

Helping Your Newly Adopted Pet Adjust

Bringing a new pet home is exciting, but can also be a little overwhelming for both of you! We've put together some tips to help those important first few weeks together go as smoothly as possible.

Be Patient

All newly adopted animals will need time to decompress and fully transition between shelter life and their new home. This decompression period will vary from a few weeks to several months, as each pet is an individual and their learning histories and previous home situations vary widely. Expect a certain amount of shyness at first, as they ease into your home.

Offer LOTS of treats

You can quickly build trust with your new pet by offering treats for any behavior that you'd like to see more of (such as approaching you, making eye contact, sitting, being quiet, or lying down). Initially, use high-value, meat-based treats, such as cooked chicken, that are highly palatable and easy on the tummy. You can also use their regular food as treats.

Create a Predictable Schedule

Give your new pet a consistent routine. Feed them in the same place and at the same time every day. Add in enrichment activities at set times each day. Take them for walks at the same time, and take the same route initially. Do not forget to include frequent nap time!

Allow the Pet to Hide

It may seem counterintuitive, but if your newly adopted pet wants to just hunker down and hide for a while, let them! Never force them to interact with a family member or another pet. You can try gently coaxing them out by tossing treats out and then leaving the area, but if they prefer not to come out, let them be. Forcing them out of a hiding spot will only make them more afraid and teach them that they no longer have a safe space.

Avoid Punishment

It can take some time for your new pet to adjust to your household expectations. If they do something you don't like, try to resist the urge to yell at or scold them. They may have been punished in the past, and you can inadvertently add to their distrust by scolding them or using any kind of aversive training tools, such as squirt bottles, a tossed bottle of coins, and certain training collars. [Check out our handout](#) on training collars.

Ease into Introductions

Introduce only one new person or animal at a time and use LOTS of positive rewards such as food treats, toys, play, and praise for all introductions. Avoid having visitors for a few weeks at least, as the new pet settles in. Be extra cautious with children and do not allow kids to play roughly with the pet. The first thing many kids want to do is hug their new family member, but as a general rule, most pets do not enjoy hugs. Kids should be gradually introduced, and every interaction with the pet should be closely supervised.

Create a Safe Space

Build a “Fear Free Fortress” using a small room, a gated off area, or an exercise pen that’s just for the new pet. It should have toys they enjoy, something safe to chew on, water, and comfy bedding. Play calming music (such as classical or soft piano music), plug in a diffuser of calming dog or cat pheromones, and make it easy for them to retreat into this safe space often.

Less Is More: Skip the Crowds

Avoid outings to crowded places initially. The first few weeks are not the time to take a newly adopted pet to the farmer’s market or the kids’ ball game. Allow them plenty of time to adjust to their new home and their new humans before gradually expanding their world to include other outings. Do not try to do too much all at once in the name of “socialization,” as it could very easily backfire and overwhelm your new pet.

Line up Your Experts

Seek out a Fear Free Certified Professional for your dog or cat. Your new pet will need a veterinarian for sure, and possibly also a groomer, trainer, pet sitter, or boarding/daycare provider. If you aren’t seeing any progress at all after several weeks with your new pet, and they’re showing serious signs of fear or a behavior issue, enlist the help of a Fear Free Certified trainer and/or veterinarian.

[Fear Free Directory](#)

The Importance of Enrichment

One of the most calming things you can do for your new pet is to allow them to express innate behaviors via enrichment. Sniffing, for example, is a naturally calming behavior. Simple, scent-based activities like searching for pieces of food in cardboard or plastic containers or underneath a blanket or sheet can create a positive association with your home. You can also purchase some commercially available food puzzles.

 *NOTE: use caution if there are multiple pets in the home. While one is seeking out food treats, the others should be confined safely in another location to avoid any potential competition or stress over resources.*