

# The Importance of a Decompression Period in Dogs

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Welcoming a new pet into your home is exciting! No matter how excited you are for your new furry bundle of joy, your new dog requires a decompression period. This is necessary if the dog is eight-weeks, eight months, eight years or somewhere in between. The decompression period provides them the opportunity to relax, get comfortable in your home and then learn the house rules.

## Rescue dogs' arrival day...

Human's point of view: "I saved you. You saved me. You're my new best friend and will be happy every day for the rest of your life. Now, let's dress you in a sweater and jacket. You are going to accompany me everywhere I go." You're so excited that you may even insist your dog interact with every dog and every person you pass during your outings.

The rescue dog's point of view: AHHHHHHHHH! This is too much. I am not used to this much attention and activity. It scares me.

Keep in mind: Older, rescue dogs may have roamed the streets within a pack of other dogs, working each day to protect themselves and their resources. Other rescue dogs lived with a family that eventually gave them away. Either way, your new dog likely wound up in a shelter surrounded by barking dogs, cold floors, strange smells and a ton of noise. Basically, their life was turned upside down.

Don't get me wrong. You did a great thing rescuing your dog. While the dog is grateful to find a new family that loves them, there is also a ton of mental baggage they need to work out. We need to afford them the space and time to do just that. This is the decompression period.

Early in my career I had a shelter buddy named Logan. He lived in the shelter for at least five years before he was adopted. Shortly after entering his new home, his owner reached down and touched him while he slept. In turn, Logan bit her. Logan found himself back at the shelter and on death row.

Lucky for Logan, he had a large group of supporters who fought for his life. He was eventually turned over to a trainer who kept him for a few years before placing him with a new family. In this home, he was loved and lived happily for the remainder of his life. As a matter of fact, he helped one family member during a night terror and another when his blood sugar dropped too low. How did Logan go from attack dog to hero?

Based on training exercises and past experiences, we believe Logan suffered from PTSD due to living in a shelter for so many years. When his owner touched him while he slept, he panicked and went into automatic protection mode. Had his owners known how important the decompression period was to Logan's mental health, they certainly would have given him the time and space he needed to unwind. They would not have immediately given him the freedom to sleep wherever he wanted.

From the day he arrived, they dressed him in sweaters and dragged him from one location to the next. I do not fault these owners. They thought they were doing the right thing by socializing him. Sadly, they skipped the most important step – the decompression period. This error caused injury to the owner and almost led to an unjust euthanasia for young Logan.

## How long is a decompression period?

The length of time for the decompression period depends on the dog in front of you. Your dog's needs are as individual as your own, therefore the period of time is different for each dog. Often friends and family are all too willing to answer this question based on *their* experience. Please refrain from holding too much stock in anyone else's experience. Their experience is their own. That outcome does not dictate the outcome for all other dogs.

An internet search on decompression periods for dogs will lead you to the "three day – three week – three month" rule for rescue dogs. That is a good model, but it isn't law. I know I keep reiterating this point but it is important. No one can tell you how long the decompression period will take, except your dog. Pay attention to your dog's body language and signals. If you struggle to understand your dog's needs, consider hiring a professional dog trainer.

**THE 3 DAYS, 3 WEEKS, 3 MONTHS RULE OF ADOPTING A RESCUE DOG**


The 3-3-3 Rule is a general guideline of the decompression process for a Canine in a new environment.

Every dog is unique and will adjust differently, so give them space and allow them to go at their own pace!

<b>3D</b>	<b>3W</b>	<b>3M</b>
<p><b>THE FIRST 3 DAYS,</b></p> <p>GIVE THEM SPACE</p> <p>SET YOUR BOUNDARIES EARLY</p> <p>STAY CALM AND GIVE CLEAR DIRECTION</p> <p>START YOUR DAILY ROUTINE RIGHT AWAY</p> <p>DO NOT FORCE INTERACTION</p> <p>BE PATIENT AND STAY POSITIVE</p>	<p><b>AFTER 3 WEEKS,</b></p> <p>WILL FEEL MORE SETTLED</p> <p>WILL START TO TEST BOUNDARIES</p> <p>WORK BASIC O (SIT, WAIT, DOWN, COME)</p> <p>GIVE CLEAR DIRECTION AT ALL TIMES</p> <p>GIVE CALM, CLEAR FEEDBACK TO THEM ON WHEN THEY ARE MISBEHAVING</p> <p>PRAISE EVERY SUCCESS!</p>	<p><b>AFTER 3 MONTHS,</b></p> <p>WILL START TO TRUST NEW HOME</p> <p>WILL UNDERSTAND ROUTINE</p> <p>DO NOT EASE OFF TRAINING, MORE IS BETTER!</p> <p>WILL START TO BUILD BOND- USE AFFECTION AS A RESOURCE!</p> <p>WILL BEGIN TO BUILD GREAT HABITS IF YOU FOLLOW THIS!</p>

**REMEMBER, IT TAKES:**

PATIENCE, CONSISTENCY, & TIME!




Typically, a 10-week-old puppy will transition to the new home quicker than a two-year-old rescue dog. Then again, I've met rescue dogs who transitioned quicker than some puppies. A happy, relaxed dog will speed through the process quicker than a high-strung, undisciplined or nervous dog.


My new rescue dog, Violet, took six weeks to adjust to our home, yet our resident dog Elsa adjusted in just a handful of days. While both Elsa and Violet were the same age when we adopted them, Violet's past was more traumatic than Elsa's.

My advice is to take it slow. Let your dog get used to these new surroundings. Then take the time to teach your new dog the house rules. Your rules may be different than the rules in the previous home. Your dog won't understand why. It is better to teach your new dog the house rules by adding structure and limiting freedom when they first arrive. Otherwise, your time together will be spent screaming at your dog for behavior you don't approve of. Screaming does not accomplish anything other than causing stress and a sore throat.

## How to Decompress Your New Dog

 **Prevent free roaming.** Crate your dog (or place in a play yard) when you cannot keep a watchful eye on them. When your dog spends time outside the crate, make sure you keep your dog leashed. This includes time spent in the house and the yard.


Using these tools will prevent your new dog from exhibiting undesirable behavior and allows you to teach new, acceptable behaviors. When your dog is more relaxed in your home and exhibits acceptable behavior, you can exchange the full-length leash for a short one, which provides a little more freedom. If this newfound freedom leads to a dog who struggles to follow rules, take back the extra freedom and work some more with your dog.

 **Keep your new dog on a schedule.** Dogs feel secure when they know what to expect each day. Create a daily plan that works for your schedule and stick to it. Just be sure to be a bit flexible with that daily schedule.

## Sample schedule when your dog first arrives:


- Bring your dog for a morning walk
- Feed breakfast in the crate
- Bring outside for a bathroom break (on leash)
- Crate time with a bone/toy stuffed with treats
- Go for an afternoon walk or train in the yard (on leash)
- Lunch or mid-day snack
- Bathroom break (on leash)
- Snuggling/train/ calm play with your dog
- Crate time with a bone or toy stuffed with food
- Bring for walk/training in yard
- Dinner in crate
- Bathroom break (on leash)
- Relaxing with family (on leash)
- Bathroom break (on leash)
- Go to sleep in crate

While this extra activity may require you to wake earlier each day or prevents you from completing your normal daily tasks, the added work will pay off in the long run. No one wants their dog to destroy their home or torture family members

 **Limit guest interactions:** Let your dog get used to you before parading people in and out of your home. We are not implying that your dog doesn't need to socialize, we just want your dog to have some time in the home before being bombarded with visitors.

If your dog is uncomfortable with a visitor or family member, ask that person to ignore your dog. You do not want to force your dog to interact with people (or animals) that frighten them. Instead, give your dog space from this person (or anything that triggers your dog). Forcing the interaction can lead to problems down the road.

When you do have guests over, limit the time they spend with your new dog. In early weeks, short and controlled introductions are best.

 **Introduction to other animals in your home:** There are some people who feel dogs should be thrown together. If a problem arises, the dogs will work it out. We do not agree with this approach. Do you know what can happen when two strange dogs try to work out a problem? A dog fight! Breaking


up a dog fight can be dangerous for you and your dogs. Dogs should be slowly integrated into the same home/space.

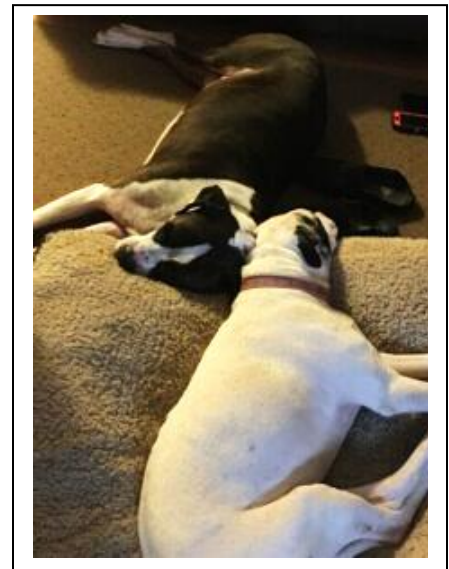


Your dog needs alone time to calm down and rest. Whether they are crated, in the play yard or resting with the family, children should keep away from that dog. People feel that dogs should learn to tolerate children, no matter what that child does to the dog. Dogs are animals. Children need to learn how to behave around dogs. If they cannot follow rules relating to the dog, then the dog should be safely locked away unless you closely supervise the two. Even if your children respect the dog's space, dogs and children should never be left unattended.

This decompression and training period will initially be extra work for you. Cleaning up messes and dealing with poor behavior will take just as much, if not more, work. At the end of the day, we want our dogs to be healthy, happy and well-adjusted. We also want to minimize inappropriate behavior.

When the dogs are together, it should be for walks or short training exercises (where all dogs are rewarded). We want these dogs to accept each other as members of the same pack. You should not leave the dogs unattended – even for a minute.

 **Respect the dog's space:** Children can be overwhelming for a new dog. They want to hug dogs, carry them, pull body parts, get in their face and steal toys and bones from their mouths. They are loud and move fast. While this is fun for the child, in most cases the dog is not enjoying this type of play. Dogs may tolerate a child's behavior – until they don't. Neither you nor your child will enjoy your new dog constantly nipping them.



Should your dog require additional training, contact a professional, certified dog trainer. If you are looking for a dog trainer in your area, email ISCDT at [info@iscdt.com](mailto:info@iscdt.com). We will work to pair you with one of our certified dog trainers who live in your area.

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