



APBC

ASSOCIATION OF PET
BEHAVIOUR COUNSELLORS

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Settling in Your New Rescue Pet Into It's Forever Home

When we adopt a rescue dog or cat, it's an exciting time for us. We usually have expectations of how our new pet will slot into our lives. Hopefully the rescue centre will already have provided a decent handover, addressing any specific needs relating to the animal who is being taken home. Sometimes the handover might be done relatively quickly once the home check has been passed, and other times it might be done slowly over several weeks, so that the new owner and animal can get to know one another and training protocols can be fully understood.

Every animal who ends up in rescue has a different history and unique temperament and personality. Whether they have been adopted from a kennel environment or a temporary foster home, their ability to adapt to their forever home is going to vary depending on the individual. There are some dogs and cats who will largely be unphased by their recent transitions between temporary and permanent homes and who will adjust to their new environment, routine and family members with ease. However, these animals are likely to be in the minority and most will require a gentle and understanding introduction and settling-in process. Try to avoid visitors whilst your new pet is settling in, despite how keen you might be to introduce them to friends and family.

Confused Cats

It can be common for cats to find the best place to hide, or the highest place, and stay there for a certain amount of time until they are confident enough to explore their new environment and interact with family members. It's sensible to just leave them be, and allow them to decide to venture

out and initiate human interaction in their own time. For these cats, sometimes allocating them with their own room with everything they need (that becomes their 'core territory') and gradually increasing the area available to them, can help them feel safer and more secure.

Different Dogs, Different Needs

Some dogs may require company for a while before attempting to separate yourself from them, both when you are still home or when you leave the house. This may be days, or weeks. Other dogs may actually need some space from humans and some may only settle properly when they are left alone. Some may find the outside world overwhelming and won't require walks initially, whilst they adjust to their new home environment and then walks can be introduced slowly so that the dog finds the experience calm and positive. Other dogs may only be able to fully relax when they are out on a walk, and find the home environment more challenging. The key thing is to try not to have any expectations and to listen to the dog you have in front of you, providing them with as many ways to be as relaxed and settled as possible.

Three is The Magic Number

Behaviourists often refer to the phrase "three days, three weeks, three months" when chatting to owners of new rescue dogs. The first three days dogs are often in an inhibited state, where they may not have much of an appetite and don't show too much of themselves. During the first three weeks, they are likely to start settling in but are likely to still be processing and catching up on rest and the dog won't

start fully fitting into its new routine or be exhibiting its normal behaviour until about 3 months. It can be normal for new owners to think "what have we done?!" at some point during the settling-in process, especially when expectations are not meeting reality. Support should be provided by the rescue during these times, but it is also important to try not to have any expectations when adopting a new pet but instead try to 'go with the flow' and take it a day at a time.

Introductions to Existing Pets

The introductory process to an existing pet is one of the most important factors in a successful future relationship together. Whether you are introducing a dog to an existing cat, a cat to an existing dog, a dog to an existing dog or a cat to an existing cat, it is really important that both the new pet and the existing pet both have their own space. With dogs, babygates (or dog gates) are essential. Time together should always be supervised and food, chews, toys and other valued resources should be managed appropriately to prevent any conflict. Cats will need their own separate core areas, with separate feeding and drinking stations, numerous litter trays and a very slow introduction. Dogs must ALWAYS be prevented from chasing a cat, so a lead should be used whenever the dog and cat are in visual contact (even with a gate that the dog can charge at).

If you have any queries relating to the introductory process, chat to the rescue before taking your new pet home so that you can be sure you are setting them up for success from the start. If it all goes smoothly, in a few weeks time you won't be able to imagine life without them!