

Ten Tips for Dog Adopters

Thank you so much for adopting from the Santa Fe Animal Shelter and providing a home for an animal in need! Follow these tips to start off right with your new companion.



1. You and your dog are partners.

- Dog behavior is complex, fluid, and driven by emotional needs.
- There is no dominance hierarchy in dog social groups or between dogs and humans.
- Reward the behaviors you like from your dog and ignore the behaviors you don't.
- Avoid punishing unwanted behaviors, as this can cause behavior problems later on.
- Respect your dog's space and communication.

2. Set up your home for a successful transition.

- Dog-proof your home to keep your pets safe and protect your valuables.
- Remove anything valuable your dog might chew on, and clear the counters!
- Slowly introduce your dog to your home by keeping them in one room at first.
- Over several days or weeks, open up other rooms to them if they are comfortable.
- Give your dog a safe space with a comfy bed to retreat to if they are nervous.

3. Expect an adjustment period for you and your dog.

- Your dog may exhibit problem behaviors while settling into their new environment.
- The length of time it takes for a dog to adjust varies, but can span weeks to months.
- Do not expect your dog to know training cues or basic manners.
- Your new pet doesn't know the rules of your house until you teach them.
- Be patient and compassionate to yourself and your dog during this transition.

4. Learn to read dog body language.

- Understanding goes both ways. It's important to know what your dog is telling you.
- Since dogs can't speak, they use their body to communicate.
- If your dog is stressed, give them space and a toy or treat to help them settle down.
- Stress signals include yawning, turning away, a tucked tail, and a tense or stiff body.
- Check out a [video](#) on dog body language to get a better idea of what to look for.

5. You may need to house train your new dog, even if they are an adult.

- It is common for dogs to have accidents after a life change or move.
- Prevent houstraining accidents in your home with consistent, frequent trips outside.
- Reward your dog with treats and praise whenever they go to the bathroom outside.
- Use an enzymatic cleaner on any indoor accidents to remove the odors your dog smells.
- Avoid scolding or punishing your dog for indoor accidents; they are still learning!

6. Provide enrichment for your dog.

- Enrichment is any activity that allows your dog to engage in natural dog behaviors.
- A dog who receives daily enrichment will be a happier, better-behaved dog.
- Boredom can lead to nuisance behaviors, so keep them occupied with enrichment!
- Use food puzzles to satisfy your dog's natural desire to forage and scent.
- Play training games to activate your dog's problem-solving skills and creativity.

7. Use positive-reinforcement training to teach your dog.

- Make training time fun and happy! Learning is more efficient this way.
- Use training games like "[The Name Game](#)" to teach your dog to pay attention to you.
- Discover what treats your dog loves, and use those! Hot dogs are often a favorite.
- Set your dog up for success by ensuring new situations are positive experiences.
- Use tasty treats, fun toys, and praise to create a positive association for your dog.

8. Be safe on walks.

- Use safe, properly-fitted, and comfortable walking equipment.
- For dogs that pull, front-clip harnesses and fixed-length leashes are the best option.
- Avoid prong collars, choke chains, e-collars, head halters, and retractable leashes.
- Abide by local leash laws and do not let your dog off leash without a [reliable recall](#)!
- Avoid leashed greetings between dogs, as they can be a source of conflict.

9. Introduce your dog to other animals carefully.

- Dogs do better meeting new animals when they have freedom of movement.
- Pay close attention to body language and separate animals that are stressed.
- Keep introductions brief at first and slowly increase their amount of time together.
- End interactions on a positive note while both animals are still happy.
- Always supervise newly-introduced animals, even if they seem to be getting along.

10. Don't know the answer? Ask for help!

- The internet is not a reliable source for training information.
- Reach out to us here at the shelter or seek help from certified training experts.
- The earlier you reach out for help, the better!
- Enroll in a group training class. We now offer [online training classes](#)!
- Join SFAS Trainer Dana on [Training Tip Tuesday](#) for fun training demos online.

For more resources, check out <https://sfhumanesociety.org/behavior-library/>