally, Tricks, and other specialty classes

For general class information and the latest schedule, see our website.

## WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Keep in mind that most of what we label “problem behavior” is normal canine behavior, and none of it is meant to spite or frustrate us. Your dog is simply being a dog.

Dogs do what they do because they want food, play, attention, social time with other dogs, etc. Pleasing—or annoying—us isn’t part of the picture. Fortunately, you can use what your dog wants to train him to behave in ways you like. With patience and consistency, most problem behavior can be changed for good.

### Troubleshooting Problem Behavior

#### **BARKING**

Some reasons dogs bark:

- Excitement
- Barrier frustration
- Territoriality
- Fear and anxiety
- Loneliness/boredom
- Attention-seeking

#### **My dog barks at people when I’m out on a walk.**

Barking at people can mean several things. Your dog may be uncomfortable with strangers—or with a subset of people he hasn’t encountered often enough as a puppy (people wearing hats, for example). Consult a trainer to find out if this is the case. The other option is that your dog is simply excited to meet new people. You could have him carry a stick or a ball around in his mouth or train him to be quiet on command.

#### **My dog barks at other dogs when I’m out on a walk.**

This is a common problem caused by intense barrier frustration. Being on a leash restricts your dog’s access to other dogs, and he’s expressing his frustration by barking and lunging. Avoid areas with many dogs and be sure to reward good walking manners. You can also consult a trainer to help your dog change his behavior or attend one of our Reactive Rover classes.

#### **My dog barks at passersby when he’s in my back yard or car.**

This type of barking springs from territoriality, barrier frustration, or a combination of the two. Again, the easiest thing is to restrict your dog’s access to the problem area (car, yard). Or you can work with a trainer to permanently change your dog’s reaction to passersby.

#### **My dog barks when he is home alone.**

First, suspect loneliness or boredom. You can rule these out by boosting your dog’s exercise regimen and providing food puzzles when away. Next, take territoriality out of the equation by restricting your dog to an area of the house where he can’t see people, dogs, or cars going by. If your dog still barks incessantly while alone, he may have separation-related issues. Consult a trainer or veterinary behavior specialist.

For more details, see *Barking* and *Dog-Dog Aggression On Leash* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## **CHEWING**

Some reasons dogs chew:    Because it feels good  
   Anxiety  
   Attention-seeking  
   Barrier frustration/escape behavior  
   Pent-up energy  
   Hunger

**Tip:** Always rule out hunger first. Ask your vet what the correct amount of food for your dog is. When gone for longer periods, use a timed food-dispensing toy like the MannersMinder®.

### **My dog chews up window frames and doorknobs.**

This is escape behavior that can spring from either barrier frustration (wanting to get outside in the world where all the fun is) or separation-related issues. In the first instance, increase your dog's exercise, provide more alone-time stimulation, and confine him to an area away from windows and doors. In the second instance, you would need to consult a trainer or veterinary behavior specialist.

### **When I watch TV, my dog fetches one of my favorite shoes and chews on it.**

This is classic attention-seeking behavior. Your dog needs more stimulation and more time with you. You should also move the shoes out of your dog's reach and redirect him to an appropriate dog toy.

For more details, see *Chewing* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## **JUMPING**

Some reasons dogs jump:    Greeting people/dogs  
   Attention-seeking  
   Play initiation  
   To explore/get something they want

### **My dog jumps up on people I meet or on guests in my home.**

That's your dog saying hello the canine way. Ask your dog to say hello a more polite way, for example by sitting or going to his bed when the doorbell rings. Alternatively, walk around people on the sidewalk, and put your dog in another room when guests arrive.

### **When I sit quietly and read a book, my dog jumps on me.**

Your dog wants attention—and probably has a surplus of energy. Direct your dog to play with his toys, and find ways to increase his exercise and mind workouts. Don't take calm behavior for granted either. Make a habit out of praising, petting, or tossing your dog a treat whenever he's lying around quietly.

### **My dog jumps on me with his favorite toy when I sit down.**

That's play behavior and attention-seeking rolled into one. Again, the answer is to redirect your dog to solitary play and make sure he gets to exercise both his body and mind every day. If your dog is social and enjoys the company of other dogs, consider enrolling him in a doggy daycare, hiring a dog walker, or attending regular dog socials.

### **My dog jumps on the kitchen counter to get to the leftover dinner.**

This is known as “counter surfing,” and here, prevention is the best cure. Dogs are natural scavengers, so figuring out how to get to out-of-reach food is hard-wired behavior. And if your dog manages to get at last night’s lamb stew just once, you may have an incurable counter surfer on your hands. Install doors in your kitchen or use a baby gate to keep your dog out of the kitchen when you can’t supervise.

Please note that counter surfing deterrents rarely work. Counter surfers are usually clever problem-solving dogs who don’t give up easily.

For more details, see *Counter Surfing* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

### **PULLING ON LEASH**

Some reasons dogs pull:      To get to great smells, other dogs, open spaces, etc.  
Because how else does one walk?

### **My dog pulls so hard my shoulder is sore. What do I do?**

Pulling is second nature to dogs (think sled dogs), so nice leash walking has to be taught. Here’s what you can do:

- **Use an anti-pull device.** For immediate relief, get a humane anti-pull head halter or harness. We recommend the Gentle Leader® for most dogs and the Halti® for flat-muzzled dogs. The SENSE-ation™ and SENSE-ible™ harnesses are both good products. Avoid choke or prong collars, which can permanently damage your dog’s trachea. Walks should be pain-free for both you and your dog.

**Tip:** If your dog is a puller, don’t use a back-buckle harness. Generally great for dogs with short necks (pugs) or thin necks (whippets), back-buckle harnesses are built in a way that encourages pulling.

- **Train good leash manners.** An anti-pull halter doesn’t teach your dog not to pull, it simply prevents it. Getting a dog to choose not to pull requires training. Sign up for one of our training classes, hire a dog trainer, or read the *Loose-Leash Walking* handout in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

### **FEARFULNESS IN NEW ENVIRONMENTS**

Dogs are hard-wired to be cautious of new surroundings and need time to adjust—often lots of time, by human standards. Remember that many things you take for granted may be completely foreign to your dog: metal stairways, flapping awnings, kneeling city buses, etc.

### **My dog crouches low to the ground, stalls on walks, shakes, or cowers.**

Avoid the worst triggers or most difficult areas. Try to keep your dog comfortable and relaxed by feeding him extra yummy treats or bringing his favorite toy. This way, you can gradually build positive associations with the new surroundings. Most importantly, give him time to adjust. It could take weeks or even months before your dog is completely at ease in his new neighborhood.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

**Myth: Using food to train my dog is bribery.**

**Reality:** All animals, including humans, work for reinforcement. A reward to us might be a promotion at work or a dinner out with friends. Dogs too will work only for reinforcement. Much as they enjoy our company, their purpose in life is to fulfill their own needs—food, shelter, security, social needs, etc.—not to please us. You can use food, play, praise, the prospect of a leash walk, or a belly rub to reward your dog. As long as you manage to motivate him sufficiently, he will happily do what you ask.

**Myth: If I start training with food, I will always have to use it.**

**Reality:** Not all the time, no. To maintain an already established behavior, you should use any reward your dog cares about and only break out the food intermittently; a jackpot prize to keep him playing the game. But when you want to introduce a new behavior into your dog's repertoire, food is a superior tool: portable, easy to deliver, and high on a dog's list of priorities.

**Myth: When my dog pulls on leash, jumps on me, or shows aggression, he wants to dominate me.**

**Reality:** The label of “dominance” has been used to explain every type of behavior in dogs, from not coming when called to protectiveness of toys and food. But dogs don't constantly plot how to overthrow humans and gain sole custody of the fridge. If your dog jumps on you, he's probably excited to see you. If he pulls on leash it's because he's in a hurry to go places. The idea of dominance sets up an unhelpful conflict. Better to focus on what you would like your dog to do instead of the behavior you don't enjoy, and then teach him that by rewarding him for it.

**Myth: Rubbing my dog's nose in his urine or feces will stop him from soiling the house.**

**Reality:** Absolutely not true. The only thing your dog will learn from this experience is to expect irrational and unpleasant behavior from his humans. Just like newspaper swatting and scolding, it may even teach your dog not to go to the bathroom in front of you, which makes it harder to house-train him.

**Myth: Stubborn dogs need assertive training and punishment.**

**Reality:** It's true that some dogs learn faster than others, but no dog is willfully stubborn. If your dog doesn't respond to your training efforts, odds are you haven't provided enough (or the right) motivation or a timely reward. Put another way: if chickens and elephants can be trained with positive reinforcement methods, so can your dog.

**Myth: My dog barks and growls at strangers on the street because he's protective of me.**

**Reality:** Alas, the naked truth is that your dog is protective of himself. The furious display of bravado is his way of showing he's uncomfortable with or afraid of strangers, most likely because he hasn't been socialized to enough people as a puppy.

**Myth: My dog destroys things in my home or urinates on the floor out of spite. I can tell because he looks so guilty.**

**Reality:** When you return home to find shredded bed linens or a puddle in the living room, it's easy to think your dog did those things because he's angry with you for some reason. But guilt is a wholly human concept. The "guilty look" on your dog's face doesn't mean he feels bad for what he did—he's forgotten all about that by now—it means he's reading subtle cues in your body language telling him something is wrong. His behavior might spring from boredom, loneliness, a surplus of energy, anxiety, or simply having to hold it too long.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

We hope the information in this handbook will be helpful during your dog's transition into his new home.

If you have further questions, we offer basic advice via e-mail. If you adopted a dog from us and need help with house-training, alone-time training, rough play, or socialization, email [adoptions@sfspca.org](mailto:adoptions@sfspca.org). Our website at [sfspca.org/behavior-training](http://sfspca.org/behavior-training) has helpful information to answer many behavior questions.

You may also be interested in attending one of our New Dog 101 sessions. This free class is highly informative for anyone who has a dog, is a new adopter, or is interested in getting a dog. A question-and-answer session with the trainer provides you with valuable advice specific to your situation.

Topics covered include new dog management, house-training, crate training, exercise, impulse control, and more. The class is lecture only; relevant handouts are provided upon request.

No pre-registration is needed. Interested students may simply show up for class; we have plenty of space available. The class is at 243 Alabama Street, and street parking is available.

**Please note this class is for guardians only – no dogs, please.**

For a list of upcoming classes, visit: [sfspca.org/behavior-training/dog-training](http://sfspca.org/behavior-training/dog-training).

**Please double-check our website the day of class to confirm the schedule.**