

‘Your First Weeks Home...

Most likely, your new dog has spent at least few weeks with a foster family. In foster care, the dogs learn or relearn basic house manners, obedience, crate training, etc. Foster care is also the time we address other situations that will determine what type of family is appropriate for the dog.

It is important that you, the adoptive family, continue with what the dog has been learning in foster care. No dog will walk right into your home and immediately identify it as HIS home. Chances are, your dog has been in a previous home, an animal shelter, a boarding kennel and a foster home, prior to being in your home. For this reason, you need to set the ground rules on how you expect your dog to live in your home. Remember that you are the master, and the dog is the dog.

It is important not to view your dog as a "poor homeless creature" and attempt to compensate for what s/he has experienced prior to coming to live with you. Your dog does not feel self-pity. Move along to setting rules. If you do not want your dog on the sofa in the future, don't let your dog on the sofa now. If you do not want your dog to beg at the table in the future, don't let your dog do it now (and certainly don't feed the dog from the table).

Now is an important time to make sure that you set up the situation for the future. We strongly recommend and encourage that you keep this dog on lead at all times (yes, this means in the house) so that you can correct any behavior you do not want in your home. Do this for at least the first few weeks. Not only can you correct a situation in the present, but it builds a relationship between master and dog.

Pack order is especially important to rottweilers. A pack needs a leader. The pack leader is YOU. Dogs do not consider themselves human. It is up to you to ensure that a dog remains in its DOG status. Humans have privileges that dogs do not - sitting on furniture, eating first, walking through doors and down stairs first, etc. Dogs expect a human, as its leader, to do these things first. If you show the dog that these things are not important to you, the dog will assume the leadership role in these cases. Since the dog is not clear on what leadership roles ARE important to you, it is likely that he will continue to investigate and possibly challenge other leadership options (i.e. marking your bed).

We also strongly recommend that the dog be crate trained and crated when you are not home. Crating is not cruel. It is not inhumane. Dogs don't consider a crate "jail". A crate to a dog is similar to its "cave", or to a child, its "room." A crate is the dog's safe place, as long as the crate is used as a positive tool. The first few weeks are critical in defining appropriate behavior. Allowing your dog free run of your home when you are not present sets the dog up to make his own rules which could include soiling in the house, sleeping on furniture, destructive behavior and so on. A crate is especially useful in housebreaking, or assisting to eliminate any confusion as to where elimination is appropriate. A dog generally will not soil his crate unless he is ill or unable to wait.

Confining a dog to one room is the next best thing, but will not likely have the same results. In a room, the dog has more room to explore and take advantage of its space. A small

bathroom provides roles of toilet paper to shred, toothpaste to eat, a door to scratch and destroy, a window sill to chew, a shower curtain and towels to play with, etc.

In the first several weeks and even months your dog can earn privileges. We can not stress enough how critical this time is. Too much freedom right off the bat will result in an overly confident dog with habits and expectations that may be more difficult to overcome in the future. This is an excellent opportunity to take advantage of the dog's will to please.

Now is not the time to reward your new dog with fresh bones or other tasty treats. A better treat for now would be a "cookie", kong or synthetic bone that does not have the same value to the dog as a fresh bone. This insures that the dog does not have a reason to show possessiveness, or at least minimizes it.

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Dale Green Young