**I GOT A SHELTER/RESCUE DOG – NOW WHAT?**



**What to do when you get him/her home?**

**Coping with the first few weeks!**

**How to move forward from there!**

**Realistic expectations!**

**The Animal Behaviour Consultants of Southern Africa (©®™)**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Many of us involved with animal rescue tend to push adoptions as a good choice for owners wanting a new dog! We cajole, we beg, and are very quick to point out the advantages, the moral reasons, and the humanity of saving a life! However, we are **NOT** so quick to point out the potential downside! Therefore, it’s not surprising that new owners often have totally unrealistic expectations of their new rescue dog! This can often result in a dog becoming “re-cycled” which is something all rescuers and shelters want to avoid at all costs!

An adopted dog **CAN** fulfil many expectations, & some rescue animals quickly fit into a new home, new routine, new dogs, new people etc. However, without some time, energy, and effort on a new owner’s part – things can go horribly wrong. It is unrealistic to expect a newly adopted dog to adapt and fit into a family effortlessly or overnight!

Now we all know that some rescue dogs come with excess baggage – this is a given.

**So what now? Where to from here?**

*I am going to make the generous assumption that the shelter is a reputable one, and has “matched” the dog with the “right” family – viz. breed characteristics’, energy levels, life style, environment etc. & that the mandatory sterilisation, micro chipping, health checks, internal & external parasite control has been achieved & any other medical issues have been attended to.*

*I am also going to make the assumption, that any dog on dog introductions to an existing dog or pack, will have already been made on neutral ground, & that any existing dogs will have met the new rescue dog at least more than once to ensure that there will not be any potential aggression when you get the rescue dog home.*

***If this is not the case then the prospective owner should insist that this is an absolute necessity before taking home a dog that is expected to fit into an existing pack.***

*This should be done under strict supervision in a totally controlled environment, with responsible experienced handlers who have extensive knowledge of dog behaviour, body language & communications, & have the skills to intervene if/where necessary with the least amount of stress*

**MR / MRS “FIX IT”!**

Most people adopt a shelter dog because they are kind, generous people with a genuinely love for dogs. Because they are caring individuals they tend to want to see fast results. In many cases this is not possible. Expectations need to be realistic – regardless of the dog’s history. Generally speaking, there are no quick fixes. In most cases it takes, time, patience & understanding to see improvements - & the first things the new dog in a household needs is ........... **TIME, & SPACE!**

**DEALING WITH THE HUMAN ADOPTEES!**

There is definitely a “personality type” of human who will be drawn to taking on a shelter dog, and many of these kind people do find it extremely difficult to put rules into place – to instil boundaries and not to totally indulge a traumatised animal from day one! Of course this is not easy. Human maternal and paternal instincts want to shower the dog with affection and most people instinctively want to try and “make up” for the animals early bad experiences.

Dogs need boundaries! Boundaries make them feel safe! Rules provide them with structure. If the human takes on the decision making – it takes“whole load” of responsibility off the dog’s shoulders! Less responsibility equals less stress!

When presented with a behaviour modification programme, with dozens of steps to undertake, many owners see this as daunting, and find it extremely difficult to grasp the emotional differences between dogs and people. Being a good leader is very difficult for these kinds of personalities. Many misguidedly thinking that if they give the dog its own way, in everything it will become a happy, contented dog.

* A good tip to help adoptees to comply with an integration programme is to provide them with short term goals, emphasising that they only have to achieve one goal at a time.
* A “settling in” programme could be divided into individual goals and on completion of each goal the next one supplied.
* Often supplying adoptees with too much information too soon can cause them to feel overwhelmed.
* With problem dogs this is often intensified as to the new owner, the problems sometimes appear to be insurmountable.
* By dividing a programme up into manageable steps it simplifies the process and makes each and every step more attainable!

**WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU GET HIM/HER HOME?**

The first thing that you do when you get your rescue dog home is

**ABSOLUTELY NOTHING** - **NOTHING AT ALL!**

* Don’t force any kind of interaction / social or other!!!!
* Don’t speak to the dog
* Don’t make eye contact
* Don’t fuss
* Don’t touch
* Don’t attempt to play “fetch” or solicit play behaviour!
* Don’t introduce her to your family and friends
* Don’t crowd her with your kids
* Don’t introduce her to your family cat, chickens, parrot etc.
* Don’t comfort or give the dog attention if she is fearful or anxious. Dogs perceive comfort as praise – so to comfort her whilst she is fearful is to reward her for neurosis! This is especially relevant during the “settling in” / habituation period.
* Don’t stress for the first day or so about food – and meals – even if the dog is malnourished. Stress often inhibits appetite!
* However after a day or so – however, if in any doubt or if the dog displays lethargy or the lack of appetite continues **DO** consult with your veterinarian to rule out any possible physiological cause.

**GIVE THE DOG A CHANCE TO BECOME AWARE OF HER SURROUNDINGS**

**TO RELAX AND SETTLE IN!**

**DO:**

* **Make sure before you release him into your garden he is wearing a collar, in case of emergencies. Do this at the shelter/foster home if he is not already wearing one.**
* Be as calm & as matter of fact around the dog as you possibly can & try to ensure that the environment is as stress free as possible! You should be in control of the environment & management thereof!
* Provide the dog with easy access to clean water
* Provide the dog with a “safe” place where he/she does not feel forced to interact with anyone or anything. (Can be a crate or corner of a room or if outside a kennel etc). Make sure the dog has a place where his space is not invaded; where he can withdraw to if he does not want to interact. Initially, his rights in this regard should be respected. Many dogs that have been kept in kennel environments are very happy to be “crated” and this provides them with an artificial “den” or “safe place.”
* **LET THE DOG DECIDE** where he/she feels safe.
* After a couple of hours you can offer a small meal – **DON’T MAKE ANY DRAMATIC CHANGES TO DIET AS THIS COULD CAUSE SERIOUS DIGESTIVE ISSUES**
* Any change should be extremely gradual. Don’t panic if the dog doesn’t seem interested in a meal – no matter how high value it is! Stress often surpasses appetite**!**
* Offer small amounts of more frequent meals - you can also make the food a bit more high value. Some insecure dogs battle to eat when humans are present. However – there is always the other end of the scale. The half starved dog who just can’t get enough in his gut! This can also be a sign of anxiety. Therefore, even with the over greedy dog - smaller regular spaced meals would be advised. This is also to ensure a healthy gut & avoid digestive problems developing.

**ARRIVING HOME - CONCLUSION:**

However, as much as I have said not to fuss too much and to try and be somewhat aloof with the dog. If it appears to gain comfort from your presence, then of course give it some company. Just don’t fuss, crowd, or go “over the top.”

**If the dog approaches you – certainly give a kind word & a smile & physical contact if the dog is actively seeking this out.**

Some more naturally social types really need this – it gives them great comfort - & it is easy to see a dog who is inviting contact. Some nervous individuals with a high food drive can also benefit from you dropping a high value treat each time you walk pass them. However, more often than not most dogs need some time to make the initial adjustment without too much interference.

**Please Note:**

**Most species of animals take approximately 14 days to habituate to a new environment.**

**DOGS ARE HIGHLY ADAPTABLE ANIMALS – AND ARE GREAT OPPORTUNISTS!**

Their incredible ability to adapt is probably one of the most important facts to take into account when discussing the adoption issue. Virtually **ALL** dogs from all kinds of backgrounds, will be able to adapt & habituate to a new environment – if the environment is an appropriate one, and the dog is given time, and his needs are satisfied (that is physical, emotional & intellectual needs)! Therefore the way the dog is initially handled is vital to a successful rehabilitation and success!

**Most dogs when they arrive at a new location are extremely stressed.**

Even if they were friendly, bouncy, playful dogs at the shelter / foster home, perhaps happily interacting with people / playing ball / running around etc, the transition to a new environment can be a very frightening time for a dog and he may behave in a very different manner than when you first met him! Try not to take it personally! It has nothing to do with you at all – **Stress can almost paralyse some individuals – so back off and give him some time!**

It must be pointed out that many dogs spend a fair bit of time at a shelter before being adopted. Therefore, the shelter becomes their “home” – their territory, & the place they would perceive to be a “safe” location. This is even more relevant if the shelter environment has been a “kennel” type “pound” facility.

Not all dogs adopted are fortunate enough to have been in a family foster home environment, or for that matter from a good, well run shelter where dogs are socialised, walked and have human contact whilst in shelter care. There are many shelters that are terrible places of disease and squalor.

Lots of dogs, who come out of the old fashioned concrete kennel “pound” type environments that are lucky enough to find a home, could already be suffering from various behavioural conditions synonymous with confinement - such as kennel dog syndrome, (severe stress behaviours caused by confinement and lack of mental and physical stimulation).

These dogs can be **overwhelmed** by a large garden and may suffer from agoraphobia (a condition characterised by an irrational fear of public or open spaces)! Crowds of people too can be **overwhelming!**

A large noisy family can be overwhelming to a dog that has spent time in a concrete wire kennel enclosure!

It is a known fact that dogs that come out of pound type environment have far less chance of being re-homed than dogs in good family foster homes!

Many dogs kept in these kinds of shelters stand little chance of being re-homed – many as a direct result of kennel dog syndrome. Dogs confined for long periods of time in “pound” type facilities often become withdrawn, loose condition and interest in their surroundings & can display stereotypical behaviours (repeated patterns of behaviours for no specific purpose or reason). In severe cases even self mutilate – (acral lick granulomas) – itself a form of stereotypical behaviour whereupon the dog chews itself excessively until lesions are formed & often permanent tissue damage can occur.

The self-licking and chewing acts as a release of tension for dogs which are bored, socially isolated, confined for long periods of time. Pacing can also be evident, as can spinning or tail chasing – all three of these problems can sometimes be linked to confinement stress related behaviours - where animals are kept in an area with little or no mental stimulation – common in a “pound” type environment. All these behaviours can also become habituated – even after re-homing!

Loose stools can also be a problem in these kinds of environments and whilst can often be connected to internal parasites can also be a symptom of stress and severe anxiety.

**Dogs arriving at a new location or environment, can be extremely vulnerable, & need space and time to start the adjustment period.**

**ABUSED DOG? / NOT NECESSARILY!**

Many people automatically assume that every rescue dog has been physically abused and/or beaten. There are of course many forms of abuse, however, if your rescue dog is avoiding people or exhibiting fear aggression it does not necessarily mean that he has been beaten. In my experience many of these dogs **have not necessarily** been physically abused.

Of course some certainly bear the scars of physical abuse that is a given..... However, there are many individuals who have simply been kept in total isolation – resulting in poor social skills, severe anxiety/stress & often fear related behaviours. However, dogs who have experienced a total absence of socialisation – both inter and intra species, (“people / dog” and/or “dog/dog”) for example - dogs that have been kept as “yard dogs” who have been kept isolated behind four walls, with nothing to occupy themselves with, and little or no mental/physical stimulation, will often present with stress/anxiety, lack of confidence and poor people skills, it is often mistaken as signs of physical abuse.

**THE FIRST NIGHT:**

Many people feel that they have to give these shelter dogs extra love and double attention – in order to make up for what the dog has lost out on - just give and give and give and give even more............. with little thought to the behavioural patterns they are setting. Dogs habituate behaviour very very quickly, & from the beginning, the rules you set could quite likely be the ones that you are stuck with, & in some cases you could live to regret!

If a dog is successful in its aim – it will certainly repeat the behaviour that caused the success! Each and every time! So think very carefully about some of the more basic things like for example where is the dog going to sleep?

It would be very unfair to start him off in the main bedroom (no matter how sorry you feel for him) if your end aim is to have him sleep in the kitchen. So decide from the beginning where the dog is going to sleep.

Prepare an area where you have decided the dog can sleep.

Make sure he is provided with his “safe” place / crate / bed / quiet undisturbed corner etc.

Try to get him outside last thing before you go to bed if possible to encourage him to toilet – if he doesn’t comply – don’t worry. It is possible that he is going to have a few “accidents” for which you should be prepared.

Don’t put newspaper down for him to toilet on at night (or any other time) as this would be sending him the message that toileting indoor is ok! If you are able to – it is often suggested that you set your alarm clock and get up a couple of times a night for the first few days & go outside with him to see if he is willing to toilet. If we limit his choices – there is less chance of an “accident” however – there are no guarantees!

**Anxious dogs often present with loose stools! Getting up a couple of times through the night to give him an opportunity to toilet outside for a few days is well worth the effort!**

Whilst I would not feed him or offer food late the first night (feed mid afternoon for the second meal of the day for several days before you change meal times). To help make him feel safe it might be a good idea, when you retire for the night, to leave him with something high value to chew. Preferably something non-synthetic a suitable bone, or hide chew or some cow hooves with some yummy filling - peanut butter or beef stock smeared inside. This will help him to vent any frustration on (chewing is good for “venting”) and keep him occupied whilst all on his own. This could also save your kitchen cupboards – dogs often chew to relive stress! Providing him with something to chew when you are not able to supervise him often reduces house damage!

Dogs who have come from “kennel / pound” environments are rarely taken out to toilet so often have little choice but to toilet on the concrete floor. How is a dog from such a background supposed to differentiate between tiles and concrete? A good many of these dogs will need to be taught toilet habits from scratch.

**SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS:**

If you have other dogs & they are socially compatible, you could simply put him in the same area where the other dog/s sleep – their company would make him feel safe & he is then less likely to panic. The existing dogs could most likely also “role model” many behaviours to him so this would also help him to feel secure and begin the journey of habituating to his new home. Just ensure that he has his own space/bed etc in case he needs an “out.”

Each individual person has a different point of view as to where a dog should sleep at night. There are no right or wrong rules (**as long as you are not dealing with an aggression problem** or a dog who has personal space issues or one who likes to defend his sleeping area). You are the one who decides where the dog sleeps. It is your dog and that is your right! Everyone has a different point of view. As long as you know any rules or indeed privileges that you set now are most likely going to be lasting ones!

If you decide you don’t want him in your bedroom or on your bed etc then confine him to a designated sleeping area. Try not to react to any whining, whimpering, howling – no matter how sorry you feel for him. If you respond each time he whines / whimpers – he is training you. Try to ignore all unwanted behaviour & only react to appropriate or desired behaviour.

**THE NEXT FEW DAYS:**

If he decides to approach you – great! You should show pleasure and verbally praise with positive non-invasive body language. Don’t lean over the dog or be invasive in your demeanour – as dogs perceive this at threatening. A good idea is to only approach him with your shoulder leading as this is perceived as non-threatening, or you could make yourself smaller if you are able to do this without leaning forward. If he is an only dog you can pop him a soft, high value treat each time he approaches you on his own bat – However be careful if one of your existing dogs has resource guarding issues or is defensive over high value treats or objects.

If he keeps his distance don’t force the issue, and don’t ever in the early stages force him to interact with you if he is unwilling.

Let **him** be rewarded for approaching you – let **him** find the interactions valuable and rewarding. This will eventually equate to **him wanting to please you**! It is a natural behaviour for dogs to want to please their role model’s – so this is a good foundation for future canine/human interactions. The only exception would be if a dog was ill or needed veterinary attention – then the rule of course does not apply.

**INTRODUCING THE FAMILY:**

For the first 24 hours I would keep the kids & everyone else in the family really low key.

Over the next couple of days – depending on the dogs individual tolerance levels, you can start introducing the family one at a time.

Don’t introduce them all at once – especially if you have a large rowdy family.

One at a time is enough for him to cope with at this stage.

Keep visitors at a minimum, and let the dog decide if he wants to interact or not. Initially instruct your visitors to be as non-influential as possible! If he shows interest – get the visitor to drop a soft, high value treat on the floor and if the dog approaches looking for more, they can repeat and build up to letting him take the treat from their hand.

Make sure that if treats are being given that you flatten your hand (like feeding a horse) as many rescue dogs have no tit bit manners & may snatch, which could give the visitors / kids a fright and also panic the dog... ............. so **set him up for success – not failure!**

**This should be your attitude in all interactions and with all his experiences!**

**Don’t force him to interact if he is not ready!**

**It is early days yet and you have lots of time!**

**THE “HABITUATION” / ADJUSTMENT PERIOD:**

Expect an adjustment period. You might be pleasantly surprised – some rescue dogs come into a new home & within a few hours it is as if they have always been there. However, the vast majority need time to get to know you & your family & lean each other’s personalities & quirks. Remember he doesn’t know your routines. He doesn’t know your rules. He doesn’t know your friends. He doesn’t know lots of stuff. So give him time to adjust!

After going through such a trauma as being re-homed at least twice in a reasonable period of time – he is going to make mistakes! Both of you are going to have to work hard together for you both to feel at home and content. As mentioned previously the average dog needs approximately two weeks to habituate to the new environment!

**AFTER TWO WEEKS MY RESCUE DOG IS SUDDENLY BEING VERY “NAUGHTY”**

I often get calls from clients who have adopted a rescue dog and they tell me that for the first couple of weeks he has been an “absolute angel!” then suddenly he has “changed” & become the dog from hell! Hmnnnn ............ the dog has now habituated to his new environment is now starting to **feel safe** and have trust in you – and sometimes this is when it becomes evident why he was surrendered in the first place.

Fortunately for the dog – by that time, the new owners have fallen for him – so are usually more than willing to work through any issues that start appearing at this stage. So be aware that this could be on the cards and have some plans in action to deal with some of the more common problems.

**He Won't Know The Rules**  
This is a big one. Every home has different rules. This dog might have gone from comfy living (or not, depending on his origin), to a place with very few comforts (the shelter), to your home, which probably seems like paradise after the shelter. **He's not going to know what to do, or what not do**. You will need to start to gently guide him into your routines & gently introduce any house rules.  
  
Dogs are also great opportunists. Even if he's never sat on a sofa before coming to live with you, he'll probably try anyway, just to see if you'll let him. The same goes for begging for food, or sleeping on the bed. Don't punish him for trying, but try to limit his choices and not put him in the position where he is able to make the “wrong” choice.

**Good Rules To Establish:**

* Give him his own area to eat in. Don’t expect him to eat close to other dogs – nor should you let children pester him whilst he is eating - **he might have had to fight to get a meal at some stage!** An indoor dog crate is a wonderful thing to use as a “safe “place. However, he might need to be gradually accustomised to the crate & this could take a bit of time – especially if he has not had previous positive crate experiences.
* He should not be disturbed when in his “safe” place – his “safe place” “rights” in this regard should be respected – especially by the children. He deserves a place where he can escape to if he feels the need. This includes his own space to sleep in – again respect his rights - and he should not be pestered by the kids when he is in his bed
* To help bonding with the dog – the entire family should take turns providing meals & the good things in life.
* The same goes with calm play – (unless he is fearful) try to get the whole family involved as play is a wonderful way to bond!
* The family can also take turns with the scoop the poop duties – this is also a good idea to help teach everyone what a responsibility it is to own a dog.
* Encourage the whole family to take part in some basic training such as teaching the dog to “come” when called. All learning should be reward based & using basic positive reinforcement methods & each and every interaction should be rewarding in some way for the dog.

**Be careful which rules you establish / reinforce!**

Beware of giving a dog attention whilst exhibiting behaviours you dislike –the attention could be perceived as a reward and the behaviour will escalate!

Rather concentrate on rewarding and **giving the dog attention when he is displaying behaviour that you approve of.**

Ignore the negative and reward and praise the positive!

**COMMON PROBLEMS TO PREPARE FOR – REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS!**

Being forewarned is sometimes being forearmed! Expect the worst then you will be often pleasantly surprised! To follow are some of the most common problems that you are likely to come across. Most of them are pretty easy to solve – with a little common sense & some time, patience & understanding.

The basic rule is to ignore all negative behaviour & reward and praise all good or positive behaviour.

Many common problems are caused by stress – therefore it is imperative that the dog is not punished for these unwanted behaviours. If you punish a dog for displaying stress behaviour – the stress levels with heighten and his behaviour could well worsen or develop/escalate into further unwanted behaviours.

* **House toilet accidents and this includes urine marking in dogs (& occasionally bitches).**

***Suggested solutions*** *- A lot of shelter dogs have toilet issues in the early stages of their transition to a new home. Stress is also a huge factor when taking loose stools into account. Worms also need to be ruled out. It is often necessary to start from scratch with a rescue dog & teach him appropriate toilet rules as if he were a small pup. Limiting his movements –not giving him the “free run” of the home – so that he has less opportunity to make a “mistake.” You will also need to take him out every half an hour or so and then last thing confining him at night in his crate. Rewarding and praising every success & ignoring any accidents. Crate training is also a wonderful way to re-teach bad toilet manners – however* ***should never be used if a dog has diarrhoea or is ill.***

* **Fear / lack of confidence and phobias**

***Suggested solutions*** *– In my opinion* ***the dog should never be forced to face his fears*** *– this would undermine any of progress made during habituation & destroy any new bond or confidence established.*

*When working with nervous or fearful dog,* ***I am personally against the use of” flooding” as a method of treatment.*** *I feel that a great deal of trust between dog and owner is vital for any flooding method to succeed* *– personally preferring to use gradual accustomisation / desensitisation coupled with positive reinforcement / reward based methods.*

*For example - start by working out the dogs “critical distance” (the distance where he does not show any negative reaction to the* ***perceived*** *or* ***real*** *threat). Using a positive association such as a meal, treats etc – ensure that he is comfortable and confident at that distance, then very gradually – over a period of time, start to slowly decrease the distance. Each lessening of distance should be a rewarding experience. Each time letting the dog decide – No force involved. However you will need to constantly raise the criteria ensuring each time that the dogs is successful – without putting too much pressure on him.*

* **Avoidance** of people or things that the dog perceives to be threatening – including touch sensitivity etc. *Suggested solution – as above gradual accustomisation. Positive reinforcement methods such as clicker training are also very useful in many cases.*
* **Fear of a specific kind of person or gender.** Some dogs have never been exposed to men, others have never been exposed to women or people of colour. Some dogs can have had negative experiences with one “type” of person. All can be relevant in a dog’s early education. *Suggested solution – as above gradual accustomisation – coupled with positive reinforcement & reward based methods.*
* **Excitable behaviours and hyperactivity**

Jumping up / wild indoor behaviour / excessive hyper-vocalisation.

*Suggested solution – don’t react to the excitement. Stay very calm. Learn to “dismiss” the dog with your body language - avert your upper body (including face and eye contact). Avoid presenting the dog with a moving target! Don’t have any flappy hands or wave your arms etc. Keep body language calm! Alternately, teach the dog how to greet you with your hands lowered (which would reduce the need for him to jump up in greeting). In other words - teach the dog a “****competing****” behaviour. After all he can’t jump up if he is sitting.*

* **Lack of inter-canine social skills –especially on leash aggression.**

Reactivity to other dogs – usually associated with fear and often only seen when the dog is on leash. This is often connected to the dogs natural survival instinct which (as with all animals) and can be a response to a threat regardless of if it is a real or perceived threat.

1. Freeze,

2. Flight,

3. Fight.

Now – if the dog initially performed a “freeze” and the “freeze” was unsuccessful that narrows his choices down to two. If the dog is on leash, he is unable to “flight” as he is restrained on the leash – this give him only one choice remaining – which is “fight”.

Again this is often easily managed and resolved through the use of positive reinforcement and desensitisation methods. *Suggested solution – Start a long term gradual desensitisation programme using reward based methods for each & every success. Do not punish for over-reactivity – work out the dogs “critical distance” find some behaviour that the dog is successful at that distance to give you an opportunity to reward him for compliance – Then, over a period of time start to lessen the gap. Ensure that you have control over the environment & try not to put the dog in a position where he can fail! Success breeds success!*

* **SETTLING IN WITH EXISTING DOGS.**

Thankfully most dogs settle into an existing group of dogs quite easily. However there are bound to be some “teething” problems, and the dogs are going to need to work out the dog on dog rules. *Information and some suggestions - If the newly adopted dog is a youngster – it is possible that an older individual might discipline it – this is ok. The only time I would suggest that you intervene is if it appears to be serious i.e. – if there is* ***“intent,”*** *or if there is blood.*

*Young pups seem to have a “puppy licence” which lasts for a few months but does eventually expire (usually during the pups first challenge stage of behavioural development, round about four and a half months). This “licence expiry” can be a bit of a shock to a young pup – but something they need to learn from their canine family members for future co-existence!*

*With older dogs and existing family dogs - defuse, defuse, and defuse – that is the solution! Often you can see an existing animal simply wanting to defend his privileges and valuable resources (people can be a resource too!) It really depends on what is of value to each individual animal – there are no hard or fast rules, each one is an individual in his or her own right! You can make high value items verboten unless supervised or separated. Another idea is to have these items in such plentiful supply that the value is reduced. For example instead of giving each dog one cow hoof – put out a couple of dozen! Things are only valuable if they are in short supply!*

*If you are in a more confined area such as a sitting room or kitchen and the existing dog is being a bit possessive over you and you can see the warning signs, a good tip would be to “leave the party”! Stomp out of the room and slam the door. This is often enough to startle the potential scrap and as you have removed the valuable resource (you) there is not much point in any altercation continuing.*

*The same goes for in the garden, – “Leave the party”! Stomp to the back door and simply slam it in the dogs face. In other words you are implying that the dogs are “on their own” and you are not there to “back them up” so to speak. Remove the valuable resource and the problem is gone!*

*The dogs are bound to have a few minor disputes over possessions, beds, toys, chew items and depending on each dog’s individual value system – they will generally work it out among themselves.*

**This of course does not apply to any kind of serious aggression or aggression with intent, or indeed if there are fights that are difficult to separate or stop. In those cases professional help needs to be sought.**

* **Destructive behaviour** – indoors and outdoors and this includes chewing / ripping stuff up, digging, pulling washing off the line etc

*Manage the environment – tidy up after yourself – put away the hose pipe etc. Provide the dog with an outlet for his frustration. Exercise often if the dog is confident enough to play or is leash trained – and provide lots of natural non-synthetic things for the dog to chew and destroy. Create a “digging patch” and reward the dog for digging in the approved spot – Teach him to dig on cue! Do not punish for accidents but rather dig with your dog & reinforce how rewarding it is to dig in the approved spot. Also ensure the dog is exercises often off the property and receives adequate, appropriate mental stimulation such as obedience training, or agility or some other dog sport.*

* **Stealing and counter “surfing”** – especially seen in dogs that were previously “outside” dogs and these individuals have never learnt house rules! *Suggested solutions - Initially manage the environment & supervise! Put stuff away & don’t leave the dog unattended where temptation is available.*
* **Disobedience** – especially a dog that does not come when he is called – and of course the other end of the scale – a dog that won’t go outside / come indoors on command etc. *Suggested solutions – Rome was not built in a day! You will need to embark on a systematic step by step / building block approach to learning. Generally you will need to break up behaviours into small steps – marking and rewarding each success.*
* **Noise pollution** – often apparent when you leave the home and leave him “home alone / separation anxiety.” *Suggested solutions - In severe cases, the dog would need to go onto a specially designed behavioural programme. In addition in some severe cases – drug therapy might be indicated – if this is the case please speak to your veterinarian for his input and expertise)*

*In mild cases you could try the following – Exercise to get him physically & mentally tired, then give him ½ hour to calm down (in order to avoid digestive problems). Then feed the largest meal of the day. As you leave the home, provide him with a special high value chew (like an uncooked – uncut ox femur) to chew on.*

*The idea is that he will be tired from the exercise, fulfilled by the meal & hopefully have a good nap. On waking he would have a nice chewy to occupy himself with. Try not to provide him with “clues” that you are leaving. No long lingering goodbyes. Try to vary your routine as much as possible. In some cases homeopathy can also be helpful.*

* **No leash manners** or skills - *Suggested solutions – As previously mentioned - Rome was not built in a day! You might need to teach the dog to accept a leash and then start from the absolute beginning and re-teach positive leash experiences as* ***you would most likely have no idea of any previous experiences good or bad.***

*Again break leash training up into small portions of behaviours, each one earning reward, and praise. For example if he appears to not have ever walked on a leash you could start by attaching a light leash to his collar each time he was fed. Once he appeared comfortable – simply pick up the end (once the meal was finished) & start by following him as he walked. It is a very small step from you following him to him following you which could then be achieved with a high value food lure.*

* **Food “mugging”**- this is a common problem! *Suggested solution* - *Teach a non-threatening “take it / leave it” but unlike some of the more popular puppy type exercises – we do not want the dog to exhibit avoidance or submission – or even to look away!. The exercise is best performed with the handler sitting on the floor - a treat in one closed fist which is resting on the floor. The treat hand must not move unless the dog complies. The dog is asked for a “down” whereupon the handler waits until compliance. The dog is then gently asked to “leave it”* ***spoken in a soft whisper.***

***I****f he “mugs” the handler- the handler is instructed to “wait it out”. We do not want the dog to avert his face or look away - as that would indicate “avoidance” or the dog “not coping with the pressure.” The idea is the dog will become confident to look at the food and learn self restraint / self discipline and and self control- and wait until a release command is given - whereupon the food is given from* ***the hand not the floor!***

* **Lack of “bite inhibition”** where the dog is not aggressive per say, but has no idea how to control the pressure of his jaw when he uses his mouth on humans – this is often seen when a dog is excited or playing rough. *Suggested solution – be in control of the environment & be a calm, role model! Dogs often “mirror” their environment so with dogs that have little natural bite inhibition it is vital to stay calm. This behaviour is often seen during play – in that case you will need to “Leave the Party!” the second the game becomes too excitable or the dog is too aroused – without saying a word or responding in any way – simply leave the room and slam the door. Stay away for about 2 minutes, then repeat. The dog will soon learn the rules if repeated often enough. Some learn it really quickly as the reward of the game is far higher than the two minute isolation!*

*Humans have hands to explore things with – dogs use their mouths. I don’t advocate “****no bite /contact”*** *when teaching dogs bite inhibition – but rather teach dogs to use a* ***soft mouth or teach them to use “bite inhibition”*** *by using positive reinforcement methods etc.*

* **Escaping** this often only becomes evident after a dog has gained some confidence. Although can also be breed specific such as with northern breeds like husky’s etc many of whom are known to be serious escape artists.  *Suggested solutions – ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT! With certain breeds – double gates within a property. Teaching a reliable “recall” – and ensuring that the dog’s physical & mental needs are met! Exercise, mental stimulation in the form of learning & being exposed to the world / life skills training etc.*
* **Travel issues** - fear of cars – can’t get the dog in the car / an unhappy traveller - or the other end of the scale hyperactivity / unmanageable behaviour when travelling. *Suggested solutions – a gradual reward based accustomisation programme.*

**A word about gradual accustomisation – or desensitisation programmes. Only work at a rate that is obvious whereupon the dog is coping. If at any time the dog regresses, then consolidate at that level/distance, until success, before moving on to the next challenge.**

**It is however – vital that he criteria is constantly raised and the dog constantly faced with more challenges, challenging situations etc - or the dog will never successfully progress!**

**IN CONCLUSION**

Taking on a shelter dog is one of the most rewarding things in the world. It is so gratifying to see an individual animal come out of its shell and flourish emotionally and often physically.

In my opinion, often a shelter dog can be more willing to please – more willing to want to work and more willing to give you their “ALL” (especially the working breeds) than many other dogs acquired through reputable breeders and or other “normal” avenues.

I freely admit I am prejudiced, and having a house full of rescues and shelter dogs, can honestly say it is the only way I would ever acquire a dog! Sure they come with excess baggage – but in my opinion, each and every hang-up and issue is well worth working through!