

## Two Week Shut Down

Adapted from Tracy Baldwin (ABC DT) for Rebound Hounds

The most important phase that dogs go through when getting out of the shelter and when first in their foster or adoptive home is the Decompression Phase. Any change in a dog's environment or routine will cause some level of stress, and it's our job as their guardian to be patient and guide them through this time...however long it takes.

Robert Cabral, The Decompression Phase- Bound Angels, writes the following.

The most important phase that dogs go through when going to a new home is the decompression phase. That is the first few weeks, days or sometimes months in your home. People want the dog to fit in and often make the biggest mistakes during this period. They will give the dog too much love, too much training, too much attention. Everything that's too much is TOO MUCH. The best thing that a dog can get when going to a new home is space. Space that will allow the dog to decompress from the emotional stress that dogs incur when moving to a new home. During that phase they should not be bothered too much, not be engaged too much, and not too much should be expected of them. Especially for the first few days, allow the dog to SEE what his new life will be without expecting him to LIVE this LIFE! Most people lack the ability to give this life-saving space to the dog and often times the dog will fail. The more the dogs fails, or the more severely his failures are, the more likely he is to end up back at a foster home. The best thing to avoid this is to give the dog space by using a crate or even an XPen. Meeting new dogs, all the neighbors and their dogs, and too much freedom is the last thing the dog needs for the first few days. A nice bed to lay his head upon (a dog bed, not yours...not yet) and some good meals will help him learn what he's in for – a life of happiness and love. If you already have a dog and are bringing another dog in, give them plenty of time to meet, today is not that day.

All dogs need structure/rules/boundaries for them to feel safe. They thrive on predictable routines. The greatest form of affection we can show our new dog is to fulfill their needs: Their need to eat, their need to have clean water, their need to potty outside, their need to migrate/walk, and their need to have a cozy/soft/warm crate (their den) to rest in. Of course you can pet your new dog; you can give him treats and a toy to chew. However, it's important to keep all of these things to a minimum for at least the first few weeks.

For a minimum of two weeks, the following protocol should be observed.

NO rough play, NO wrestling, NO couch, NO beds, NO laps, NO kissy face, NO free roam through the house, NO interactions with any other pets, NO visits from your friends and family, NO trips to Petco, NO walks around the neighborhood, and NO car rides (other than to the vet). The goal for these first few weeks is to help your dog learn the structure/rules/boundaries of your home.

Imagine you just started a new job. You walk through the huge entrance to the building and you're standing in the lobby trying to figure out which way to go. You don't know where your office is. You don't know where the break room is. You don't know where the rest room is. And, you don't know any of your coworkers. You feel lost/overwhelmed/nervous/anxious. Now imagine that same new job BUT as you walk into the building, a coworker walks up to you and calmly says "Hi, welcome to XYZ Enterprise, follow me and I will show you around." They give you the tour, they give you a welcome packet and they show you to your office. How much more relaxed and comfortable would you be in the second scenario? Your co-worker made you feel comfortable by guiding you and giving you information. NOT by hugging you or showering you with affection. That's exactly the relaxed comfortable feeling you need to create for your foster or newly adopted dog.