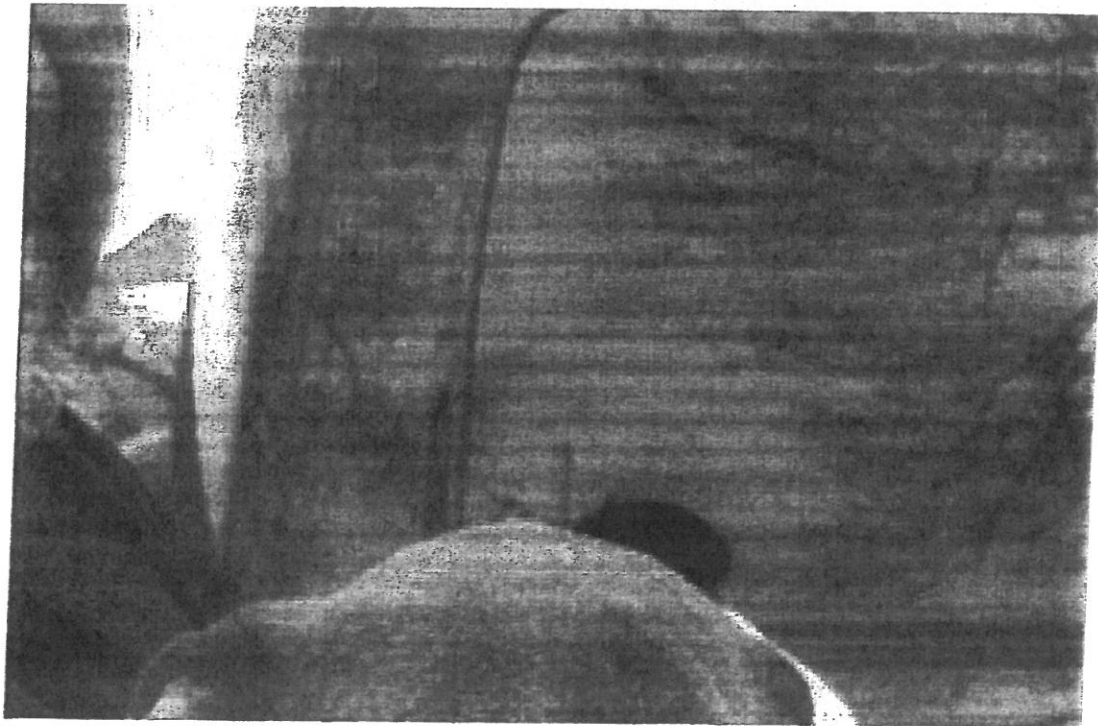
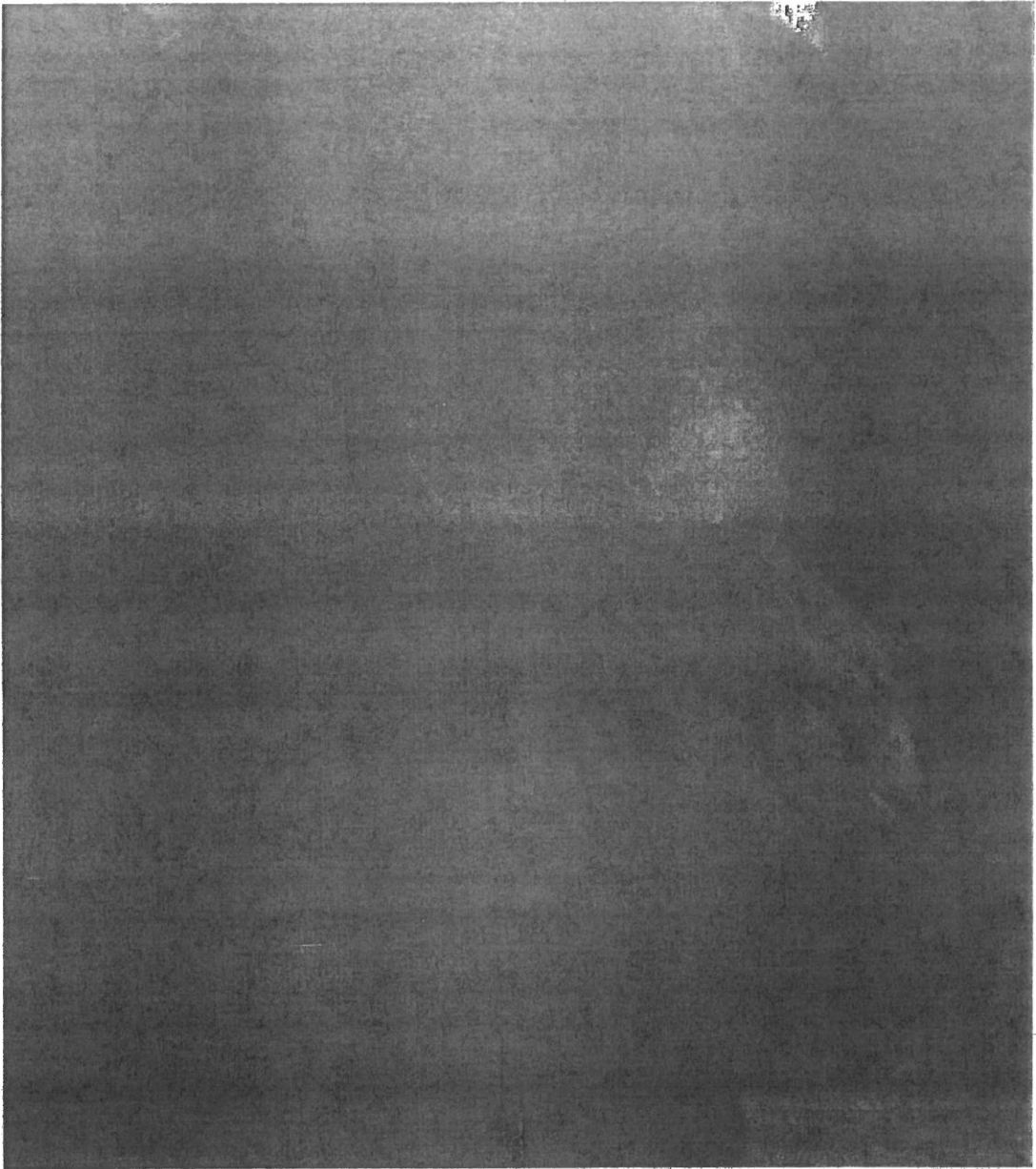




THE FIRST THING TO DO WHEN GETTING A DOG FROM A SHELTER – LEARN WHAT “DECOMPRESSION” IS

by KD | May 16, 2017 | Dog Lifestyle, Training Articles | 59 comments





It's pretty damn awesome of you to look to the shelter when searching for a dog to add to your family.

I mean that.

Our nation's shelter's, pounds, and humane societies are overflowing with perfectly healthy and awesome dogs who desperately need good homes where they can live out their lives. The fact that you have decided to go there first is great.

But all that greatness will be meaningless if you do not do your homework first.

I'm not even talking about general dog stuff like behavior and training. There is something even more important that you must be aware of, be cognizant of, and be prepared to implement the moment you take that dog from the shelter.

SHELTERS ARE NOT FUN PLACES

If you have ever walked through the kennels of an animal shelter you surely can attest to the stress of the experience. Perhaps you can remember the first time you entered one. It might have been a memorable experience!

They are very very loud.

It is non stop barking, howling, whining, and yelping. The sound can be deafening at times and if you are not used to it or it is your first time, it can cause a heavy dose of anxiety to rise up your bones and make you want to turn around and walk out.

It's intense.

Now realize that you CAN turn around and walk out. Those dogs can't. They are there all day, all night, all week, all month. It shouldn't take too much contemplation to realize this isn't the ideal setting for any dog. Some dogs can be there for months on end if it is a no-kill shelter.

The longer they are in there the worse the mental trauma can be.

While some dogs will completely shut down others seem to amp up developing numerous anxiety based behaviors that border on neurotic. While the observable behaviors might be different, the source is the same, stress from being in there.

Recognizing that this type of experience can have an impact on a dog's state of mind, it baffles me how people think that simply putting a leash on the dog and taking it home means everything is suddenly going to be O.K. As if anything is that simple!

So many of these dogs end up back at shelters for a wide variety of reasons, including aggression, because their well intentioned new family did not take the time to research the proper way to bring a dog from this type of environment home. When the dog starts acting in inappropriate ways or even worse, becomes aggressive, everybody is quick to blame the dog's "troubled past".

It's not the dog's past, it is the dog's present.

The first day in a new home is not the day to meet other family members, loud and energetic toddlers, other dogs, the cats, the super nosey neighbor who wants to give your new dog hugs and kisses....

NO.....NOT AT ALL.....

DECOMPRESSION

The name is indicative of the what it means in terms of what the dog has been through and what the dog needs. All the stress from the living conditions the dog is coming from needs to be addressed. The dog has been under a lot of stress and pressure.

The dog needs to "decompress" and take some time getting back to a balanced state of mind. This will not be achieved with going from one crazy high activity place to another. The dog should not be introduced to the couch for endless hours of belly rubs on day one because you feel bad the dog had a rough past.

That makes YOU feel good.

This isn't about you and what you like, this is about what is best for the dog. Remember?

For at LEAST 2-3 WEEKS, your new dog's life should be incredibly simple and boring. Keep the affection to a bare minimum, keep talking and training to non-existent levels.

You want as much silence as possible.

Have a daily routine or schedule 100% planned out prior to the dog coming home. This should be the dog's day mapped out.

From bathroom breaks, to crate time, to short walks in quiet boring places, the entire day should be on a schedule.

Dog's find exponentially more comfort in routine than they do belly rubs and cuddles. For that reason, keep the affection to a bare minimum. This is not the time to shower the dog with affection as all that will do is reinforce an unbalanced state of mind and confuse the dog as to YOUR role in their lives.



A nice calm and quiet beginning is essential

The premise behind decompression is allowing the dog to get back to a neutral and relaxed state of mind, opposite of what it just came from.

Your dog needs leadership and calm predictability.

These two things are crucial to the dog becoming appropriately integrated into your home. Allowing the dog time to decompress, without having to deal with a whole new set of intense stimuli will set you all up for a successful future.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

My free E-Book is the instruction book that should have come with your dog. It's short and sweet and easy to get through. Learn the very basics of owning a dog FIRST before worrying about the other stuff. What color you paint your walls doesn't matter if the foundation is wrong. My intention was to sell it, then I realized it's

FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES: We are seeing a lot of posts and pictures of dogs who have just arrived in your homes that are not leashed, not tethered to you, are being allowed immediate interaction with other pets in the home, are being introduced to new people and are not being crated and allowed to decompress after transport or a move. Not giving a dog time to adjust and decompress is the best way to set them up for failure. Our two week shutdown is not just a suggestion, it absolutely needs to be followed to give our dogs the best chance at being successful in a new home. The shutdown paperwork is given to all adopters and is sent to fosters along with our foster forms.

Please take a moment to go over the procedure and please let us know if you have any questions. Below are some guidelines as well:

Step 1: Chill Out!

Your new foster is going to need quiet time in your house, before anything else. Basically, the dog needs to CHILL OUT, which we call "decompression time." Skipping this step is a sure-fire way to make sure you have problems.

You should have a quiet, crated area for your new foster to decompress in. Get it out of your head that a crate is a form of punishment. Every tool can be used properly or improperly, properly used a crate gives a dog a safe, "den like" area which is very natural to them. Make sure the foster dog is provided with lots of ways to be stimulated mentally (Kongs with frozen peanut butter, interactive toy games, etc). I also have music playing 24/7 in the room. Specifically, classical music, since the piano tempos slow down the racing heart-beat of a stressed dog.

Stressed dogs destroy crates and act out. Calm dogs do not. We also already know that our dog is coming into our house already overstimulated from too many people, dogs noises and sounds at the shelter/transport and we need to help the dog decompress. Not only does this alone time let the dog relax, it also allows the dog to explore your house with his nose, while crated and secure but still learning about your other pets, children, etc without the stress of a face-to-face meeting where body language might be misunderstood.

Resident dogs all go out the back to potty in the yard. The new foster dog comes out of his crate and immediately goes out the front door to potty.

The new dog is then allowed to come inside and explore the larger part of the house, and typically they will go right to where my dogs hang out and start rolling around and exploring those scents. After a minute or two, the foster gets a delicious treat and goes to enjoy it in his crate.

Resident dogs come back inside and they immediately start rolling around too, smelling the new dog and getting used to him. Then they all get rewarded with delicious treats, too.

New dog smell = GOOD.

Never put a time frame on how long the “smell before see phase” lasts. Each dog is unique and will need more, or less time. Gauge it more on the body reaction of all the dogs in the house.

If you're unsure about reading dog body language, you should probably learn a little more before bringing in a new dog to foster since missing or misunderstanding their cues causes most problems with new dog greetings. We are always available to help with this and answer any questions.

SEE BEFORE TOUCH

Now, you open up another sense for the dog which is the sense of sight. The dog's position in the house remains relatively the same but the door is opened up and then baby gated shut.

The dog still spends more time in their crate than the other dogs, and you offset that by spending more time out of your day exercising the dog individually; ensuring that all of their physical and mental stimulation needs are met.

Keep your dog moving around the house and reward positive body language while redirecting unwanted body language. Don't let them

sit in one spot and stare at each other, and gauge their reaction to seeing the other dogs.

If you need to start off at 50 ft away, start off at 50 ft away. If you can be a few arm's lengths without any problems, then start there.

The Greeting

Do not put a timeline on the steps above. But two weeks is the standard amount of time it takes and about how long you should plan to spend before moving on to letting your dogs meet.

Some dogs will need more time. I've stayed in the, "see but don't touch" phase for several months, with some more extreme cases. Every time, with positive reinforcement and a focus on mental and physical stimulation and the positive projection of my own energy, the dogs have eventually advanced to the next stage.

When you're ready to get your dogs to meet each other, you have to think like a dog if you want a good interaction. Humans like to stand in one spot, make eye contact, and talk.

Dogs like to run around and move, they avoid too much direct eye contact, and they'd rather smell than talk.

So, take your dogs for a walk. A nice, long walk. Have your spouse or a friend help you and spread it out. Dog-Person-Person-Dog.. Keep everyone moving forward and remember the 5-second rule. No, not about dropping your food on the floor. If you have dogs in your house that food shouldn't last 5 seconds on the floor. The 5-second rule about eye contact. Nothing good ever comes from more than 5 seconds of two new dogs locking eyes.

Watch them, count silently in your head, and around the 3 to 5 second mark, take the lead and redirect the dogs BEFORE any negative body language, growls, or snaps happen. Reward them positively for the good, short interaction.

Then repeat. And repeat. And repeat. Always short interactions, always ending on a positive note.

Your dog's way of thinking can be summed up by a sequence of "If/Then" statements. If I see a dog, then I need to do this. If I see a cat, then I need to do this. If someone rings the doorbell, then I need to do this. The more we shape those experiences with positivity, and the more positive experiences we provide, the more we can do for misunderstood, abused, unwanted and neglected shelter animals that might not otherwise make it out the front door.

Everything is about being realistic with your abilities, your time and your other obligations. It's the only way to set your dogs and your foster dogs up for success. Not to mention the rescue you are helping. Many of them will only take a dog in because someone offers to foster. If you're unprepared, you're going to place a big burden on that rescue soon as you force them to quickly find another foster while you deal with unexpected behavior problems you're ill-equipped to handle.

You, as the foster, are on the front lines of deciding the final outcome for the dog you're taking into your house. Take that responsibility seriously, and you will experience one of the most rewarding feelings ever.

Please also remember that we are available 24/7 and we ask that you contact us as soon as any issues arise. When situation are allowed to escalate before intervening it makes things difficult to handle and reverse.

Thank you!!