

# DECOMPRESSION - THE TWO WEEK SHUTDOWN: THE ESSENTIAL DECOMPRESSION PHASE

The most important phase dogs go through after the shelter is the Decompression Phase, also known as the Two Week Shutdown. The Decompression stage lasts anywhere from the first day to a few weeks to even, in extreme cases, months. This guide will show you step-by-step what to do from the moment your rescue arrives through the first days and weeks to set up your foster dog for success.

## What IS the Two Week Shutdown?

A very brief overview of the Two Week Shutdown is this:

Your new dog needs time to adjust and there are many scenarios that people put their new dog through that only encourage negative behaviors to surface. Dogs may be resilient creatures, but they do also need to know that we are in control of situations, that we will protect and provide for them, and give them clear expectations and routines to follow.

Two weeks is just a guideline. Most dogs advance faster but depending on the individual dog and how closely you follow the guidelines, it may take longer.

## What Does The Two Week Shutdown Mean To Me?

When you bring home a new dog, young or old, we KNOW you are so excited and you want to share your new addition with everyone you can! Did you know that by taking your dog to pet stores, friends and family's homes, dog parks, pet events or other really busy, social settings you may inadvertently be telling your dog to act out?

Think about this: the majority of us, when put into new situations, do not put all of ourselves out there. We put forth what we want people to see or think they want to see. Also, we are much more likely to withdraw from situations that make us uncomfortable. What would you do if you were on a date with someone new and they took you to meet their family who constantly hugged you, kissed you or otherwise invaded your space? What would you do if they then took you to meet all their friends and they did the same? Would you consider your date sane? Would you consider your date someone you could trust? Sure, you liked them initially to go out with them on a first date, but wouldn't their actions throughout that first date dictate whether you would see them again? Would you see them again if they put you in so many situations that made you uncomfortable? Consider this as well: say you had to go live with a new family who spoke a language you didn't understand. You'll be reserved, perhaps a bit detached.

What if they doted on you, as a new family member, speaking to you in a language you don't understand, expecting you to interact with all their family members and friends? Would you feel comfortable? Would you want to retreat to a safe place? Would you know where a safe place was? Would they give you one?

Things many people forget is that we expect our new dogs to be so accepting of everything and we put them in these very similar situations and then become alarmed when they "act out." Your new dog is acting out or misbehaving because they don't view you as the decision maker. Remember, to them, you are putting them in situations that make them feel uncomfortable.

Keep reading to find out how to help your dog adjust and begin to view you as the decision maker of the home and to help them put their trust in YOU, where it belongs!

Trust is EVERYTHING to building a good and solid relationship with your dog!

## So, How Do I Get Started?

Even if you've had your dog a few days and are beginning to notice some issues behaviorally, you can still start fresh and get them started on the shutdown.

**Some things you want to keep in mind with your new dog when you first get them:**

- 1. A tired dog is a happy dog!** Exercising your dog(s) regularly and thoroughly will help ensure they relax into their new household a little easier. Without that pent up energy, they've GOT to relax! However;
- 2. Do not take them on walks yet.** Walks provide an overabundance of stimulation and there are many variables you may encounter that you need that trust built FIRST before subjecting them to those new situations. Instead, exercise your dog in the yard on a long lead (20ft plus) and spend some time getting to know one another.
- 3. Do not take them to pet stores, dog parks, other people's homes, etc.** Again, these situations provide an overabundance of stimulation that your dog needs to have the trust built in you for YOU to handle the situation so they don't have to.
- 4. Keep them leashed to you at ALL times when they are not crated.** Yes, even in the house and yes, even if you have a fully fenced yard. Why? It builds the precedence with them that YOU are the bringer of everything in life. Additionally, keeping them leashed to you keeps them from getting in trouble. If they aren't housetrained, they can't very well go run out of your line of sight and have an "accident" if you have them leashed to you huh? Or, if someone new comes in the home, keeping them leashed to you can help prevent the reinforcement of undesirable behaviors like jumping on people. When the dog is leashed to you, YOU are in control. The dog WILL begin to understand this.
- 5. Do not allow your new dog and your existing pets get into a 24/7 free-for-all.** Remember, your existing pets don't know this new "intruder" and the new dog doesn't know the routine of the home and what's permissible. Setting a routine with the new dog first, without the full distraction of other pets will make life 1000 times easier when you begin integrating them.

**6. Do not allow your new dog furniture privileges.** They haven't earned them yet. Create a spot for them to be when they are out lounging around in each room. Furniture privileges can be given later on down the road if you so please.

**7. Do not give your new foster dog unstructured affection.** Any and all affection from you must have a purpose. No kissy face or baby talk. I know it is hard, especially when they have likely never had love before but you will not be helping him or yourself if you do this.

**8. DO NOT PUT YOUR FACE IN YOUR NEW DOGS FACE.** They do not know you and this can be very intimidating for your new foster dog. They could growl or worse, bite out of fear/anxiety. They need to trust you so don't assume that you can do this because they appear friendly.

**9. Do not allow your new dog to "go ahead of you".** Establish this rule right away. You go out and in FIRST through the door. In fact, it is a good idea to have them sit before they can enter, before you leash up, etc.

## The Basics

When bringing your new dog home, give them a brief tour of their primary living area or the places they will be most often. Now, it's crate time! It's time to give the dog some time to itself to take in everything that's happened thus far.

The crate will be used as a tool in the shutdown, not as a prison. Think of it more like their safe place. Sure, some may cry initially but with positive reinforcement (yummy crate-only treats, no coddling, etc.) they'll learn to accept their time alone and realize it's not so bad! Something to remember is to NOT let the dog out of the crate while they are crying. Do NOT give in as this will only serve to reinforce their crying and barking to be let out of the crate. Being inconsistent will likely train your dog to be a screamer in the crate and that's not what you want at all!

Initially, keep out of crate interactions short, just like time in the crate should be short. 20-30 minutes at a time initially will help keep interactions with you positive and help reinforce positive crate training. You will increase the time as needed as the days move forward, little by little. You are using the crate as a way to give them a time out to collect their thoughts and to process the new information they received in their interactions with you. If this is a new and only dog, you'll likely find that progress will move swiftly! No worries! Patience is a virtue and you will be handsomely rewarded!

You will know as a guardian when this phase is truly over. Use your gut. Some dogs don't get it right away, others take longer. Once they are into a routine, seem relaxed and confident, tolerate the crate well, and look to you for guidance, they are probably beginning to feel safe and secure in their new world. Pat yourself on the back - job well done. Patience and consistency with your new dog will reap the greatest rewards!

## Have Other Pets? Take things SLOW and easy!

When bringing home a new dog to a home with existing pets, it's important to realize that everyone in the household will need time to adjust to the new living arrangements and routine. It's important to take things very slow initially and keep things positive and upbeat.

First, let me go ahead and say that **the initial meeting of the new dog with resident dog(s) needs to happen OFF your property in a quiet, neutral setting.** We don't need your resident dogs to feel the need to "protect what is theirs" without having the opportunity to get to know one another first.

Now, after the initial meeting, if things go well and you choose to bring the new dog home (or this can be tweaked if you've already introduced some other way that wasn't recommended here), it's time to crate and rotate initially. I'd say for at least the first 48 hours, keep the new dog and your existing pets separated. Sure, let them sniff around. Shoot, crate them side by side (never nose to nose!) to help them get used to the other being around. But, keep at least the first 2 days for yourselves and don't expect the new dog and existing dogs to interact and everything be hunky dory.

After the initial time has passed, do another outdoors meeting on leash first, then bring them indoors and let them further interact. KEEP LEASHES ON. This is just in case something unexpected DOES happen. You've got leashes on to help keep things under control. It can also help when you interject a too hyper play session to encourage the dogs to settle and relax. Keep new interactions VERY short initially. I'm talking 10-15 minutes. End things on a positive note and give the dogs' time to process everything that happened. Doing things this way does a couple of things. It gives the dogs the opportunity to enjoy one another's company without becoming overstimulated and it also gives them the desire to want MORE interaction. Sure, you might have to deal with a bit more whining from them because they want to play, but remember, YOU call the shots. Not them. Being very deliberate in the amount of time they have to play together and WHEN they get to play together sets that precedence of YOU being the person they look to for direction. And with multiple dogs, that's what you WANT!

Over the course of a few days, slowly increase the time they are out together. Remember to end things on a positive note and be on top of their play 100% of the time. Do not allow over excited play because it can quickly amplify. If one of the dogs is walking away from play, step in and separate. Pay attention and supervise and you can help keep a peaceful multi-dog home.

**Make sure to monitor toys.** Actually, at the very beginning of interactions, I recommend not having any toys at all for them to play with. Let the dogs learn one another first before introducing things which may be of high value to one or all. Give them the chance to realize one another's signals for play and for agitation. It is also YOUR responsibility to learn these things as well. As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Ultimately, slowing things down and setting a solid routine helps tremendously. It will help him learn who makes the decisions and it will help build the relationship between your new dog and all the members of your household. It may sound like tough work, but it's worth it!