

The Two Week Shutdown: Resource for Bringing Home New Dogs

Original Written by Stacie Sparks: http://www.bigdogbighearts.com/2_week_shutdown0001.pdf

This is a GREAT method for anyone who brings a new dog into their home. If you are planning to adopt or foster a dog, please take the time to read through what Stacie has to say here. Using, or not using this method can be the difference in whether or not a dog's transition into a new home is a good experience or a bad one.

The First Two Weeks: Give'em a Break!

So, what are you planning to do (or did you do) when you finally get your new family member?

"Well, we plan to go to Petsmart to get a new collar, leash, bowls, toys, etc. and of course we want to show everyone our great new family member! We might also stop by the in-laws place. Oh and then there is my best friend who has a dog too and we KNOW they would get along beautifully! And then when we go home, we're gonna let her out with our other three dogs and the cats so they can meet one another and wear each other out playing."

Say what!? I'm sure that sounds like a very reasonable thing to do, especially if you've just obtained an adult dog; but, think about this for a minute: Does this new dog know you? Yeah, it knows you are a human and I'm pretty sure the dog enjoyed all the belly rubs and hugs and scratches you had to dish out. BUT, does this dog know you will feed it? Does this dog know you will protect it? Does this dog you are a leader?

You might feel inclined to answer yes to these questions but step back for a minute and think how you might feel if you were never going to go back to your "home" and that you were expected to live with new people who didn't understand your language. What if these new people took you to all sorts of different places expecting you to greet everyone happily and feel comfortable with an overload of attention all at one time? How might you feel after all of that, to have to go to your new "home" and interact with a bunch of strangers? It's very likely that you'd feel exhausted, overwhelmed, and ready to retreat but really have no place to go to. You might begin to act out and yell at people for coddling you and insisting that you do this and do that.

Well, many dogs are put in the very same position and the only way they know how to get their point across is to act out or "misbehave." The dog may act out by nipping at children, growling when being moved off furniture, starting fights with the other animals in home, etc. So, what IS the "Two Week Shutdown?"

Let me go ahead and preface this by saying that "two weeks" is a general guideline of the amount of time you should follow this program. Some dogs will settle in faster, some will take longer. It all depends on the individual dog and their needs. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR DOG. They will "tell" you when they've had enough.

During the initial two week period, the dog is taking in the new environment, the people in it, and is learning who the “leaders” are in the new group, be it animal or human. Remember the dog has NO idea WHO you are. Pushing the dog to accept new things too fast makes you (who should be the leader) look like you have no control over situations. This makes the dog feel that THEY have to make decisions for themselves and you DON'T want that. Dogs who feel the need to make decisions for themselves are the ones who “act out” or “misbehave.” It is your responsibility to the dog and as an owner to make sure the dog looks to you for direction and guidance. Putting the dog in new situations with a person they don't yet know to trust fully is setting the dog up for “failure.”

Stacie says it best here: When you first met your “spouse or significant other”, you were on your best behavior, you were not relaxed enough to be all of yourself, were you? Just think of the things you do physically once you get to KNOW a person, you wouldn't run up to a stranger and hug them and squeeze them! Imagine, if on the first date, this new person, was all over you touching you and having their friends hug you and pat you on the head, and jostle your shoulders, looked in your mouth then he whisked you off to another strangers home and they did the same thing. Would you think this person normal and SAFE? Wouldn't you feel invaded and begin to get a bit snarky or defensive yourself? Wouldn't you think to push these people away for obviously your date is out of their mind, as they aren't going to save you from these weirdoes!! Yet we do this very thing to our dogs, and then get upset or worried that they aren't relaxed and accepting of EVERYTHING instantly!

In providing the dog two weeks to “shut down,” you are allowing the dog time to see and hear you and the sounds and routines of your home.

Crate the dog in a room by itself. Dogs are sensory animals and pick up on a lot without having to visually SEE it. Leash the dog at all times when not crated. Yes, this means leash the dog to you in the house (this helps a lot with bonding too) and out in the yard (use of a long line is A-OK here :). The dog needs to start learning that YOU are its everything. Letting the dog have full freedom of your home and yard is just telling him to do whatever he pleases and right now, he doesn't have that right because it's YOUR house. You need to remember that so he learns to respect it.

Do little to no training at all. Interactions with the new dog at this point should be positive so as to strengthen the bond. This is another GREAT reason to have the dog leashed to you at all times because, how can they get into trouble if they are right there with someone ALL the time.

No walks, car rides, pet store excursions, other animals (unless crated next to them) etc. Obviously, trips to the vet are excluded from this. The dog can live for two weeks without going on a walk. Walks provide an over abundance of stimuli and are VERY stressful, especially when the dog still has no reason to trust you. Again, read Stacie's original words on this subject: The dog may react to something and we start correcting it with the leash and we just installed a VERY STRESSFUL moment to the dog in what should be a fun and learning walk. TEACH the dog by doing the shut down, that YOU are the one to look to, that you are now here for the dog! He can trust in you and look to you for guidance. Then you can venture out into new situations one at a time, the dog knows he can trust in his new humans and can relax under the fair guidance of his new leaders!

Allow the dog 20-30 minute intervals of time in and out of the crate, AFTER exercise/yard times. For instance, take the dog out for 20-30 minutes, then crate the dog for about 20-30 minutes. The dog is not

crated for an excessive amount of time and still gets to learn about you and the household. As time progresses, the intervals can be increased as the dog relaxes to help the dog adjust to a more accurate routine.

Ignore crying and/or barking. If you run to the dog each time they bark, whine, or cry, you are teaching the dog that doing those things gets your attention. The dog must learn to be secure when you are not there.

Refrain from introducing the dog to resident pets. You don't want the dog to bond to another dog without bonding to you first! Crating the dogs side by side will help them get used to one another but GREATLY limit any interactions for the first two weeks. As the dog begins to relax more and look to you more for direction, introduce the dogs/pets slowly. My personal recommendation is to keep the initial introductions VERY short. 10-15 minutes at a time. Supervise ALL the time. Increase the time by small amounts daily.

You will notice a HUGE difference in your new dog within these two weeks! You will see a smile start to come out. You will see more goofy quirks come out.

You'll also begin to get a glimpse of behaviors you will want to correct with training. But, you will have a healthy start in training your dog because you've given the dog a chance to get to know you and trust in your guidance and direction!

Do you need a little more coaxing about why this method works so well? Stacie has supplied some pictures of dogs that have come through her home, as well as us. The difference in the dogs' facial expressions will amaze you!

The main point to remember: SLOW DOWN! Don't push your new dog to accept many different things and give the dog the opportunity to get to know you. Two weeks may seem like a long time, but its very short in comparison to the next 8 or so years you will have with your new companion!