

The First Thing To Do When Getting A Dog From A Shelter – Learn What “Decompression” Is

by KD Mathews | May 16, 2017 | Dog Lifestyle, Training Articles | 53 comments





It's pretty damn awesome of you to look to the shelter when searching for a dog to add to your family.

I mean that.

Our nation's shelter's, pounds, and humane societies are overflowing with perfectly healthy and awesome dogs who desperately need good homes where they can live out their lives. The fact that you have decided to go there first is great.

But all that greatness will be meaningless if you do not do your homework first.

I'm not even talking about general dog stuff like behavior and training. There is something even more important that you must be aware of, be cognizant of, and be prepared to implement the moment you take that dog from the shelter.

SHELTERS ARE NOT FUN PLACES

If you have ever walked through the kennels of an animal shelter you surly can attest to the stress of the experience. Perhaps you can remember the first time you entered one. It might have been a memorable experience!

They are very very loud.

It is non stop barking, howling, whining, and yelping. The sound can be deafening at times and if you are not used to it or it is your first time, it can cause a heavy dose of anxiety to rise up your bones and make you want to turn around and walk out.

It's intense.

Now realize that you CAN turn around and walk out. Those dogs can't. They are there all day, all night, all week, all month. It shouldn't take too much contemplation to realize this isn't the ideal setting for any dog. Some dogs can be there for months on end if it is a no-kill shelter.

The longer they are in there the worse the mental trauma can be.

While some dogs will completely shut down others seem to amp up developing numerous anxiety based behaviors that border on neurotic. While the observable behaviors might be different, the source is the same, stress from being in there.

Recognizing that this type of experience can have an impact on a dog's state of mind, it baffles me how people think that simply putting a leash on the dog and taking it home means everything is suddenly going to be O.K. As if anything is that simple!

So many of these dogs end up back at shelters for a wide variety of reasons, including aggression, because their well intentioned new family did not take the time to research the proper way to bring a dog from this type of environment home. When the dog starts acting in inappropriate ways or even worse, becomes aggressive, everybody is quick to blame the dog's "troubled past".

It's not the dog's past, it is the dog's present.

The first day in a new home is not the day to meet other family members, loud and energetic toddlers, other dogs, the cats, the super nosey neighbor who wants to give your new dog hugs and kisses....

NO.....NOT AT ALL.....

DECOMPRESSION

The name is indicative of the what it means in terms of what the dog has been through and what the dog needs. All the stress from the living conditions the dog is coming from needs to be addressed. The dog has been under a lot of stress and pressure.

The dog needs to "decompress" and take some time getting back to a balanced state of mind. This will not be achieved with going from one crazy high activity place to another. The dog should not be introduced to the couch for endless hours of belly rubs on day one because you feel bad the dog had a rough past.

That makes YOU feel good.

This isn't about you and what you like, this is about what is best for the dog. Remember?

For at LEAST 2-3 WEEKS, your new dog's life should be incredibly simple and boring. Keep the affection to a bare minimum, keep talking and training to non-existent levels.

You want as much silence as possible.

Have a daily routine or schedule 100% planned out prior to the dog coming home. This should be the dog's day mapped out. From bathroom breaks, to crate time, to short walks in quiet boring places, the entire day should be on a schedule.

Dogs find exponentially more comfort in routine than they do belly rubs and cuddles. For that reason, keep the affection to a bare minimum. This is not the time to shower the dog with affection as all that will do is reinforce an unbalanced state of mind and confuse the dog as to YOUR role in their lives.

The premise behind decompression is allowing the dog to get back to a neutral and relaxed state of mind, opposite of what it just came from.

Your dog needs leadership and calm predictability.

These two things are crucial to the dog becoming appropriately integrated into your home. Allowing the dog time to decompress without having to deal with a whole new set of intense stimuli will set you all up for a successful future.



A nice calm and quiet beginning is essential

RESOURCES

I just gave you the summary and basic idea of what decompression is and why you should implement it. There is already a TON of material out there explaining the steps and the specifics so I chose not to reinvent the wheel but rather get you started in the right direction.

Here are some more links to articles on the subject.

READ THEM!!!

If you can't invest 20 minutes of your time educating yourself on what is best for the dog, then you should reconsider how worthy you are of the gift that is indeed sharing your life with one.

[FiveDogBlog – Decompression](#)

[Huffington Post Article on Decompression](#)

[Decompressing Rescue Dog](#)

Want to learn more?