Congratulations on adopting a new member of the family! Adopted dogs are often overanxious and need help in adjusting to your home. To make the transition easier for your new friend, we recommend a few basic guidelines that will help our dog adapt to your "pack" much easier and with fewer problems.

FIRST, WHAT EXACTLY IS A DOG?

Dogs are pack animals just like their forefathers, the wolf. They are very social animals, even more so than human beings. Each member of a pack has a rank (like a pecking order) and the higher up the ladder you are, the more privileges you are granted. Each pack has a leader or alpha, and for the dog you just adopted, that must become every human in your household!

Dogs are only capable of learning on a canine level and can only understand canine values. They do not understand the human terms of fairness or equality. So whether you have a young puppy or adult dog it is much easier to start establishing rank the minute a new dog enters your home rather than waiting until your Fido has established himself as "Leader of the Pack".

If Fido views himself as higher ranking than you, he may start to growl when you approach his food dish; when you try to take an object away from him; he may even bite when you are trying to groom him or pet him; he may try to chase away guests when they enter his den (your house); or he may refuse to remove himself from your couch or bed.

ADOPTED DOGS DO MUCH BETTER ADJUSTING TO A NEW HOME IF THEY HAVE A STRONG LEADER (WHICH SHOULD BE YOU!) AS THEY UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHERE THEY FIT INTO YOUR FAMILY "PACK."

The following guidelines will help you in adjusting your new companion to your home and help in establishing yourself as "pack leader."

KEEP YOUR DOG UNDER CLOSE SUPERVISION WHEN LOOSE IN YOUR HOUSE

An easy way to keep Rover under control is to let him drag his leash around so you can gently guide him away from the trash or off the couch. Another way is to put up baby gates or close the doors to certain rooms so he only has restricted access in your household.
WHEN YOU CAN'T WATCH FIDO, THEN CONFINE HIM TO A CRATE OR TO A SMALL ROOM OR AN EXERCISE PEN

Never leave him alone in your house for at least the first 30 days. If you have adopted a younger dog (two years and under), plan on keeping him in a safe place when you are gone to prevent destructive behaviors from developing. A safe place can be a crate placed in the most used room in your house or confinement to one room such as the kitchen or bathroom. An exercise pen is a metal folding pen (sort of like a playpen for babies) that is portable and can be placed in any room in your house. We do not recommend putting your dog outside or in your garage when you cannot watch him. That to him, is punishment (he got cast out of the pack’s den), and if he becomes stressed out over it he may develop bad habits such as becoming a landscape gardener or a trashaholic or an escape artist or a neighborhood serenader. Please read information on Crate Training for more information on how to contain your dog inside your house.

YOUR ADOPTED DOG WILL BE STRESSED THE FIRST FEW DAYS - INTRODUCE HIM TO NEW THINGS SLOWLY

Unless he stinks to high heaven, forego the bath for the first 5-6 days. He's in a strange place, with strange people. He really doesn't need the entire family "cornering" him in the bathtub and leaning over him. He may act defensively out of fear, and we don't want you starting out on the wrong foot with a bite. Let him get used to you feeding him, petting him (always start by reaching out and stroking under the chin, not reaching over top his head and coming down - a dog that has been abused will take that as a threat).

Don't invite the entire neighborhood over the first day to meet your new family member. Think of how a youngster sees their first day of school in a new neighborhood -- how should I act, will I be accepted? The same thoughts are going through your dog's head. Putting him in a situation of having to be polite and responsive to every one of the neighbors will only confuse him.

HAVE TIME OUTS

Do not spend so much time with your new family member that when it comes time for you to go to work on Monday, Fido is overanxious that you are leaving him. Deliberately ignore him for 20 to 30 minutes at least three times a day (just pretend he is not there, do not pet him, say anything to him, or make direct eye contact; just move away should he try to paw you or nudge you). Use time outs just before you leave for work in the morning and use one as you arrive home each evening so your dog learns not to become emotional about you coming and going.
PRACTICE PUTTING YOUR DOG IN THE PLACE HE WILL STAY WHEN ARE YOU NOT HOME, ONLY DO IT WHEN YOU ARE HOME AT FIRST.

Put him in his crate or confined in one room in the house and then you remain in the house watching TV or cleaning house. Start by leaving him alone for five minutes several times in one day. Gradually increase the time he is alone until you can safely leave him for two hours at a stretch. You are preparing him for when you shall want to leave the house for work or errands.

TREAT YOUR DOG AS UNHOUSEBROKEN, EVEN IF YOU WERE TOLD THAT HE IS TRAINED.

Most adopted dogs are nervous about their new surroundings.. So take him out often during the day the first couple of weeks. Show him where he is to do his business, giving him loads of praise when he does eliminate. A leash can help you get him out where he is to go. If he does make a mistake in the house, do not yell at him, swat him or rub his nose in it. All he will learn is to be afraid of you. See the housetraining page for detailed information about housebreaking.

GIVE YOUR DOG HIS OWN BED ON THE FLOOR.

As much as you may be tempted, if you allow your dog to sleep in your bed, you are telling him that he is just as high ranking as you are. Give him a blanket on the floor at the foot of your bed. If he roams or is unhousebroken, keep him in a crate at night or tied to the foot of your bed (give him no more than a length of ten to twelve inches of leash).

AVOID GAMES LIKE TUG OF WAR, WRESTLING OR ANY ROUGH GAMES.

These games only encourage him to use his strength against you. Play games such as fetch, hide 'n seek, blow bubbles for him, or kick a soccer ball around for him to chase. Some dogs love to play Frisbee and other excel at learning tricks. Children especially should play all games standing up, as getting on the floor at dog level is like telling him that you are a dog too.

IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN, PLEASE READ THE SECTION ON KIDS AND DOGS

Children are often the most disrespected members of your dog's pack. Your dog will view himself as much higher ranking than our children. This could result in a bite sometime down the road. It is up to you to prevent any possible problems from developing between your newly adopted dog and the children by following the basic rules outlined in this packet.

Find good information at: www.ddfl.org/behavior/kidsdogs.pdf
MAKE SURE THAT YOUR DOG EARNS ALL PRIVILEGES - STROKING, EATING, WALKING, PLAYING, ETC.

Do not allow your dog to demand these things from you (by nudging you with his nose or paws). Making him sit or lay down before you pet, feed or play with him will put you more in control. This is called NO FREE LUNCH!

FEED YOUR FAMILY FIRST, AND THEN FEED YOUR DOG

Pour Fido's meals (he should have at least two meals daily) in his bowl and leave it on the counter while you eat your meal first. Then put Fido's food down for him to eat. Give him no more than ten minutes to eat and then take away whatever is left over and save it as part of his next meal.

MAKE SURE YOU GO THROUGH NARROW OPENINGS LIKE DOORWAYS AND PASSAGEWAYS FIRST

Make your dog follow you, not lead or herd you. Leaders lead and followers follow.

MAKE YOUR DOG MOVE OUT OF YOUR WAY WHEN YOU MOVE ABOUT THE HOUSE.

Letting him drag a six-foot to ten-foot leash behind him allows you to move him easily and without a hassle.

ENROLL YOU AND YOUR DOG IN A TRAINING CLASS

Most adopted dogs do have some type of behavior problem, such as jumping on people; fearful of strange people or dogs; or pulling on a leash. A good quality training class can help you with your dog's problem and help you understand why he is doing some of these things.

MAKE YOUR DOG A PART OF YOUR FAMILY

Unacceptable behavior is never improved by isolating your dog to the backyard, or worse, tying your dog up in the yard. Pack animals need their pack and for better or for worse, you're it.

Thank you again for giving a home to an adopted beagle. The unconditional love and loyalty you receive in return will more than outweigh the time and effort you have put into teaching your dog how to live with you.

Thanks to the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley for allowing us to use much of their text in this article.