Congratulations on the adoption of your new furry family member! Please read through the following information to help ease your pet’s transition into your home.

Allow Time for Adjustment

No doubt you’re excited and looking forward to forging a lifetime friendship with your new pet. Try to keep in mind the confusion your dog may be feeling at this time. Whatever your dog’s past history, coming home with you is a new experience. Your dog is likely to be wondering where they are and who all these new people are. Don’t expose your dog to too many people for at least the first three days. They need to understand who their new family members are and learn the new territory. Wait until your dog gets settled in to show them to your friends and family. The most important things to your new dog during the first three days of their new home is....

- Who are my new family members?
- What is mine in this new home?
- When do I get attention? Food? Bathroom breaks?
- Where can I go to be alone and sleep?

The key to helping your dog adjust to a new home is to be prepared, be patient, and establish a routine for the dog to follow. Remember, it will take about 90 days (three months) for you and your new dog to adjust to each other. Your dog is not yet bonded to you and you cannot expect him to know the rules of the house, to be trained, or even to come when you call him. This all takes time.

The personality of your dog will change from what you have learned of them so far and will continue to change in the first weeks and months of acclimation. Expect changes! When they feel more secure and confident that they are with you to stay, they will display their truest personalities.

When a dog is first settling in, he may display shyness, anxiety, restlessness, excitement, crying, or barking. He may also have physical symptoms, such as excessive water drinking, frequent urination, diarrhea, or a poor appetite. If these symptoms last more than 3-4 days, please contact your veterinarian.

Establish House Rules and Routine

- Having a set routine is very important to a dog. It helps make them feel more secure. You should feed at the same time every day (once in the morning and once in the evening or more if you have a puppy) in the same location.
- Regular exercise, such as a walk or a game of fetch, is also necessary for your dog’s well-being. In addition to the health benefits, it provides a bonding experience for you and your dog and gives your dog something to look forward to each day.

- Work out the details of your dog’s care among the members of the household. Decide things like feeding and walking schedules and rules for your dog, such as whether they will be allowed on the furniture and if any rooms will be off limits.

- It is important during the first few weeks to have all members of the household feed and walk your dog, so your dog does not develop an overly strong bond with one person and bonds to all of you. This will go a long way toward keeping the dog from becoming protective of one family member.

- Once the family decides the rules, every member of the household must stick to them. It is very confusing to a dog when one person lets them do something, but the next person doesn’t. It is also more difficult to change an undesirable habit, such as lying on the bed, if one person in the house allows your dog to do this. **Consistency is the key!**

**Protect Your Dog**

Understand that when your new dog first comes home, they don’t understand what is happening, that they are in a new safe place to stay, and they don’t understand that they can trust you. You will need to protect your dog from themselves always, but especially during this acclimation period. **Watch your doors and gates.**

- Even if you need to have the front door ajar for a few moments to bring in groceries, put your dog in a bedroom with the door closed. If you are opening the backyard gate to move yard items, put your dog in the house so that you don’t give them an opportunity to slip out. Never take any chances with doors left ajar or gates left unlocked. Always keep padlocks on your gates to prevent your dog from being stolen. Never leave your dog outside unattended; they will be safe, more secure and less likely to develop bad habits if you leave them indoors when you can’t be with them. Crate training is a wonderful way of house training your dog and for giving them a safe place of their own when you are away or sleeping.

Be sure to make arrangements with anyone who might have access to your home or yard and have a plan for keeping your dog contained. Make sure everyone knows to shut and lock your gates when they leave.

**Doggie-Proof Your Property**

Just as you would child-proof your home for a toddler, you must doggie-proof your home for a dog, no matter what age. Your yard and garage should be cleared of chemicals, fertilizer, automotive additives, antifreeze, etc. Antifreeze is very tasty to pets and just a very small amount can kill them.

- Other items that you want your new pet to stay away from are prescriptions, over the counter medications, chocolate, onions, and xylitol. If your pet ingests any of these items, please contact your veterinarian. You can also contact the ASPCA Poison Control Center 888-426-4435 for more information.

You’ll want to dog-proof your yard as well. Make sure all plants they will have access to are pet-friendly and non-toxic. Make sure there are no holes in fences, that the fence is the proper height to contain your dog, and that no objects that might endanger them or help them escape are present. Remember though, you should always be outside with your dog in order to interrupt poor or endangering behaviors.
You should see that all electrical cords are out of the way where the dog can’t chew them. You should also put away anything that you wouldn’t want the dog to chew on, such as shoes or articles of clothing and anything that may have sentimental value to you.

**Expect to Lose Items of Value**

Do not set your dog up for failure. For instance, do not give the dog the run of the house until you are sure they can be trusted. A lot of your belongings may start to look very tempting to a bored and lonely dog who doesn’t understand which things are okay and which are off limits. Make sure and always offer your dog an alternative to chewing your personal items (couch, remote control, hat, etc.). If all you do is yell “NO!” at the dog and remove the item they are chewing without offering them a toy they can chew on, you have solved nothing, and they will remain choosing the wrong items to chew. Dog trainer rule of thumb is, if your dog ruins something you care about, it’s your fault for leaving it in their reach.

Always have lots of toys around to offer in exchange for those you do not wish them to chew. If you continue to offer them toys in exchange for other items, soon your dog will learn what to seek out and chew and what not to chew. *Remember the idea is to take every negative behavior and redirect it into a positive behavior and then reward that behavior, this will encourage the repeat of the good behavior.* You must teach your dog what you expect of them. After all, you are bringing an animal into your house and they will need instruction of how to follow the rules. Just yelling ‘NO!’ at your dog all the time will leave them thinking their name is no and they will learn nothing. Use baby gates or crates to keep your dog confined at all times you cannot be there to monitor their activities. It is much easier to avoid a bad behavior rather than trying to fix it after the fact.

You should provide plenty of dog toys, including at least one chew toy. Choose toys that are safe and appropriate for your dog and that cannot be eaten. Exchange the toys you leave with your dog so that they have new ones every day or two. Also keep toys that are just for crate time and when playing with you. One toy that your pet has gotten used to while at our shelter is a Kong toy. Kong toys are safe to leave with your pet and are a great enrichment toy to help keep your pet mentally stimulated.

We strongly recommend against using rawhides as dogs can often break off large pieces of rawhide and swallow them, which can cause serious obstructions in their digestive track. We encourage the use of pig ears and bully sticks because they are 100% digestible. In multi-dog households, issues between multiple dogs over resources can be easily managed by making sure there is one of the exact toy/treat in the same color, flavor, etc. for every dog in the household. If any of the dogs have issues with aggression over high value items, give it to them in a closed crate/space and then allow the dogs out when they are done.

When you decide it is time to give the dog the run of the house, you should still “doggie-proof” the entire house. Remove items of value like sneakers, clothing, utensils, etc. off the floor and out of your dog’s reach. Keep medicines and other chemicals securely locked away.

**Building a Relationship with Your Dog**  
*(Nothing in Life is Free—NILIF)*

What is NILIF? NILIF is a basic program that will provide your new dog with structure and make their transition into your home smooth and happy for everyone. Dogs crave structure and consistency. By following this program, you can reduce or even eliminate many problems that occur with dogs within the first six months in the new home. Sometimes, a dog is unwittingly “set up to fail” in a new home and, based on our experience, we strongly recommend using the NILIF program.
You may find that following this program is harder on you than on the dog! The best way to help your new dog feel safe and loved is to be a good leader for him. You can demonstrate that you are a good leader, and also build good behaviors by always asking your dog to do something for you, in order to access the things they want; this is the premise of the NILIF program. Once you have taught your dog to learn “sit” and “down” you can use those commands to help with the rest of the training and relationship building. For example, your dog wants access to the backyard, ask them to ‘sit’ before letting them out. Your dog wants his breakfast or dinner, ask them to “sit” or “lie down” before delivering their meal. Your dog is seeking attention and petting from you, ask them to “sit” before petting.

Try to be consistent: If you only reinforce this sometimes and not at others, your dog won’t learn as quickly and the behaviors you want will not be consistent. Ask your dog to “sit” for you before you feed them a meal, give them a treat or give them any attention. In other words, if your dog comes up to you while you are sitting on the couch watching TV and starts to nudge your hand for attention, ask them to “sit” first. Once they sit, play with them or pet them. Allowing the dog to get attention whenever he wants without working for it can result in a very pushy dog. Do not pet, stroke, or cuddle with your dog for ‘free’. Always ask your dog to “sit” first.

1. If you play with your dog with a toy such as a ball or a pull-toy, ask your dog to sit before you throw the ball or start playing. Do this each time you throw the ball. If your dog refuses to sit, ignore him briefly, they try again. Always make sure you are the one that initiates play with your dog.

2. Do not allow your dog to jump on the furniture without permission. If you are willing to let your dog sit on your couch, only let them do so when you invite them to.

3. If you ask your dog to perform a behavior and he ignores you, completely ignore him for a few seconds, then repeat. Do not even look at him. For example, if your dog jumps on you and you ask the dog to sit and it continues to jump, turn your back on your dog, most likely he will attempt to come around to your front. If he does this, continue to turn your body so that your back is to the dog. If he sits, praise him wildly.

4. Use reprimands with your dog that tells him what you want him to do, instead of just yelling “No!” If a dog is doing an action you do not like, such as jumping up, ask him to do something else like “sit”. When you praise your dog after he does the sit, he will understand he is being praised for the sit and not for jumping up.

5. Feed your dog twice a day (or three times for puppies) and ask the dog to sit before you put the food bowl down. If your dog does not eat their food within 10-15 minutes, pick up the food bowl and say nothing. Don’t worry if your dog does not eat. A healthy dog can miss a meal or two. Your dog will learn that all good things in life (namely food) come from you. A dog that is free-fed cannot make this association. Also, it is difficult to determine if your dog has loss of appetite (one sign of illness) if you are free-feeding.

If you follow these steps, you will have a happy, secure dog that will look to you for love and leadership and become “part of the family”.

Teach Children How to Handle a Dog Properly

Always supervise young children around the dog. Even the gentlest dog could bite a child who has pulled his tail or his ears once too often. Never allow your children to lie on or “ride” a dog; this is unfair and abusive to the dog. Children are always excited about a new pet, but don’t allow them to overwhelm the dog with attention and handling. They need to be taught how to play gently with the dog, how to handle him, and to never disturb the dog while he is eating or sleeping. Never leave children alone with a dog, children’s movements are unpredictable and
scary to your dog. Many of the dog bites that happen could simply be eliminated with responsible adults at the other end of the leash. Additionally, children should always be the giver of good things to the dog and NEVER the ones to give punishments. We want dogs to see children as the source of all good things as this will improve their relationships. Since children between the ages of 5-9 are the age group most likely bitten, and bites are most commonly inflicted by the family dog, these suggestions are imperative for you to follow.

Young children should not be allowed to hold the dog’s leash on walks by themselves. A child may not be able to hold the leash tightly enough or may be injured if the dog pulled hard on the leash.

If you have young children whose toys might resemble dog toys, keep the children’s toys picked up or in a separate room which is off limits to the dog. The dog may think the toys are his and a possessive dog may snap at a child who goes to play with them.

If You Have Other Pets at Home

If you currently own other pets, it is best to monitor all of their interactions so that you can get a feel for how they are getting along. You can use crates, baby gates or closed doors to give them breaks from each other if need be. It is important that you have separate time with your new dog in the beginning, but that you also uphold the bond with your other resident dogs. Allow the new and current dogs to play together supervised at first, until you are sure they can get along and move about your house together without fighting over toys, food, or sleeping places. Always make sure there are more toys and sleeping areas than the number of dogs you have. Make sure you give your current dog ample attention, so they don’t feel left out. If you have dog toys or bones scattered throughout the house, pick all of them up so that your dogs do not end up fighting over them. Gradually introduce the toys as your dogs get to know each other and you are present to monitor their interaction.

It is always wise to feed your dogs separately, in order to prevent fighting over resources. With some dogs, this can be accomplished by simply standing between them while they eat. With other dogs, you may have to crate them separately while they eat or feed them in different rooms. Also, picking up empty food bowls after meal time can eliminate guarding the area or the bowls where feeding time occurs.

If you have cats or other small animals in your home, make sure they have ample space to move about where they can be away from the dog if they feel threatened. For cats, a high perch or cat tree is an excellent safe place from a new dog. Do not allow the dog to play with the cat unsupervised- if the cat feels threatened, he could easily claw your dog to keep him away. Keep your other pet’s food dishes up high where the dog cannot get to them and with cats their litter boxes should have lids on them and out of the way of your dog. Some dogs find cat feces to be a tasty little snack.

House-Training Help

Patience is the key to house-training. You must establish a scheduled routine for your dog to follow. Don’t be surprised if your dog makes some mistakes at first. He may not have full muscle control and he will not be familiar with your home or routine at first. Be patient and follow these tips:

1. First thing to do when arriving home, when you wake up, before you go to bed and several times during the day with your new dog is to take them to the outside bathroom area of choice before bringing them into the home. Try and wait long enough for your new dog to go to the bathroom. If you can ensure their first elimination to be in the place of choice, it will be instinct for your dog later when in the home and they need to go to the bathroom, to try and get back to the first place they went. Every time your new dog goes to the bathroom outdoors, prepare to have a celebratory party on the spot and given them a food treat to reward that good behavior.
2. Confine your dog when he is alone. Use baby gates, a crate, or other barriers to create a “den” where your dog can eat, sleep, and relax. If you use a crate, your dog should not be left crated for more than 5 hours at a time (except at night if he sleeps in the crate). If your dog is confined by barriers, the enclosed area should be just large enough for your dog to stand up, lie down fully extended and turn around. Crating works extremely well for house training because dogs do not like to soil their “den”. Many dogs feel secure and relaxed in a den-like atmosphere. You can place some towels or clothing in the crate that smells like you to calm your dog. A Kong or sterilized bone stuffed with peanut butter is another way to keep them happy in the crate. Every time you let your dog out of his crate make sure and have the leash ready to take him to the outside bathroom area. It doesn't matter if they need to go to the bathroom or not, it is the routine you are trying to establish.

3. Walk your dog first thing in the morning, after meals, after naps, after play sessions, and when you see him sniffing around for a place to relieve himself. If you see your dog about to relieve himself in the house, calmly go to your dog and quickly take him outside ASAP. When you want to take your dog out, say, “let’s go potty.” Walk with the dog out to the same spot each time. Watch your dog to be sure he eliminates before you return inside or play with your dog. Make sure you praise the dog calmly every time he eliminates outside. Remember to have a party and be prepared with treats on the spot; don’t leave them in the house. If you know your dog needs to go to the bathroom but they have not eliminated, bring them back in the house and put them in their crate-don’t let them have free access in the house or you could be setting them up to have an accident. Leave them alone in the crate for 5-10 minutes then take them straight outside and try again. The message should be this clear to them, “if you go to the bathroom outside, you can have supervised freedom in the house, if you don’t, you will need to go to your crate”. They will learn very quickly this way.

4. It is important to keep your dog’s diet consistent and on a strict schedule. Use the same brand of food; do not switch brands while house training. Set the dog food down for 10-15 minutes, then pick it up whether the dog has eaten or not. Do not give any more food until the next feeding time.

Keep up this routine until the dog has no accidents. The process should not take much longer than six weeks if you are consistent and follow the routine, depending on the age of your new dog. Don’t get impatient! Remember that this training is a learning process and some dogs, especially puppies, need more time than others.

If your dog does have an accident, never rub his nose in it. If you find a mess, do not even call your dog’s attention to it. If you punish the dog, they will not make the connection that you don’t want this to happen in the house. Most often this will confuse the dog into thinking you don’t want him to go to the bathroom at all. This may result in the dog refusing to eliminate when you take them outside, then waiting until you are gone and eliminating in the house.

When an accident occurs, clean up the mess with a cleaner formulated for pet stains such as Nature’s Miracle. Ordinary household cleaners are not enough to remove the urine smell. If a dog continues to smell urine or feces in an area of the house, they may continue to eliminate in that area.
Socializing Your Dog

Many poor dog behaviors can be attributed to lack of early socialization. After the first three days with your new dog, you need to start introducing them to the world; every sight, sound, and smell you can think of. There are many places you can take your dog with you, lots of home improvement stores and garden stores and some outdoor restaurants.

Introduce your dog to people on the streets, always slowly and never forcing things or people on your dog. Have people offer your dog treats when meeting them. Having a dog trained in your home is completely different than having your dog respond to you out in a high stimuli environment. You need to assume a level of control with your dog no matter the place or time. Taking them out into the world with you is a fun and exciting time for your dog and you. Unsocialized dogs can become aggressive with outside people and when guests come over to your house.

When having guests at your house make sure to ask them to not run up to your new friend, let your dog approach them when they feel comfortable. It’s best if your guests completely ignore the dog at first. Always have new people offer treats to your dog. Once your dog has the chance to see you interacting with your guest, hugging them, shaking their hand, sitting by them on the couch, offering them a drink, etc. They will understand that this new person is welcome and safe in the home avoiding any desire for your dog to become scared or unsure how to respond to this new person. That said, no dog should be forced to endure hugging, looming over or any type of forced, physical interaction. These interactions are how people meet people; dogs don’t meet dogs this way and it is rude to them when people meet them this way and could set them up for having a bad experience.

Try to Prevent Separation Disorders

Many dogs have been abandoned at some point in their lives. Therefore, they are often more likely to suffer from separation disorders when their new owner leaves them at home alone. Separation disorders result from being left alone and may be caused by fear of abandonment, or anxiety when left alone, or may just be caused by boredom and too much freedom. Behaviors that could indicate a separation disorder include destructive behaviors, excessive barking or crying, chewing, housetraining accidents, pacing, trying to escape the home to follow the owner and in some cases, self-mutilating acts.

It is important in the days following the adoption to spend as much time with the new dog as possible. However, from the first day you bring the dog home, you should practice leaving him alone for short periods of time. Start out leaving for very short periods (such as one minute) and very gradually increase to 5 minutes, then 10 minutes, and so on. Vary the times, until you can increase the amount of time your pet is alone to 30 minutes without him becoming stressed. Slowly, your pet will come to realize that your leaving does not mean abandonment.

It is extremely important that you are not emotional when you come back to or leave the house. You should try to ignore your dog for at least 10 minutes when leaving or coming home. Your dog will learn that your comings and goings are not dramatic, stressful events. We recommend you downplay the excitement felt by you and your dog at these times by giving a simple “goodbye” when you leave and “hello” when you return. Soon the dog will start to see your departures and arrivals as part of the daily routine, and they will be less likely to suffer from separation disorders when you have to leave them for longer periods of time.

It is a good idea to play with and exercise your dog prior to leaving the house, as this will tire the dog out and make it more likely that they will sleep while you are gone. It may also help to leave a TV or radio on while you are gone. Some dogs find this comforting. You can also give them an article of clothing or a towel or blanket with your scent on it while you keep them in the crate.
Giving your dog something to concentrate on while you are gone is also very helpful. Most dogs experience the worst anxiety during the first hour you are gone. Giving him a toy such as a Kong or sterilized bone stuffed with peanut butter or treats, will entertain and give your dog something to focus on during that critical time.

Always try to remember that if your pet “acts up” while you are away and is destructive, he is not trying to “get even” with you for leaving. Your dog is acting out on their own fear or boredom.

When your dog acts scared, talk to them in a calm, matter-of-fact tone of voice. Dogs are masters at reading body language and if they see you are not afraid, this may help them to relax and gain confidence. When your dog appears calm and relaxed, praise them for these behaviors. If this behavior becomes extreme and interferes with your ability to leave your dog alone or is diminishing your dog’s quality of life, seek a dog behavior professional for help.

Make sure your dogs’ crate is either in the bedroom or in the hallway near the bedroom. It is very important that your dog still feels like part of the family at night when everyone is sleeping. Many people section their dog off in the kitchen or laundry room, this is not normal for a dog and can bring about stress and anxiety which will also bring for behavioral problems. Your dog does not need to be sleeping in bed with you but should be able to smell, hear, and see you as they sleep.

Other Things to Remember

- Always walk your dog on a leash
- Always have a collar with tags on your dog
- Microchipping your dog is extremely helpful if/when they get lost
- Never leave your dog unattended on the street
- Protect your dog from loud noises (fireworks, thunderstorms, etc.)
- Keep gates and doors closed
- Conduct “home sweeps”

Love is homegrown! Love your new furry friend like one of the family!

Health Care

Regular Veterinary Visits

- Your dog should see a veterinarian for a full physical examination every year. At this time, it can be determined which vaccines and diagnostic tests are necessary. If your dog is sick or injured, seek help immediately.

Vaccinations

- **Distemper/Parvo**: Puppies should be vaccinated with a distemper/parvo combination (DDPV) beginning at 6-8 weeks of age and repeated monthly until they are four months old, then once annually. Some breeds should be vaccinated until 5-6 months of age before getting their yearly vaccine, so talk to your veterinarian about what is best for your dog.

- **Rabies**: Most areas, including Colorado, require annual rabies vaccination. The first vaccine is given at 4-6 months of age, and then given every year. If your dog is current on its rabies vaccine, your veterinarian may administer vaccines that last for three years.

- **Other vaccines**: These may be appropriate in certain situations. Your veterinarian can tell you about them. This may include Canine Influenza, Bordetella, Leptospirosis, Heartworm Prevention, and Canine Hepatitis.
Tooth Care

- Dental health is an important part of good health for your dog. Oral and dental disease in dogs can cause pain and discomfort, bad breath, and disease to other organs. Your dog’s teeth and gums should be checked at least once a year by your veterinarian to check for early signs of a problem and keep your dog healthy.

- Just like in people, prevention of oral disease in pets consists of removing plaque and tarter that forms on teeth that are not kept clean.

- Some breeds (such as Chihuahuas and other small dogs, short-face dogs, and dogs with long muzzles) are more predisposed to dental disease, so talk to your veterinarian what is best for your dog.
Prevention

Rabies

A disease that can be fatal in dogs and humans. Rabies is caused by a virus that infects the nervous system. If left untreated, rabies can be deadly. Rabies is preventable through vaccination.

Stages of the Disease

1. Incubation: The virus enters the body through a bite or scratch from an infected animal and travels to the brain.
2. Prodromal: Symptoms such as fever, malaise, and pain may develop.
3. Paralytic: Severe systemic signs including fever, agitation, and death.

Preventive Measures

- Vaccination: Rabies vaccination is recommended for all dogs and cats. Vaccination is not required for birds.
- quarantine: Hold your pet indoors, away from other animals. Do not allow your pet to go outside.
- Keep your dog under control at all times.
- Mammals play a crucial role in the transmission of rabies. Therefore, it is vital to monitor your pet and report any signs of illness.
- Reporting: If you suspect your pet has been exposed to a rabies-infected animal, contact your local animal control agency or your veterinarian.

Additional Resources

- www.colorado.gov/dcp/animals
- www.colorado.gov/dcp/pr/requirements
- http://coloradoanimalshelter.org
- Denver Animal Shelter: 720-913-1311
- General Inquiries: 720-913-1311
- Officer Dispatch: 720-913-2080