



As most of you who already know me, I am a fan of crates, a big fan. Not for confinement, not for punishment, not for convenience but for privacy. Privacy of the dog. We take for granted the impositions we place on our dogs. We assume that because we feel that being placed in a crate is cruel. From a human perspective, maybe but do we not confine children to playpens and cribs for their comfort and safety? Do human children have a bedroom to call their own? of course they do and any parent who subscribes to routines and consistency notices the difference in their child's development. A child who has regular naps and a regular bed-time appears to be a better student, a calmer and more patient child, not prone to temper tantrums or sudden outburst of disapproving behaviours.

I think it safe to say that dogs will naturally react to the same routines and stability in their own environments. If some of you are of the belief that a dog is just a dog, not in a derogatory way but meaning that you still believe a dog has a less complex set of emotions than a human then I understand your resistance to what I am about to tell you. I, however, feel a dog has the capability to comprehend a vast amount of emotional complexities. Not only do they reflect our emotions but I believe they manifest a wide range of empathic abilities. They are simply mirror's to our soul.

Re-programming the Second Hand Dog

So what happens when we have highly evolved emotional beings that are abused and discarded like they are nothing more than filthy pieces of rags?

When we re-home and adopt second hand dogs, what should we do?

I have been lucky enough to have helped with tons of rehabilitation projects over the years and the method I subscribe to has worked wonders for developing trust and creating unbreakable bonds.

One mistake that I see and I cannot stress enough is the over emotional human who thinks it best to coddle, impose and add more stress to second hand dog. Whether the dog you have adopted is an introverted, passive dog or an extroverted, anxious, reactive dog. Imposing upon them will only add to your trouble and theirs.

When adopting a shelter dog, you must first take into account the honeymoon period. Any animal brought into a new environment will experience a sort of 'shut down' period. It is perfectly natural and expected. Change will elicit any being to shut down and to take stock of it's new environment. Dogs are predators and hunters so hard-wiring has programed them to be very attentive to detail. In this honeymoon period they will learn who their friends are and who their enemies are. Unfortunately this period is sometimes ignored by even the most experienced of dog people. This period can be a make it or break it time for new owners.

If you understand how conditioning works and how habitual behaviours are formed then you know that in order to counter-condition and break unacceptable habits/ behaviours you must get through extinction bursts, a period where all old behaviours will try hardest to survive change. You must diligently change the environment and the dogs perception of his environment by eliminating the triggers that the old environment presented.



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This brings us back to why I adore crates. Using a crate as a private place for your dog to relax in allows the dog the luxury to defragment without being 'told' anything. No nagging, no physical discipline, no yelling, no frustration, no confrontation, absolutely no stress for you or the dog. It allows the dog a safe 'zone' to forget those triggers and to re-assess his existence.

If a dog has experienced trauma before coming into your home, he will need to learn to trust again. If you have adopted a reactive or aggressive dog, he will need to learn to be calm and dis-associate from his environment. If you are inexperienced with dealing with reactive dogs, you may make things worse by indirectly re-enforcing his reactive behaviour.

If a dog that is not used to an abundance of affection and attention then there is a possibility that too much in the new home could create separation anxieties that did not exist before. Likewise if a dog was given up for adoption because of separation anxiety then now is a great opportunity to create some routine and stability by teaching the new dog to be comfortable being alone and comfortable in his crate.

Never think of crates as punishment. They can be used as time outs and more accurately as an opportunity to calm an over-stimulated dog. Over-stimulation only serves to disrupt any progress. Be careful that you don't fall into the trap of too much activity in the beginning. Don't try and tire an already 'hyper' or high drive dog by throwing a ball or toy continuously for hours on end. You may tire him initially but really all you are doing is creating stamina and more high drive and possibly contributing to some serious OCDs (obsessive compulsive disorders)! It's better to do calmer things with a high dive dog such as mind games, focus games, clicker training and shaping. Teach them to settle and be calmer dogs.

Every adopted dog has a chance at a successful new beginning. Just like us every new year marks an opportunity to change your life. If negative behaviours or issues in your life are triggered by factors in your environment, then perhaps it's time that you too changed your perception and eventually changed your behaviour by eliminating those factors.

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