

# The Sacramento Shelter Pets Alive Dog Fostering Handbook



Bradshaw Animal Shelter  
Sacramento, CA

## **Contact Information**

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**Shelter Address: 3839 Bradshaw Road, Sacramento, CA 95827**

### **Shelter Hours Open to the Public:**

Tuesday	12:30 – 6:30 p.m.
Wednesday	12:30 – 5:30 p.m.
Thursday	12:30 – 6:30 p.m.
Friday	12:30 - 5:30 p.m.
Sat/Sun	Noon – 4:30 p.m.

Closed Mondays and most holidays

**Email for General SS Pets Alive Inquiries and Adoption Applications:**

**[sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com](mailto:sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com)**

**Email for Bios, Photos, and Video Additions to Your Foster Dog's Webpage:**

**[sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com](mailto:sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com)**

**Visit <http://saccountydogs.com/fosters> for more information on adding content to your foster dog's webpage and to find a link for our bios Google form.**

**Document Sponsor: Sacramento Shelter Pets Alive**

**For more information about SSPA, visit <http://www.saccountydogs.com>**

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**Thank you for deciding to foster a dog.** Few ways of helping an animal in need are more rewarding than becoming a foster family. You're actively saving lives when you get involved in fostering. It can be an incredibly fun and challenging experience—one that will likely change your life for the better. We are grateful for your help, and we have created this guide to answer your questions along the way. Please also ***call or email us any time*** you have specific questions.

## Before You Bring Home Your Foster Dog

There are a few steps you can take to make sure your home is ready for your foster dog.

1. Put away all food bowls, treats, and toys. Don't forget the cat's food bowl, if you have one. For the entire length of your foster experience, meals should only be given inside crates or with animals separated by closed doors to avoid spats over high-value resources. (After a couple of weeks in foster care, treats and toys can be given together with supervision.)
2. Designate a space for your foster dog's crate. It's nice to have it in a living area around family activity if possible, so that the dog can retreat or have crate time but still be part of the family activities.
3. Make sure your yard is secure (no gaps in the fence or broken parts) and safe for a new dog who might be prone to escaping. In a new environment, many dogs will try to escape out of fear and confusion, so **foster dogs should never be left unattended in back yards when no one is home**, even if your fence is high and secure.
4. If you are concerned about your resident dogs catching kennel cough, you may get them a Bordetella vaccine at your vet at least 2 weeks before you foster.
5. If you have any upcoming trips planned, please discuss these with us when you inquire about fostering (you are welcome to take the foster dog with you on a trip when the situation allows). If the trip is a few months out, it will be easy enough for us to secure a temporary foster home for the dog while you are away. We will just need some advance notice. If the trip is quickly approaching though, we will want to discuss how to plan your foster experience around it. Sometimes it's better to wait until after the trip, while in other cases we may be able to accommodate an upcoming departure.

## The Basic Ground Rules of Fostering

1. **Dogs will never be left unattended together or with other animals unless approved by the foster coordinator.** They will be separated using secure crates when unsupervised. Crate doors should be additionally reinforced with carabineers, which we can supply.
2. Foster dogs will not be introduced **off leash** to any resident dogs on their first day home unless approved by the foster coordinator. Dog introduction procedures will be followed as described in this manual.
3. Foster dogs will not be introduced face-to-face to any resident cats or other small animals during their first week home unless approved by the foster coordinator. Small animal introductions will take place as directed in this manual.
4. **Food will never be left out between meals.** It will only be given when dogs are separated by closed doors and/or crates. Separate feeding is an absolute **MUST** during foster experiences.
5. Foster dogs will never be off leash in public places such as parks or waterways. **Dog parks are off limits** to foster dogs.
6. Any disagreements between the foster dog and resident pets, even minor ones, or concerning behaviors of any kind, will be reported to us immediately, so that we can discuss safe strategies to manage the situation.

## The First Two Weeks at Home

Your goal for the first two weeks with your foster dog is to help them decompress from the stress of being in the shelter and start getting the hang of life in your home. This can be accomplished by keeping expectations simple. Keep in mind that while most dogs have experienced indoor life as a pet, some haven't, and they may need more patience and guidance as they learn indoor rules. Establish a routine from the dog's first day home. This will help him acclimate as quickly as possible, since dogs enjoy the predictability of a schedule. As much as possible, if the same things generally happen morning, midday, and evening each day, you will be helping your foster dog settle in as quickly as possible.

## From the start:

1. Establish a simple schedule for the dog. Keep life predictable.
2. Allow plenty of down time every day for the dog to decompress and rest. Keep the environment under-stimulating rather than over-stimulating, as much as possible.
3. Nothing in life is free. Start establishing good behavior with your foster dog by helping them learn to work for everything they get. This means sitting for treats, food, and other rewards, getting permission before coming onto furniture or laps, and starting to learn how to wait at doorways and keep four feet on the floor before getting the thing the dog wants.
4. Plan to crate the dog from day one, during down time and when other pets are loose in the house (while following the slow introduction guidelines). This means crate training will need to be on an accelerated schedule.
5. There is no need to walk your dog in public during the early days home. People frequently think the dog must be walked immediately once or twice a day for exercise, but we find that this can be over-stimulating for a dog newly out of the shelter. For most dogs, the best approach is to spend the early days at home in the house and yard, getting accustomed to the new environment and bonding with the foster family.
6. **Every dog is different**, so if anything in this guide doesn't seem to be working well for your foster dog, ***please contact us*** so we can discuss your specific challenges and possible solutions.

## Two Days, Two Weeks, Two Months: Behavioral Changes Over Time

Assuming your foster dog isn't adopted immediately, you will likely observe behavioral changes in the dog as he settles into your home. After a few days, you may see him shaking some of his initial kennel stress, and his true personality may start to emerge. After a few weeks in your home, the same will be true—kennel stress disappearing, true personality emerging—only more so.

This couple-of-weeks milestone is often a time when new behavior issues occur. A dog who was shut down when he first came home may start to reveal new anxiety-driven behaviors. Some dogs may also begin to feel more confident and start to test boundaries to see what they can get away with. Consistency of routine and remaining firm on house rules will be key. A dog that tests boundaries and challenges rules needs to see that the people he looks to for leadership are not going to change the rules for him or back down from enforcing them. Remaining consistent will allow him to relax and feel secure in his environment.

If you notice changes in your foster dog after a few weeks, this is a good time to check in with us and discuss what you are seeing. We can recommend strategies for dealing with any issues that have come up.

If your foster dog is still with you after 2-3 months, it's likely at this time that you can start feeling confident that the dog you see is the dog you get. He will be likely to have fully decompressed from kennel stress and will understand the rules and routines of the household, which provides a framework within which to relax and be himself. This will provide you with great insight about what the dog needs in terms of an adoptive home and better equips you to choose a great home for him.

## The Roles of Relationship and Environment

Dog behavior, just like human behavior, is dependent upon context. This means that behavior is shaped by relationships and environment, and when a dog's close human relationships change and/or the environment changes, behaviors may change as well. A dog who thrives in an environment with very clear rules and expectations may display behavior problems in a home where the rules are inconsistently enforced. A very pushy or willful dog might behave like a brat in a permissive household, while he could display very appropriate behavior in a household that doesn't allow him to break the rules.

If you find your foster dog struggling with behavior problems, whether it's after a few weeks or a few months in your home, it's important to consider the context in which the behaviors are occurring before we discuss with you possible solutions. Questions to ask yourself include:

1. **What are the behavior issues observed?** Make an effort to describe exactly what you are seeing, avoiding labels like "aggression" and "fearfulness," because sometimes such labels get in the way of allowing us to see what's really going on. Descriptions such as "cowering when hands come near the top of his head when out in public" and "growls when other animals approach the food bowl" are much more helpful and accurate.
2. **Does the dog display the behavior around certain people, or all people?**
3. **Does the dog display the behavior in certain settings or specific situations?**
4. **Are there any triggering events associated with the behavior?**
5. **Are other animals involved with the behavior in any way?**

Once you have answered these questions for yourself, **give us a call** to discuss what's happening and how it might best be resolved.

## Crate Training

### Equipment Needed:

1. A Crate or Kennel -- Unless you already have an available crate/kennel at home, the shelter will provide you with one of an appropriate size for your foster dog. If you find that your foster dog has severe separation anxiety and that a normal crate isn't strong enough to prevent escape, please note that we have steel crates also available, which are better able to withstand escape attempts.
2. At least 2 carabineers, to be used for providing a secure lock at the top and bottom of the crate's gate.
3. A Kong toy, stuffed with kibble (subtract this amount from their most recent meal, or have the Kong count as a mealtime), and capped off with peanut butter. To make the treat last longer, freeze it the night before.

If you have other pets in your household, crate training your foster dog will need to begin on Day 1, at an accelerated pace. Provide all of the dog's meals inside the crate, and start creating as many positive associations as you can with the dog entering the crate. Sprinkle extra-tempting treats inside the crate when the dog enters, and praise them immediately. Provide a comfy bed inside the crate, but keep in mind that some dogs may chew the bed when unattended, so this will need to be supervised at first, and then offered on a case by case basis during unsupervised time in crate.

When you close the dog inside the crate for the first time, offer a treat, and then let them out after only a short confinement. How long this will be depends on the individual dog. If they are content there for a few minutes or more, let them stay. If the dog whines to get out, wait for them to quiet down, and then open the crate and let them out.

Repeat this exercise throughout the first day home, lengthening the dog's stays in the crate as much as possible. If the dog is very resistant to the crate confinement, try the steps above and then give an "uh-uh" if the dog starts to bark or whimper. Offer treats and/or calm praise and attention when they are quiet for a reasonable stretch of time.

If the dog ignores food and treats inside the crate, when they are normally very interested in food, their anxiety about the situation is too high for treats to be an effective reward. **Please discuss this with us** so we can offer some strategies for crate training in this situation.

Some dogs will take to the crate quite easily, while others will present significant challenges. If you are struggling with getting your foster dog to stay in a crate, **contact us for more detailed instructions.**

## Introducing Resident Dog to Foster Dog

For your dog's first day home, allow him plenty of time to decompress before dealing with introducing your resident dog or dogs. When it comes to dog introductions, follow these rules:

1. Introduce **one dog at a time** to the new dog.
2. **Be patient.** Expect that integrating a new dog into the household of dogs will take at least a week, but could take a month or more, depending on the dogs involved. When one of the dogs is a puppy (assuming the other dog enjoys puppies), or both dogs have very playful, puppy-like behavior, timelines may be shorter.
3. For two adult dogs, start on leash in neutral territory with a goal of simply having the dogs see each other and walk near each other without any face to face contact. Watch each dog's body language and increase distance between the dogs any time either dog becomes stiff or seems uncomfortable.
4. If the dogs got along well in neutral territory, the next step can be having a **brief** interaction with leashes dragging in the home or back yard. **Be sure no valuable resources are present, by removing all toys, food (including cat food), chews, and treats from the space.**
5. Keep play sessions brief, always ending on a positive note. If at any point the dogs start to seem over-stimulated or the play gets too intense, end the session and plan for the next time to be shorter and less intense.
6. If at any point during the dog introduction process, the dogs don't seem to be getting along, or you are concerned about either dog's behavior, separate the dogs and **call us** to discuss what you have observed before proceeding any further.

## Introducing Dogs to Cats and Other Small Animals

Each type of small animal may require a slightly different approach to introductions, but there are some principles that apply to all of them.

1. **Keep the process very slow**, with the goal of **having only successful and positive interactions** between the pets. Expect that it may take up to a few months to full introduce your foster dog to resident small pets.



2. **Let the dog's behavior guide your progress at every step.** Any time the dog begins to act more than slightly interested or aroused, it's time to end the intro session, preferably with them bringing their attention back to you and then receiving a treat for that return to focus. Don't allow the dog close enough to the small animal that they are unable to return their focus to you or stay relaxed.
3. If at any point the dog becomes hyper-focused on the small animal, lunges or growls, whines or barks, claws at a door, or strains to get to the small animal, **you are moving way too fast with the dog.** You will need to back up several steps until you find the situation in which the dog is able to remain calm and focused mostly on you.

Since the small animal most foster homes are likely to have is a cat, we will discuss cat introductions here. For other types of animals such as chickens or rabbits, please discuss with us how to modify this plan for their needs.

## Dog to Resident Cat Introductions

**Step 1 - Scent Without Sight:** For the dog's first week in your home, plan to keep the cat in a totally separate room or area, separated by a secure, closed door. Baby gates should not be used at this stage at all. Whenever possible, the dog should have the larger area to explore. Allow the dog to investigate the smell of the cat in the house at first. Rotate rooms and allow the cat to also smell the dog's new scent in his territory.

**Step 2 - Sound and Scent Without Sight:** Once the novelty of the scent has passed, have the cat and dog in areas where they can be heard by one another but not seen. The cat in the bedroom with a closed door that the dog can walk up to and smell is a typical scenario. If the dog reacts strongly to the sound of the cat, give an "uh-uh" and direct his attention away from the sound and onto you. Give calm praise and treats when he is able to focus on you and ignore the sound. Practice this until the sound of the cat is no longer interesting to the dog.

**Step 3 - Controlled Sight:** With the dog on a leash that an adult is holding, place the cat inside a secure crate or cat carrier, and allow the dog to see the cat in its carrier from a distance across the room. With high-value treats (such as chicken or hot dogs—not kibble) and verbal cues, get the dog to focus on you instead of the cat. So long as the dog is able to remain calm and focused on you, you can continue this exercise for 5-10 minutes, allowing them to be in the same room getting use to the sight of one another. Repeat this exercise frequently, so long as the dog continues to remain calm and able to break focus from the cat. You can slowly decrease

the distance between the dog and the cat with each session, but how quickly you do this will depend on the animals in question. If at any point the cat becomes highly distressed, increase distance and/or end the session.

The dog displaying mild curiosity is fine, but keep asking him to return his focus to you. The goal is to turn these sessions into calm, we-are-hanging-out-in-the-same-area experiences, in which the dog is becoming more relaxed. So long as he's paying attention to you, you can pet him, give him calm attention and affection, and generally make the experience more pleasant for him. Offering him a chew toy is fine too, so long as you are sitting right there too and able to redirect him if his attention turns to the cat. Decrease distance as the animals both seem able to handle it without disrupting the calm state you are going for.

If at any point the dog becomes hyper-focused on the cat or starts behaving in an excited way toward the cat, you have allowed the session to go on for too long and/or you have decreased the distance between them too quickly. Increase distance and end the session. It's by far better to go too slowly though, than to move too quickly, because your goal is never to allow the animals to get into a hyper-focused or distressed state.

**Step 4 - Roaming Cat and Dog on Leash:** When you begin this step will depend on how Step 3 goes. Some dogs may need several weeks or more of exercises with the cat in a crate across the room, before they can be relied on to display appropriate behavior. Other dogs may relax and ignore the cat right away. Using a baby gate or a glass door as a barrier, put the dog on a leash with an adult holding the lead, and allow the dog to see the cat moving freely in another room through the baby gate, or through a glass door. Repeat the exercise of asking the dog to focus on you, while the cat roams freely nearby.

If the cat is very curious and wants to come investigate the dog, only allow it so long as the dog is staying relaxed and able to break focus from the cat. If the dog starts to become excited by the nearness of the cat, end the session. Repeat this exercise until you have achieved the same calm results as in Step 3, with the dog able to relax and keep focus on you or a chew toy.

If at any point the cat darts or runs, be sure that you can break the dog's focus from that behavior. Many dogs will be relaxed around a cat *until* the cat runs, and at that point the dog may attempt to chase the cat. If your foster dog does fixate when the cat runs, keep practicing Step 4 until you can easily bring the dog's focus back to you even when the cat is daring around.

**Step 5 - Cat Loose Without Barrier and Dog on Leash:** Again with the dog on a leash that an adult is holding, have very tempting treats in hand and allow the dog and cat to meet face to face, with the cat roaming loose in the same room. Be sure the cat has a safe place to hide and/or escape to if he chooses to do so. Watch the dog's body language constantly. He should

have loose, relaxed posture, and he should not be giving the cat any hard stares. If he is sniffing and looking curious, that's fine, but he should also be able to return his attention to you for a treat whenever you ask him to. Ask for his attention frequently, and give treats and calm praise for his ignoring the cat. It's okay and necessary for him to pay attention to the cat at this stage, but it should be gentle, curious attention. Anything more is inappropriate, and if you feel the dog going from calm to very aroused/excited, you've pushed him too far and you need to end the session immediately. If they are able to be in the room together, relaxed and gently curious, for 5 minutes, call it a big success and end the session.

Repeat this exercise 3 times per day, letting the animals' behavior be your guide for how long each session should be and how frequently you do it. The first few days, if all goes well, having the dog and cat in the same room for a handful of 5-minute sessions would be a big success.

**Step 6 - Loose Together with Leash Dragging:** After a few days of exercises with the dog restrained on leash and the cat roaming free, if all you are seeing is mildly curious behavior and no over-excitement, you can drop the leash and let it drag so the dog can freely roam the room with the cat. Be sure to have the leash on the dog though, as a safety measure in case freedom with the cat turns out to be more than he can handle. Shoot for having the cat and dog in the room together the first few days of Step 6 for a few sessions of 15 minutes at a time.

Don't forget to be very watchful of how the dog behaves if the cat suddenly darts or runs from one spot to another. Many dogs are able to coexist with a cat until the cat runs, and at that point, the instinct to chase prey combined with the freedom of no one restraining the leash may temporarily override any lessons you have taught about ignoring the cat.

**Step 7 - Freedom with Supervision:** If all goes smoothly in Step 6 for a few days to a week, it's time for supervised freedom between the animals. This means that **when a human is present to directly supervise**, the cat and dog can be loose in the room together. If at any point you are not able to watch their interactions directly, separate the animals by a secure closed door. When you leave the house, you should always have the dog and cat securely separate. One typical scenario is to have the dog in a crate and in a room with the door closed off from the cat.

One final note about all resident pets and foster dogs living together--**animal relationships in the home require constant monitoring**. Especially when introducing a new dog, it's important to note any changes in the behavior of animals in the home and discuss with us changes observed.

## Housebreaking

For dogs of all ages, the following 5 rules will help with successfully housebreaking your new foster dog.

1. Feed on a schedule, twice a day, with **no food available between meals (treats or filled Kong's used for crate training are the exception)**. This will help you begin to learn when the dog needs to eliminate.
2. Never leave an unhousebroken dog unattended, loose in the house. Until he can be trusted not to eliminate indoors, the dog must be crated, X-penned, tethered, or leashed to you at all times that you are not directly paying attention to him or her. If you are not able to actively be engaged with the dog, they will have the chance to eliminate indoors, so they must instead be confined in one of the ways listed above. For specific instructions on how to safely use tethering, an X-pen, or a leash-to-person for housebreaking, please discuss with us.
3. Take frequent trips outdoors with the dog (hourly or more is good), especially within 10-15 minutes after he eats or drinks. Letting the dog use a doggy door doesn't count—you need to physically go with him so you know exactly when he eliminates.
4. Reward good behavior. Praise the dog heartily the moment they eliminate outside. Really make a huge, happy deal out of it, even if you feel silly doing so. Also reward him with a treat within 3 seconds of the act. The goal is to strongly communicate to him what a wonderful thing it is that he eliminated outside.
5. Avoid negative feedback or punishment for mistakes. This can be so hard to do, but it's absolutely a mistake to punish a dog for eliminating on the floor. It only teaches him to be afraid of you, and most dogs will not learn from it the message that indoor potty is bad. They will instead possibly learn that they need to hide from you when they eliminate, which makes housebreaking even more difficult. Instead, calmly clean up the mess, knowing that when you allow the dog to eliminate indoors, it's human error, not doggy error, to blame. However, if you do catch the dog in the act of eliminating, it is okay to interrupt him with an "uh-uh" and usher him outdoors immediately.

## Introducing Dogs to Small Children

Most dogs are able to live happily with small children, given proper supervision of both the dog and the children. Whether you have a small child of your own in the house or small children visit your household while you have a foster dog, it's important to give a bit of thought ahead of time to safety measures. These guidelines are a good starting point:

- 1. Children and dogs should never be together unattended.** If an adult is not able to directly supervise their interactions, the dog should be securely separate from resident children, using a baby gate or similar secure barrier.
- 2. Children should be taught how to respect a dog's space,** along with the type of handling dogs enjoy, such as petting under the chin and along the body. Even toddlers can learn some basic do's and don'ts for interacting with the dog. It's very important that even the youngest children are taught not to attempt to "ride," climb, or sit on the dog, tug or pull at the dog's body parts, hit the dog, or throw objects at the dog. Many people celebrate the idea of the dog who tolerates any and all treatment from a small child, but we should consider how unfair an expectation that is to place on a dog.
- 3. Teach children never to approach a dog while he is eating or enjoying a toy or chew.**
- 4. Help resident children learn to recognize the signs that a dog is uncomfortable.** Visit <http://www.liamjperkfoundation.org/downloads.html> for a list of great resources for educating yourself and your children about reading a dog's body language.
- 5. For very young children who can't be trusted to always behave appropriately with the dog, use baby gates, crates, and/or closed doors to keep the dog and child separate when you are unable to actively supervise their interactions.**
- 6. Help the dog begin to understand from day one how to behave calmly and appropriately around small children.** This can be done by always encouraging/rewarding calm behavior from the dog. Teach him to sit before getting anything he wants, including treats, meals, toys, and access through doorways. Teach him to generally respect all people's space by not allowing pushy or invasive behavior and rewarding calm, appropriate behavior.
- 7. Having the dog in the presence of children with a leash dragging can be a useful tool for managing the dog's behavior.** It allows you to quickly stop the dog from engaging in unwanted behaviors. However, this works only around kids who are able to understand that the leash is not a toy to be grabbed or tugged on for fun.

- 8. Keep in mind that children running through the home and/or behaving rambunctiously are likely to cause the dog to run and behave rambunctiously too.** When you are teaching the dog to be calm and appropriate, the kids will also need to be calm around the dog.
- 9. Remember that kids and dogs can be best pals!** All it takes is proper management and instruction for the kids and animals involved.

## Bonding

The easiest and most fun part of any foster experience is usually the bonding time you spend with the dog. Never underestimate the benefit your foster dog will get from having your affection and physical contact. Be sure to spend as much time as you are able in the early days and weeks giving him physical affection and contact. He may want to be a “Velcro dog” at first, at your side constantly, and this should be allowed. This will help him catch up on lost time, after a stressful stay in the shelter, and it encourages security and mental wellbeing for the dog. Inviting him to snuggle up next to you on the sofa, or rest against your feet while you work at a desk, or even curl up on your lap—these are all easy ways to bond and let the dog decompress with the benefit of your proximity. As the dog becomes more secure, you will likely notice him venturing away from your side and relaxing nearby, not needing to be right on top of you so much.

Light, easy obedience work, 3 times a day, is another easy way to bond. When the dog sees you as the source of food and fun, he is more likely to pay attention to you as you try to communicate the house rules. So keeping in mind that nothing in the first two weeks should be very intensive, work on teaching the dog to sit for treats, meals, and entry through doorways (this doorway practice will be more appropriate as an early skill for some dogs than others). If “sit” comes very easily to the dog and he seems eager to learn more, teaching “watch me,” “stay,” and “down” are also good early commands to learn. If the dog masters all of those with ease, you can start lengthening the time you ask him to do a down – stay, from a few seconds, gradually increasing up to a minute or more. But only do this if the dog seems eager and ready. Asking too much too soon, at this early stage, can lead to frustration.

## Health and Well-Being

You may notice your foster dog sleeping a lot during his first week or two home with you. He may have kennel cough (if he also coughs, sneezes, and/or gags frequently), or he may

just be recovering from kennel stress. If you do notice him coughing or gagging, especially on leash, please contact us immediately. We will arrange a shelter vet visit so that the dog can be medicated.

Anything of note that you observe about the dog's health should be reported to us, so that we can decide whether a vet visit is needed. Foster dogs will be treated at the shelter by our veterinarians. Even if you live a considerable distance from the shelter, it will be necessary to bring the dog to our shelter for treatment unless you have gotten special permission from the foster coordinator to do otherwise at your own expense.

## **Socialization and Counter-Conditioning**

Dogs of all ages, but especially young dogs, need to be socialized to a wide variety of people, settings, and other animals. After you've had your foster dog for a week or two and he has started relaxing and displaying more of his personality, it will be appropriate to start exposing him to many different experiences. Take him on car rides, go for walks in new areas and at different times of day and evening, and allow him to meet new people as much as possible. These should all be happy, fun experiences.

If at any point in the process, the dog reacts with wariness or fearfulness, you will know a more structured approach is warranted for that particular setting. A little wariness that goes away with a bit of coaxing usually needs no more than repeated exposure until the dog reacts normally to a setting or situation. If the wariness is toward a person, please contact us immediately to discuss what you have observed and how to proceed.

Treats should most certainly be used as a lure when a dog seems unsure of a new situation or setting, and the more tempting the treat (or the smellier!), the better. Cans of tuna fish, hot dogs, cheese, jerky, fresh meat, and wet cat food are all treats most dogs will find tempting enough to overcome minor fears for. When they are relaxed and associating the new experience with good things, then the work is done.

For more persistent cases of fearfulness—for instance, when a dog is terrified of going up stairs or entering a car—plan time each day for practice sessions surrounding the problem area. We will discuss fear of cars here as an example.

Offering a treat tempting enough to lure the dog up next to the car, with lots of praise and encouragement when he is close to the car, is the first step. Next session, the goal can be to get his front paws onto the seat without your help. Placing a treat on the seat just far enough that he has to put his paws on the seat to reach it will help. Later, try for getting the dog all the way into the car. It's okay if he needs a physical boost into the vehicle, if he is at the point where he will put his front paws on a seat. Once he is in the car, make it a very happy

experience with praise, treats, and affection. Spend a few minutes just hanging out there before ending the session on a positive note.

Once the dog is getting into the car without too much fear, the next steps will be to drive him to a fun destination. The trip can even be just around the block and back into your driveway, with lots of celebrating and treats at the end, so that the dog begins to associate getting into the car and driving with fun and good things.

If the dog displays fearful behavior while in the car, to the point that he will not take treats, pants or drools excessively, and whines or claws at the door to get out, talk with us to develop a more intensive strategy for conquering his fears.

## **Behavior Issues**

Some behavior issues are not apparent in the shelter environment. If your foster dog reveals or develops a behavior issue while in your care, it is ideal to help them overcome it before adoption. The first thing to do whenever you encounter a behavioral change in your foster dog or a situation you aren't sure how to handle, is to call us--or email if it isn't urgent. For any emergency or urgent situation, call us immediately.

### **Some common behavior problems we see are:**

- Separation Anxiety
- Resource Guarding
- Boredom-Related Destructiveness and Chewing
- Eating Non-Food Objects
- Fearfulness Due to Lack of Socialization
- Leash Reactivity

Every dog and situation is unique, so if you find yourself facing any of these issues, please contact us so we can discuss strategies most appropriate for the dog and situation.

### **A general approach to minor behavior problems such as chewing inappropriate objects is:**

1. Offer appropriate replacement behaviors (in this case, something appropriate to chew on).
2. Determine whether something is triggering the behavior, such as boredom, and decide if there is a way to eliminate the trigger.
3. Use verbal corrections to interrupt the unwanted act. For instance, give an "uh-uh" (or whatever verbal correction you can use consistently) the moment the dog begins



- to chew on an inappropriate object, and take the object away (always replacing it with an appropriate and equally desirable object).
4. If verbal corrections aren't enough, a spray bottle can be used as a last resort to interrupt the act. Use the spray bottle sparingly though. Most dogs will find it highly offensive to be sprayed in the face and will cease the behavior immediately, but some will become immune to it if it's done too often. And for very sensitive dogs, being sprayed can be extremely stressful.

## Separation Anxiety

Dogs are wired to want to be with people all of the time. They look to us for their food, safety, and companionship. Given this dependence, combined with the highly social nature of the average dog, it's easy to see how separation anxiety has become a common problem for canines in the typical home, where dogs are frequently left alone for 8-10 hours or more per day. When a dog becomes anxious at the absence of his people, he may display a range of anxiety-driven behaviors such as destructive chewing, clawing at or destroying doors and other barriers, barking, and excessive drooling.

Separation anxiety can be challenging to deal with, especially if you have a full time work schedule. If you suspect your foster dog is struggling with this issue, please talk to us immediately about the behaviors you have observed so that we can figure out the root cause of the behaviors. Sometimes, boredom-related behaviors can seem like anxiety.

**If your foster dog does indeed have separation anxiety, these strategies can help reduce and eliminate it:**

1. Keep the dog's time spent alone minimal for several weeks, if at all possible. Plenty of quality time with you up front can help ease anxiety and establish a secure bond that will help the dog cope with stretches spent alone. Gradually increase the amount of time you leave the dog alone and crated, starting with no more than an hour or so per day as necessary, and increasing to stretches of 4-6 hours eventually.
2. Make crate training a top priority, so that you can have a secure place to keep the dog from being destructive.
3. Practice "leaving the house" exercises 10-15 times per day or more if you can manage it. This means you calmly go through the motions of leaving the house—getting your bag/keys, putting on shoes and coat, putting the dog in the crate, leaving the house, and locking the door. At first,

you will come back in the house immediately. Gradually, you lengthen the time you stay gone—from a few seconds at a time, up to a few hours—letting the dog's ability to cope with your absence be the guide for how long you leave.

4. When you return to the house, whether it's during a leaving-the-house exercise or after you really had to go somewhere and are back home, always keep greetings very calm. For the first ten minutes or at least until the dog is calm, ignore him. If the dog gets excited in his crate upon your return, it is important to ignore him until he has calmed himself. Once he's able to calm down, it's fine to let him out of his crate, but unless he's able to greet you calmly at that point, you keep ignoring him. In order to eliminate separation anxiety, it's very important to keep the emotions surrounding coming and going from the house as low-key as possible.

5. If the anxiety is especially severe and/or the above strategies are not helping, please contact us so we can discuss whether medication to ease anxiety is warranted.

## **Resource Guarding**

Another behavioral issue foster dogs may occasionally present is resource guarding high-value items such as food, treats, toys, and even people. This means that the dog attempts to protect the item from perceived threats such as other dogs or people who might take away the resource. Before learning how to handle this behavior, it's important to keep in mind that it is a common dog behavior, and how it is managed depends in some part on the particular situation and resources being guarded.

The most common scenario is a dog who attempts to protect his food, treats, or toys from other dogs. When the dog in question is one who is still decompressing from kennel stress, and who may have faced persistent hunger in recent months due to poor care in his previous living situation, it is extremely important not to challenge the dog with difficult situations during his early weeks in the home. This means NEVER leaving potential resources lying around for him to guard.

We frequently get calls from new foster providers, upset because their foster dog and their resident dog have gotten in a spat over a toy or food. This is obviously stressful for the humans as well as the dogs involved. The stress is entirely unnecessary and avoidable though.

Just keep in mind how the dogs must feel. There is a stressed out new dog in the home who doesn't yet know if he can trust that food and other resources will always be available to him. He doesn't know the house rules, and he is trying to sort out where he stands with the animals and people in the house. Meanwhile, the resident dog is likely experiencing stress from

having a new, unfamiliar dog in his space. Imagine if a stranger arrived in your home and just started living there without asking you. Even if you're the most patient person around, you might still find the situation uncomfortable for at least a few weeks.

Because every dog and home situation is unique, it is important to **contact us** right away if you observe behaviors in your foster dog or resident dog that lead you to believe one of them is a resource guarder. We will need to discuss what you have observed so that we can recommend specific strategies to use based on your situation and the dogs involved.

## Connecting with Potential Adopters

Once your foster dog is healthy and has overcome any major behavioral issues, you'll naturally start thinking about finding the right home for him. How long this takes is partly a matter of luck, but you do have some control over it, too. Providing us with great content for the dog's website is the best way to ensure he attracts as much adopter interest as possible. The content you can provide includes photos, video, and bio information. Please visit <http://saccountydogs.com/fosters> for complete information and instructions on how to send us content. Anything you would like added to your foster dog's web-page can be emailed to [sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com](mailto:sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com).

Off-Site Events and Shelter Visits – If your foster dog has a relaxed demeanor in public and enjoys meeting and greeting random strangers, why not attend off-site adoption events? We have a permanent off-site adoption center at Petco, and there are a number of other seasonal opportunities that come up regularly. You are also welcome to come to the shelter during adoption hours with your foster dog and hang out in the lobby to greet adopters, if the dog is able to calmly tolerate that environment and the dogs in it.

Getting Creative – Foster families have tried a number of creative options to increase a foster dog's exposure to potential adopters. From creating a Facebook page for their foster dog, to Instagram accounts, to Craigslist ads to handing out hand-crafted Valentine cards advertising your dog, the sky is the limit to what you can try. Have fun with your marketing ideas, and let us know what you try. We can often make suggestions based on our own experience, and we are happy to link the dog's webpage to Facebook or other social media you've created.

## Attracting More Adopter Interest

If adopters aren't drawn to your foster dog, there could be any number of reasons, but the first step is to look at your dog's webpage and carefully examine it for possible weaknesses. Ask the following questions:

1. Does it have the most attractive photos possible? And are there photos showing the dog in various environments including at home, indoors and outdoors? Did the dog have studio shots taken at the shelter yet? If so, do they show the dog at his best, or would he benefit from an updated photo session?
2. Attractive, natural-light indoor photos really help adopters see the dog as a family pet and envision it in their own home. If you have photos with family members, especially children and other pets, these can be very helpful.
3. Is there at least one great video of your dog available for viewing? Several videos is ideal. Adopters tell us again and again that it was the video watched on a dog's webpage that made them first fall for the dog. Videos of dogs playing together are very popular, as are videos of dogs and children playing appropriately. If your foster dog is not the playful type, create a video of him doing obedience work, or chasing a ball, or coexisting nicely with other dogs. If he has a quirky or cute behavior you can catch on video, that's great too.
4. Does the bio content answer the questions an adopter might have about the dog, such as whether they are housebroken and crate trained, what their personality is like, what their favorite activities are, and how they are with other animals and children?

## When Your Foster Dog Only Has Eyes for You

Occasionally, a foster dog may bond with you strongly and not be interested in meeting other people. Dogs aren't dumb--they know a good thing when they've found it, and some dogs will decide there's no point in meeting and cozying up to new people when the one they've already got is so wonderful. If your foster dog shows no interest in strangers, and/or if they have already created an awkward adopter meet and greet by giving the adopter the cold shoulder, please talk to us about options for future meet and greets. It often helps to have someone else whom the dog isn't so strongly bonded with conduct the meeting.

## **Meet and Greets with Adopters**

Applications for foster dogs from potential adopters are submitted online to **sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com**. Occasionally they are also turned in at the shelter. Once we have received an application, screened and counseled the family, and determined that they are a potential match, we will contact you to help set up a meeting.

If this is your first foster dog or first meet-and-greet with an adopter, the foster coordinator will be present to conduct the meet-and-greet.

### **Selecting a Location**

You will choose when and where you meet with potential adopters, based on your schedule and their availability. The location you select should be based in part on where your foster dog is likely to be comfortable and able to show off his true personality. Some dogs are able to meet adopters at the shelter without any visible signs of stress, while others will need a more low-key location. It is acceptable to meet adopters at your home if you are comfortable with this arrangement. Some foster families prefer to go to the adopters' homes in order to do a home check at the same time they meet the family. A neutral location such as a public park is also an option.

It is also fine to set up a second meeting if you feel it is warranted.

### **The Process**

After you have met with the potential adopters, it is ultimately your decision whether they are the right family for your foster dog. We want you to feel confident the dog is going to an appropriate, loving home. Whether you decide to let them proceed with an adoption or you prefer to keep looking for the right adopter, let us know, and we can communicate the decision to the potential adopter. Adopters who are receiving an adoption-counseling discount from us will need some additional paperwork and instructions.

Even if the meeting goes perfectly, the adopter should never plan to take home the dog straight from that meeting. Before they can take possession of the dog, they must first complete the adoption paperwork and pay the fees at the shelter during regular business hours. The only exception would be if you've actually met them at the shelter for the dog introduction, and the dog is already altered and able to go home with an adopter immediately.

### **After Adoption**

You may experience a whirlwind of emotions after saying goodbye to your foster pet. For many, it is a bittersweet experience. You've poured so much love and care into an animal that has lived in your home and been a part of your family. Saying goodbye isn't easy, and it can

even be heart-wrenching. Conversely, there is also the relief of having your home return to normal, as well as the fun prospect of taking in another foster some time soon.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding ways to hang onto the best of having a foster dog is by staying in touch with the adoptive family. An occasional email, text, Facebook, or Instagram update can go a long way toward helping you feel connected and reap the reward of seeing your foster live out a happy life.

There are, unfortunately, occasions when adoptions do not work out. Ideally, we love for the foster pet to be able to return to the foster home if possible. When you foster, it's best to decide for yourself what you would like to do in such a scenario, and be sure to let both us and the adoptive family know if you want the foster dog returned to you rather than going back to a shelter kennel, should something go wrong. The shelter can still be contacted by the adopter to process the animal's return, but he or she will be listed as going directly into foster care rather than returning to the shelter.

The vast majority of adoptions work out wonderfully, especially when care is taken in matching the dog with their potential family.

Yes, it may be bittersweet to say goodbye to your foster dog, but the gift you've given that dog, as well as their new family, is priceless. You've given the dog a second chance at life—and you've given their new people a cherished family member to love.

We can't think of many gifts better than that.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**How long until I can bring home my next foster dog?** You can bring home another dog immediately if you like. Or if you prefer to take a break between dogs, just contact us soon as you are ready for a new foster dog. We *always* have dogs ready to go into foster care!

**Can I bring my foster dog to my own vet, to save myself the drive to the shelter?** Foster dogs must be treated by the vets at our shelter. In a few rare cases, when the foster family is willing to pay for veterinary care, we have been able to create an exception to this rule. Please contact us to discuss this before you proceed with any veterinary care.

**If I want to adopt my foster dog, is that allowed?** Of course! Just contact us to get the process of adoption started. We love our foster "failures."

**My friend wants to adopt my foster dog. Is that okay?** If you think your friend will provide a great home for your foster dog, have them email us an application at

**sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com** and let us know that you already know them and approve of them adopting the dog. We will still complete the usual screening process/adoption counseling with them, however. If you find yourself unsure whether your friend is the right home for the dog, please do let us know your concerns before we screen them.

**I need to go on a trip and can't take my foster dog with me. What will happen to my foster dog while I'm gone?** If you are making temporary arrangements for the care of your resident pets, it's also okay to include your foster dog in those arrangements (but please do let us know so we can make sure the necessary paperwork is completed). If you will need us to arrange care, please give us at least a few weeks notice if possible, so that we can try to find a temporary foster home for the dog. On short notice, the dog may need to be returned to the shelter while you are away. We do our best to locate temporary foster homes, but the more lead time we have to do so, the better. Also please remind us of any special needs the temporary foster home should be aware of, when you contact us about the trip.

**I think my foster dog is going into heat. What do I do?** Please call us immediately so that we can discuss what you've observed and how to handle the situation. It will be important to keep the dog away from any intact male dogs. Please also note that you may observe behavioral changes not only in the dog in heat, but also in the other dogs, both male and female, with whom she comes in contact during the heat cycle.

**Have questions not listed here? Contact us! For general inquiries about fostering, sacramentocountydogs@gmail.com is the address to use. For specific issues with specific dogs, refer to the contact information on the first page of this manual.**