



## THE LABRADOR RESCUE TRUST

### ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO HELP YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR NEW RESCUE DOG

The following notes have been written by Labrador Rescue Trust helpers, with the knowledge of many dogs over many years, and with first-hand experience of most of the problems. It is hoped that they will help you in the first few months with your new rescued dog and may prevent the dog being returned to The Labrador Rescue Trust (TLRT) for yet another re-homing. If you have had dogs before, then you will no doubt be aware of the things that can go wrong and we apologise for telling you something that you already know. However, to the new home who has never had a dog before, or at least not for some time, we hope the following will help you.

When your new dog first comes home, try to maintain a **calm and quiet atmosphere**, at least until he has settled in. Play it cool and do not make him the centre of attention. He has come to live in your house where **you** must make the rules right from the start. You can do a lot of training in the course of daily life without taking the dog to training classes to start with. Although these classes are marvellous for some dogs and their handlers, the rescue dog needs time to adjust to his new family and get to know them before being subjected to yet another experience. He needs to learn that he has to respond to you as his new home and will be confused if confronted with too many other different people at first. One of the worst things you can do is invite friends and relatives (and their dogs) round on the first day to meet the new arrival. When your dog is in the garden or the next room, call him to you and give him a treat, but **only** if he immediately responds. Don't give a treat every time. Sometimes just verbal praise or a reassuring pat will do just as well. When taking the dog on walks for the first few weeks, use a Flexi-lead or other long lead and periodically call him to you, reinforcing good behaviour with a treat. It is recommended that the dog should not be let off the lead in a public place or any open space (other than a properly fenced garden) until such time as the dog will come when called. Also it is advised when taking the dog out in, say, the car, the tailgate or doors should not be opened without attaching a lead so that you have control and the dog doesn't coming flying out and disappear off for his own walk. Unless time is taken to achieve a bonding with your new dog he will always do his own thing rather than please you.

Most dogs settle into their new homes very easily. However, occasionally a dog will find the move **very stressful** and this can show itself in various ways. He may pant, drink copious amounts of water, pad about, be very animated and not settle. He may howl, bark or whine at night. **Remain calm** to allow the dog to gain reassurance from your confidence. Take him on a tour around the house, even upstairs just this once, so that he knows where you have gone to. (Up and down stairs should be avoided normally as it can cause serious damage to joints). Maybe use a stair gate here or in a doorway to avoid



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shutting a door on the dog. Please remember that although you know that you will be giving the dog a loving home, at this stage all he knows is that his life has changed, which can be very unsettling to some dogs. You may also find the use of one of the newer pheromone products (like DAP diffusers/collars/spray) helps to ease the transition.

**Do not change his name** immediately and if you must, then choose something similar and do it gradually. If a dog has already become used to being called by a certain name, changing it will be confusing and he may well not respond for quite a while.

Male dogs in particular may **scent-mark** when first going into the new home, especially if there is another dog in residence or there has been recently. This is natural behaviour for the dog and the only remedy is to be really vigilant. If he starts sniffing and one leg starts to “lift” then take him outside immediately to relieve himself. Apparently, a solution of **biological** washing powder is the only thing that will get rid of the smell so it’s undetectable to a dog.

**Tug-of-war games** with your dog are fine if you know the dog and he knows the limitations, but to a new dog in the family, it may be seen as a game of hierarchy. All games that we play with our dogs simulate their behaviour in the wild and their place in the pack. Labradors usually love retrieving games that will satisfy their needs and give them lots of exercise together with mental stimulation, especially if you play hide-and-seek with a suitable toy for retrieving or carrying that cannot cause throat damage or blockage. Please bear in mind that balls (the size of tennis balls or similar) can get stuck in a dog’s throat and cause suffocation and that a stick can cause severe damage to the dog’s throat if the stick is moving or not lying flat when taken by the dog. There are now a wide variety of suitable, safe toys available for purchase, which will keep your dog amused and happy.

**Never throw sticks.** A dog can impale itself if the stick does not lie flat. If you have children, make sure that they don’t get the dog too “wound up” as when they want to finish the games the dog may not know that they’ve had enough. Also, remember that many young dogs are very “mouthy” and can inflict bites and bruises on humans. This is not aggressive behaviour but is how dogs play. Unfortunately human substitutes are much more fragile. If you have a puppy or young dog, **do not over-exercise** him or allow him to run up and down the stairs, as this puts huge pressure on his growing joints. Take exercise gradually, building up muscle tone and no real long walks until your dog is about a year old. A puppy, less than six months old, should be restricted to exercise in the garden and/or very short walks. You should never try to tire your puppy out.

Another problem that seems to be quite common when a dog is re-homed is that he may **mount** people or blankets. Children are often a target for this behaviour because of their size and the fact that they excite the dog more as they usually run off screaming and



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shouting. Although basically sexual behaviour, it is not always that simple and can also happen with neutered dogs and bitches. It can be a tension reliever when the dog is anxious or frustrated or is unsure. Neutering is the best thing for a pet dog for several reasons, but don't rush straight to the Vet before your new dog has had a chance to settle in. Don't over pet or fondle the dog if he shows this undesirable behaviour. Try to **distract** him. Immediately you have got the dog's attention, give him a toy to play with or a chew or maybe take him for a walk.

Another common problem is when the dog grabs hold of something and runs off with it, only to refuse to give it up when (if!) you catch up with him. Again, don't roughly pull anything from the mouth as this will be seen as great fun and a challenging game that the dog wants to win (and usually can if he's determined to!). If you can't **distract** him with another activity, just **ignore** the dog and walk away, above all **avoiding eye contact**. This is not giving-in as you are only diffusing the situation and not giving the dog what he wants.

If you have **livestock** of any kind eg: chickens, rabbits, etc remember that these are natural prey to a dog and it is almost inevitable that the dog will show interest in them. If you can't ensure that the livestock can be fully protected then the dog must never have access to them. Some dogs will jump the fence, dig holes under it or chew holes in it to satisfy their interest. When a dog is left to his own devices, his natural instincts may come to the fore and even trained gun dogs in experienced homes have been known to kill their handlers' chickens!

Although we pass on information about the dog given to us by its previous home, he will obviously have to fit in with your lifestyle now. He may take time to adjust to **feeding** times with the inevitable results - you will have to get to know when the dog needs to go to the toilet! The dog should be fed on his own without interference or distraction and, as soon as he has finished, the bowl should be removed until next time. Even a good natured dog may snap if he is not allowed to eat in peace. This is not the sign of a nasty dog, but is natural behaviour. It may take a while to build up a dog's trust and it is best to avoid conflict at the start. It is a good idea to allow every member of the family to take turns at feeding the dog, and if you can get him to sit and wait until he is told to eat, so much the better, but don't create a battle of wills. Put everything that you don't want the dog to have way out of his reach. Even his own **toys** should be under your control, not his; and he should be given them to play with only when you decide, not whenever he wants! Dogs have no concept of stealing, if it is within reach they will take what is available. Don't **exercise** the dog immediately after feeding. If possible, exercise first and feed when you get back. It is recommended that there should be about half an hour to an hour gap between getting back and feeding, depending upon the nature of the exercise undertaken. Keep an eye on his **weight**! Most Labradors are dustbins that could eat for England if allowed. You'll be the best judge of your own dog's needs, taking into



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account his lifestyle and metabolism. Did you know that human **chocolate** is actually **poisonous to dogs**? **Only dog chocolate is safe.** Also **cooked bones** or any poultry bones can splinter, so best not to give these.

A dog that **jumps up** is another common problem. Try folding your arms and turning away from the dog. If he is shouted at or there is physical contact, he will do it again, as nearly all behaviour is based on the dog **seeking attention**. **Avoid eye contact** in this situation. The worst punishment a dog can be given is to be **ignored**, as being a pack animal they cannot stand being ostracised from their pack. **Never try to outstare a dog**. If he is a dominant dog, he may consider this to be an aggressive act on your part and it may result in an attack.

There seem to be an increasing number of dogs that not only eat the **excrement** of other animals but also of their own species and sometimes even their own. Although this behaviour is extremely distasteful to us, to the dog it is normal. They should come to no harm as long as regular **worming** is carried out (every 3 months) with a broad-spectrum wormer. If however, you have a dog that has this habit and you feel that you can't cope with it, there are several things that can be suggested, such as putting pineapple or brewer's yeast in with his food. Both these things are supposed to break down to very bitter products in the stool. The change in taste, especially to such a foul new flavour can sometimes do the trick. If he is just eating his own or that of a companion dog(s) in his own garden area, then obviously follow him round with a poop scoop so he doesn't get the chance!

If you discover your dog enjoys rolling in something very smelly, such as foxes or badger's excrement, a useful tip is to cover the patch with tomato ketchup and rub it in well. Then wash it off. Sometimes it takes a couple of applications, but it does work and it is worth the effort to get rid of the pungent smell.

Then there are dogs who **pull on the lead**. Many people use a "halti", "gentle leader" or "easy walk" with a great deal of success. Dogs vary in how easily they accept these, especially the "halti", and again, a food reward while you put them on can help. If you need help, then do contact your helper for advice. Please **do not use check chains (more commonly known as choke chains)** as these can easily cause serious damage to a dog's neck and throat and don't actually stop them pulling. Another good way to teach the dog to walk properly at heel is to **keep changing direction** every few yards or as soon as he pulls, so that you dictate where you are going and not the dog. It's best done in a field, will take you forever to get anywhere and probably make you dizzy, but eventually the penny will drop and the dog will realize that unless he walks with you, he won't be going anywhere. This does work eventually – don't expect miracles immediately – it all takes time and patience. If you absolutely insist on use of a check chain please, please ensure they are used correctly and ensure that it is put on the correct way round so that, after the



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'check', the chain releases and therefore does not choke the dog. A check chain should **never** be left on a dog when training is not taking place as they can become caught on bushes and other obstacles and strangle the dog. They are only a training tool.

Try not to send the wrong message down the lead. If you're worried by the approach of another dog, for example, and show it by tightening your hold, the dog may react as if the other dog poses a threat. Try to **relax**. If he pulls towards the other dog, stop rather than continuing, stay calm, make him sit, trying to avoid eye contact with the approaching dog by distracting him, perhaps with a treat, and wait until the other dog has passed by. If the situation looks as if it's likely to become a confrontation, then you must take charge and briskly walk off in a different direction. Remember, if the other dog is off-lead yours will feel happier off-lead too! He likes to keep his options open: **flight, freeze or fight**, in that order. He can't flee if he's on the lead! But equally if the other dog is on the lead, put yours on too, to avoid making the other dog feel threatened.

**Being left.** It can take several months for a dog to realise that he is in a permanent home, especially if he has had a traumatic or unsettling experience in his previous home(s). Often a dog becomes anxious when his new family "desert" him by going out without him. If he can't cope with this (we don't always know what has happened to him before, if he was a stray, we certainly won't know), he may howl, whine, bark or become destructive. Often having a companion dog helps tremendously, but if he is an only dog, get him used to being left on his own by leaving him in a room for just a minute or so and then rewarding him if he is quiet and well-behaved. Don't give any response to barking or whining, but just keep trying this exercise throughout the day. If there is a problem, this is usually resolved with time as he becomes more confident. Try giving him a treat just as you leave to associate your leaving with something pleasant. Possibly give him something to chew, as chewing is a great stress reliever for dogs - that's very often why they do it as adults - and there are a great many "chewy" toys on the market. Many people now use **dog crates** and they are excellent if used properly. They must never be used as a punishment or for hours at a time and must be a pleasant place for the dog to go into, so that he looks on the crate as a den. If you are unsure of the proper way to use a dog crate, please ask for advice from your helper.

Some rescued dogs will often drive you to distraction, but please try to be patient. Don't feel sorry for your rescued dog whatever his past has been. Most dogs are just looking for leadership and permanence and need to be shown this **right from the minute they arrive** in their new home. If they are allowed to get away with things because you want to compensate for their past experiences, they will only become more unsure. They need to know the "rules" and everyone in the family must adhere to them from the start. The dog must realise that he doesn't need to be pack leader, that you and the rest of the family are higher in the pack order than he, and that he can relax, enjoy life and not have to take on this responsibility. Little things like not letting him go through a door first, **ignoring** him



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if he is being too pushy, walking away in the opposite direction if he runs off (a very difficult thing to do but usually works and he will come pelting back once he realises you're not chasing him) – all these things help to put you above him in the hierarchy. All this should be combined with praise and treats when he does well.

Please **take out insurance cover NOW** that you have your new dog, it is your responsibility, so do not put it off. Veterinary fees can be very expensive, and insurance will also provide cover should your new dog be the cause of an accident and result in a claim against you. It is now your responsibility to ensure that:  
you comply with current legislation about keeping the dog under control in a public place etc.  
the dog wears a collar with your name and address and  
you 'pick up after your dog'.

The Trust is striving to microchip all of our dogs, but if your new dog has not been chipped, we strongly urge you to contact your local helper to make the necessary arrangements, as this is the only failsafe option, should your dog be lost or escape.

We are pleased to confirm that The Trust will be using the proceeds from an unexpected legacy to pay for the neutering of all dogs re-homed by The Trust from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2008. Neutering will be carried out at selected vets across the South West and new homes will receive a voucher detailing the dog's name, TLRT number and the name of the closest vet. Your helper, area co-ordinator or vet will advise you on a suitable time for the neutering to take place depending on the dog's age and general health. The Trust is unable to pay for operations carried out by vets who are not in our neutering scheme except in exceptional circumstances when it is in the best interest of the dog. Some dogs of course will have been neutered already but many will not.

It is the policy of The Labrador Rescue Trust that all dogs and bitches should be neutered, as this not only rules out any risk of unwanted puppies but also avoids health problems in later life that can be experienced by both dogs and bitches that are not neutered.

The Trust strongly urges you to make arrangements to have your new dog castrated/spayed if he/she has not already been done. Under no circumstances, may your 'rescue' dog be used for breeding.

The Trust recommends that you take the dog and register him with your local vet within the first two weeks of receiving a dog from The Trust. It will give you and the vet the chance to be aware of the present state of the dog's health and to ensure you are registered, should any unforeseen accident or emergency arise which entails an emergency visit to your vet.



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Having said all this, we are sure you will have great fun with your new companion and we wish you all the best. Don't forget we are always available to give advice and help if we can. Don't battle on with a problem that could be sorted immediately. Best to nip it in the bud before it gets out of hand. Your helper will probably have personal experience of any problem but if he/she hasn't, they will certainly know someone who has!

We hope all this helps and we wish you the best of luck with your new dog.

These Information Sheets are intended to serve as a guideline to new homes and foster homes. They are the result of many years of experience from our helpers and we hope that they provide a useful insight. Please note that these are only guidelines and The Labrador Rescue Trust, its helpers and officers make clear that it is the responsibility of each home/foster home to recognise the needs of their dog and to react to those needs. The Trust, its helpers and officers cannot be held responsible for the behaviour of any individual dog.

THE LABRADOR RESCUE TRUST COMPANY

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