

# So You've Adopted a Dog..

*The Underdog Training & Behaviour  
Consulting Guide to settling in your new family  
member*



**Tamara Jackman and Stuart  
Mulholland**

[www.underdogtraining.com.au](http://www.underdogtraining.com.au)

[underdogtraining@hotmail.com](mailto:underdogtraining@hotmail.com)

**0402 112 105**

## Settling Your New Family Member

Congratulations on adopting your new family member. Please remember that both the rescue organisation you adopted from and Underdog Training & Behaviour Consulting are here to assist you with any problems you may experience. The following points will assist you in helping your dog adjust to their new life

- Be consistent from day one. Before you bring your dog home, you must decide what behaviour will be acceptable and what behaviours will not. Everyone in the family must know what behaviours feature on each list! It is difficult for a dog if the rules are changed after a few weeks/ months in the home. We recommend making a list to put on the fridge as a reminder to everyone!
- Set up controlled situations with your dog to teach appropriate behaviour. You may want to let your dog wear a lead in the house to begin with so that you can control them easily to start with or settle them when they get excited or become unsure. Remember that while your new dog gets to know you- they may not want to be grabbed by the collar- a light lead can make things easier for everyone.
- Experiment to find out what your dogs likes and dislikes- are they motivated by food? Do they love affection? Do they play with toys or like to play tug? Some dogs prefer different types of tug toy so experiment- don't try one and give up!
- Taking your new dog to training will help your dog to bond with you and learn the rules. You will get out what you put in! Practice regularly and be consistent- bringing your dog to training will do very little if you do not follow through at home. Old dogs can learn new tricks!!
- Recognise that your new dog is likely to make some mistakes in their new home- they may chew, dig or have an accident in the house. This does not mean that they will do these things forever- how you deal with these things is what determines whether or not they will do this again!!
- If a problem occurs more than 2-3 weeks after the dog enters the home, there may be something in the dogs environment that is contributing to the problem- you may need to adjust what you did with previous dogs to suit the new arrival- every dog is different.
- Remember that dogs learn as dogs- not people. They don't automatically know what is good and bad behaviour- it is our job to teach them!



## Training Concepts- How Dogs Learn

There is no doubt that we love our dogs and, for many of us, treat them as a four legged member of our family. But do we really understand how dogs learn and why they may repeat behaviours that we find unappealing?

Dogs don't perform behaviours that **they believe** to be bad. Hang on a minute, I hear you say, what about digging up my flowers, chewing my outdoor setting, scratching at the back door- they're all bad behaviours!! And I would agree with you- **to US**, they are certainly some of a number of undesirable behaviours. But all of these behaviours appeal to a dog because at the end of the behaviour, the outcome is a desirable one.

It is then our job, based on what we find acceptable to teach the dog that behaviour has consequences- some behaviour has good consequences and some behaviour has bad consequences. The consequences should be relevant to the dog and situation. Consider the following example:

### **SITUATION:**

Dog is scratching at the back door because he/ she wants to come inside

### **POSSIBLE OUTCOMES:**

- Dog is allowed inside and learns that scratching at the back door is what he/ she needs to do to get inside the house
- Dog is ignored, the behaviour gets worse- **is still ignored** and the behaviour ceases (extinction training) **This is the most effective option for this problem but will only work if it is done consistently!**

**In this scenario we can also think about ways to make being outside more appealing to the dog- special treats or toys given in an area are a great way to build positive association with being outside alone.**



## Using Rewards and Corrections

- NEVER correct your dog more than 3 seconds after the event. If your dog digs a hole or has an accident inside that you do not witness, you must not try to punish the dog later as they will not understand what the punishment is for. Dogs do not feel guilt- they respond to your body language and they simply know that you are angry.
- You must reward your dog for behaviours that you find desirable- even when your dog is sleeping quietly on a mat or calmly exploring their backyard! Don't forget about them when they are calm and quiet!! These are the times to reward, reward and reward some more!
- Look for as many opportunities to reward as possible- carry rewards with you at times or have them easily accessible so that you're ready to reward your new dog for general behaviour around the house.
- Think about what your dog wants at the time, look at how they are going about getting it (are they sitting for a treat or jumping up for example?) and decide what consequences (positive, neutral or negative) you are going to attach to the behaviour.
- Some behaviours are self rewarding. Digging a hole or chasing a rabbit are examples of behaviours that are fun for the dog (so the dog will do them again and again if you ignore them) even though you are not rewarding them for doing so. In this case we may need to channel the behaviour into an appropriate outlet- for example providing a sand pit area with toys where the dog is allowed to dig.
- A well timed correction should stop the behaviour immediately, if the dog continues, they are telling you that your correction was not effective- i.e., that your timing was poor, the level not high enough or the type of the correction was not a correction to the dog- e.g. using a water spray on a dog who LOVES water!
- Corrections can be anything from ignoring the dog or turning your back on a jumping dog, to giving a collar correction, lead correction, providing a time out, verbal correction, water spray etc. The type of and level of correction will vary from dog to dog. It is best to have a trainer show you how to use some types of correction **if needed** for your dog. Removal of a reward your dog wanted at that time can be an excellent way to correct unwanted behaviour.

## Dealing with common problems- Jumping Up/ Mouthing

Jumping up and mouthing is very common and is often seen when a dog gets very excited or is trying to play. While it is normal for puppies to mouth, many dogs continue to do this as adults simply because they have never been taught not to. Even if you don't mind the dog jumping on you- consider the potential for problems if the dog jumps on a stranger who is unfamiliar with dogs or a small child.

So why do dogs continue to jump up and mouth? More often than not, it is the result of some kind of reward that the dog has received for the behaviour.

Many people encourage puppies to jump up because they believe the behaviour is cute and/ or they believe the dog will simply grow out of it. This is most definitely not the case.

Is your dog being rewarded for jumping up- even though you may feel you are telling them off, many dogs believe that bad attention, (such as yelling or pushing the puppy down) is better than no attention at all!

Fortunately, training the dog not to jump and mouth is the easy part. Training friends and family may be a little more challenging!!

Firstly remove all the rewards that exist for the dogs jumping.

Do not speak to or touch the dog while he/ she is jumping or mouthing. Instruct all family members AND visitors to do the same. They will get to pat and play with the dog- just not when he/ she is behaving in this way.

Use dinner time to teach the dog to be patient- without a command, you simply hold the dogs bowl and wait until they offer a good behaviour (such as all 4 paws on the ground or a sit) before placing the bowl down. You can do this with all treats and toys- holding out of the dogs reach and waiting until they offer the correct behaviour before quickly giving them what they are waiting for. Do at least 20 repetitions of this exercise every day- guests can also do this once the dog can show self control with you.

Consider having a lead on so that you are able to stop the jumping up as soon as the behaviour starts. Control the situation when guests are present so that you can ensure the dog receives a consistent message.

There are many other techniques that may be used if jumping persists after trying these methods, but it is important that they are tailored to you and the dog- what works for one may not work for another.



## Toilet Training

Many adult dogs have never been toilet trained- they may have always lived outside or always had access to a dog door and never had to learn to physically hold onto their bladder.

- Toilet your dog outside in the area you would like them to use regularly. Always take them outside after they have been sleeping, after eating or if you notice them sniffing in circles or going into a corner or 'private' area.
- If leaving a dog inside when you are not home, restrict the dogs access to one room and provide a toileting area that is of the same or similar surface to what the dog uses outside. (eg- fake grass)
- Always **praise** your dog for toileting outside. **NEVER** harshly punish your dog for accidents when they are learning- if you catch the dog and punish harshly, they may try to hide their accidents from you- by going into other rooms for example. Instead, you can interrupt them with a **calm** verbal 'no' and take them outside immediately- making sure that they walk to the area on their own and you do not carry them.
- Clean accidents without your dog present and clean with a product especially designed to neutralize the smell of doggy accidents.
- Supervise the dog when they are inside- do not allow unsupervised access to the house- this is another situation where having a lead on can allow more control, until the dog is toilet trained.

A crate is an excellent training tool, particularly for toilet training and should **NEVER** be used as a punishment. Crate training is a quick and effective way to toilet train a dog and has the added advantage of becoming a mobile bedroom for your dog to aid you if you move house or the dogs sleeping area changes.

A crate should be a comfortable, enclosed sleeping area, big enough for the dog to comfortably turn around and lie down. Dogs do not like to soil their sleeping area and therefore the crate should **not** be big enough for the dog to sleep at one end and toilet at the other. If using a crate, use for short periods initially and toilet the dog regularly- you can build up the time until the dog can successfully hold its bladder over night. Crates are generally used over night with your dog having the freedom of a yard/ house during the day- they are not designed to keep a dog in for excessive periods of time. A crate also provides a safe haven for dogs when they need a break from children, visitors etc.



## **Dealing with and Preventing Separation Anxiety**

- Ensure that your new dog does NOT spend every moment with you- particularly if you have taken time off and will be leaving the dog for periods of time in the future. All dogs need to learn how to cope with being away from you
- At times even when you are home, ensure your dog is outside or away from you for short periods- if the dog cannot cope with being away from you when you are at home, they are likely to be worse when you leave for work or other commitments.
- Vary your routine as much as possible. If your dog has a set routine- changes to this may cause anxiety- even from weekend to week day. For example-If my dog expects me to be home everyday at 5pm and I don't arrive until 6- many dogs will be anxious during this time. If my dog has no expectations and knows that my arrival time varies, there is less reason to be anxious.
- Provide interactive toys such as treat balls, nylabones and kongs for your dog while you are away- dogs need toys that will interact with them without you having to be there- a tennis ball sitting on the ground is not very exiting when you're not there to throw it!
- Make your comings and goings low key- do not greet your dog with absolute excitement and enthusiasm the moment you walk through the door. Your arrival home should be calm and controlled with exciting times and play to occur at least half an hour after you have entered the house.

## **Obedience Exercises- Tips and Tricks!**

- Do you want your dog to respond to your first command? First ask yourself- Does my dog know what is being asked of them? Do they understand what the words sit or come actually mean?
- We then need to think about what's in it for the dog? If you find your dogs responses to commands are unreliable and that they only comply at times- think about whether the level of reward is high enough for them at this stage. Try to integrate

obedience commands into fun activities or around the home- ask the dog to sit before coming into the house or receiving affection etc.

- The level of reward your dog receives should vary depending on how hard they work. Does your dog find 'stay' difficult? If so, break the exercise down into tiny steps and provide a bigger reward each time there is improvement, however small.

Consider the following analogy- If you were asked to decipher a complicated code, the reward you receive at the end would need to be worthwhile to encourage you to keep trying, even when it is difficult. Your dog needs the same incentive.

Find out what motivates your dog and use this in all of your training!! Does your dog like food? Try liver, devon or chicken rather than dry food. If your dog has a favourite toy- use this as your training toy- a tug toy or squeaky ball may be just the thing to get your training buddy motivated. Restrict access to these training rewards at other times so that they maintain their value. Of course your dog should have other toys to keep them amused when left alone.

- Consider the equipment you are walking your dog on- is it really suitable for the dog? Are you using it correctly? Training classes will show you how to use the most effective training tool to suit you and your dog. If your dog is pulling on the lead to the point of choking or coughing- stop. Seek assistance from a reputable trainer as soon as possible so that walks can be more enjoyable for you and your dog.

- Off lead recalls ARE an advanced exercise for most dogs and should only be attempted once you have trained a reliable recall AND bonded with your new dog. Avoid letting your new dog off lead at a park for now- this is a great goal to work towards but its important to ensure your dog WILL come when called. Allowed off lead does not mean out of control!!

- Obedience should be fun- if you are unmotivated, your dog will be unmotivated as well! Training is about developing a relationship between you and your dog- find training classes that will help you to achieve this.

**Remember- not all training is obedience- your dog may enjoy tricks, agility or scent detection!!**

**We are happy to help with any enquiries and any problem- we want your new family member to stay in your home and get the second chance they deserve! Please contact us to discuss what would best suit your dog- former rescue dogs do receive discounts on many of our services and we offer training all over Melbourne.**

**Contact Tamara and Stuart**

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