

Hints for training a shelter dog

BY CAROL CARIDAD

President, Paws 4 You Rescue



We're all guilty of having our heartstrings pulled after seeing those big brown eyes, floppy ears and wet noses. Walking through a shelter, it's easy to feel sorry for our four legged friends

who have been abandoned by their previous owners, either through a lack of loss prevention (such as a simple ID tag or microchip) or through being dumped on the street. Some of us end up with dogs simply because we can't bear to have them sleep another night on the cold, hard, concrete of a kennel. It's during the first few weeks of bringing our new furry companion home that these feelings lead us straight into an unproductive and unhealthy relationship with our dog.

Imagine being locked up, without access to proper socialization, without the opportunity to have long walks each day, and with little, if any, challenging mental stimulation. The most excitement in a shelter dog's life is that five minutes a day when food, water and clean bedding is provided.

"It's no wonder these dogs are wound up so tight when you take them out on a leash," says local dog behaviorist Denisa Hoult of Applause Your Paws Dog Training. "In working with shelter dogs, it's extra important that right away new owners establish a sense of leadership, security and stability."

Hoult believes that "the tendency, however, is to give the dog no leadership to make up for the hard life they presumably have had. Unfortunately, this lack of leadership results in dogs remaining insecure, fearful, becoming destructive or even aggressive."

So what kind of things can you do when you bring your dog home that first night? Here are a few ideas:

- Keep your dog on leash the first few hours in your home. This immediately establishes the house as your territory, your rules, and that the dog is to follow you — literally! Using a leash in the house during introductory periods is a great way to establish leadership, while at the same time build a strong, trustworthy bond between you and your dog. A dog that feels secure while tethered is a dog that feels confident that his leader will protect him.

- Enforce entry and exit etiquette by making your dog sit and wait patiently by all doors in the house. If your dog tries to rush the door, simply remove your hand from the handle until the dog is calm. Walk away from the door if necessary. Then, when the dog is calm, walk back and open the door. The end result will be a dog who sits at your feet instead of jumping on you whenever you enter or exit the door.

- Practice having your dog wait for food. This helps establish that the leader provides and controls the food, and is responsible for the eating ritual. Having

Paws4You

a structured meal time diminishes mild food aggression that the dog may have acquired in the shelter.

- Ensure that your new pooch gets at an hour of exercise each day, especially during training. A majority of this exercise should be through walking with your dog while encouraging him to stay by your side instead of pulling or walking sporadically on the leash. There is no better remedy for an anxious mind and body than a long walk. After all, dogs are genetically programmed to move as a pack. Walking with a human or other dogs is therapeutic.

- Lastly, remember when you leave the house not to make it a farewell production. Shelter dogs already suffer from separation anxiety, so there is no need to add to it. The best thing to do is invest in an interactive dog toy like a rubber treat-dispensing Kong ball. When you leave the house, the dog gets the ball. You leaving the house then equals fun (the ball) and a positive reward for not being anxious about you leaving (the treats).

"The beauty of dogs is that they don't remember the bad things that happened yesterday, or who was responsible for those things," says Hoult. "Yes, I agree that dogs do have memories, but those memories are based on associations of positive and negative experiences, not necessarily on places and things." That's why it is so crucial that as soon as a dog is removed from a situation where he or she has been subjected to negative or traumatic experiences, that the only associations the dog is making with you are positive ones. Stick to the five basics of everyday training above and you're on your way to barking up the right tree.

People trainer/dog behaviorist Denisa Hoult may be contacted via email at <applauseyourpaws@hotmail.com> or by calling 786-239-6216.

PETS OF THE WEEK

Paws 4 You Rescue has puppies! Go to <www.paws4you.org> to read about each one — Fozzy Bear, Fuji, Grizzly, Kit Kat, Koda — and more! Fill out an application to meet them or visit PetSmart (across from The Falls) every Sunday from 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Paws 4 You Rescue is a volunteer organization of people dedicated to giving life a second chance. Our mission is to save animals from euthanasia, re-homing abandoned pets, providing necessary medical treatment, as well as educating the community on the importance of spaying and neutering. Please contact us with any questions.

Carol Caridad is president of Paws 4 You Rescue. She may be contacted by calling 786-242-7377, by addressing email to <carol@paws4you.org> or by visiting <www.paws4you.org>. <www.paws4you.org>.