



# Friends of Macon County Missouri Animals

## Fostering Guidelines

(Please note: many of these guidelines apply to newly adopted dogs, as well.)

Nearly all animal shelters and rescue organizations rely on temporary foster homes for their animals in order for their adoption programs to be successful. Fostering eases the number of dogs in shelters, opening up space for others in need. Fostering facilitates a safe place for previously homeless, sheltered, abused, or neglected animals to “unwind” and feel settled. The time spent in a foster home provides vital decompression time and creates the opportunity for the animal to adapt to interactions with people and other animals. During that time, trust builds, resulting in improved socialization and calmness. These qualities increase the chances of these dogs being adopted into loving, forever homes. The time spent with your foster animal helps him build the confidence needed to adapt to new surroundings. The time also allows you to get to know the dog, assess his behaviors and quirks, and gather valuable information to pass on to potential adopters.

### Things to First Ask Yourself

Agreeing to foster a dog is a commitment which should not be taken lightly. Foster dogs may remain in your care for a relatively short time (weeks or months) or perhaps longer, sometimes up to a year in some cases. Are you willing to make a potentially long-term commitment to this dog? Dogs require consistent care from their fosters. Their physical needs such as feeding, exercising, going out for potty breaks, walks, and basic obedience training involve time, patience, and scheduling. Their emotional needs require time and attention as well. This type of care involves frequent, positive interactions, providing safety and security, love and understanding, and lots of play time. Are you willing to provide the care he needs?

Some dogs may have accidents in the house, either from never having been house-broken or from feeling stressed the first few days. Are you willing to take the time to work with an untrained dog who may present with this type of problem?

If your foster dog is ready for adoption and has a potential forever home, will you be ready to give up the dog with whom you have developed a bond?

If you can answer “yes” to these questions, then fostering is for you!

### Decompression Time

It is suggested that dogs be allowed a minimum of 3-5 days (may be up to a week or longer) to decompress and begin to adjust to their new surroundings. The amount of time varies with each dog. Some dogs settle right in while others may take a considerable amount of time. Dogs who have come from shelters may become kennel-stressed from the constant noise, fear, and the smells of the shelter. Some dogs come from situations in which they were abused or neglected, never knowing kindness from human interactions. These dogs may require an even longer amount of time to reach a calm state. Keep your new dog/foster in a crate during the decompression period. Take them out frequently for potty breaks and long walks on leash and always have a calm demeanor around them. Try to maintain a schedule for exercise balanced with rest. Give chew toys, treats, and lots of reassurance throughout the day. Keep visitors to a minimum for the first several days to prevent over-stimulation. Keep other household pets separated during the decompression phase to allow the new dog time to adjust. Once you feel that your dog is calm and no longer shows signs of stress or fear, you may, at your discretion, let him out of the crate while you are in the home. It is strongly suggested that the dog be in the crate when you are away from the house, at least in the beginning.

### Introductions and Socialization

Introducing the dog to family members:

Just as dogs need time to adjust to new surroundings, they also need time to adjust to new people. When members of the family meet the dog, it is best for them to be sitting and let the dog approach them at his own pace. This allows the dog time to feel comfortable enough to approach “strangers” and reduces the stress of the event. Never force a greeting on your foster dog. Slow, relaxed introductions result in a more pleasant experience for all.

Introducing the dog to your resident dogs:

Once your foster dog has had a chance to decompress for a minimum of 3-5 days and appears visibly settled and calm, you can slowly start introducing your resident dogs, one at a time. It is best that introductions take place outside of the home. This can be done by taking both dogs for a walk together or going to a park. Once they seem to be getting along together, you can let them out together in the backyard to socialize. When they appear to be getting along in the yard, then you can bring them into the house together, but only if you feel comfortable in doing so. If you are not comfortable, wait for another day. Dogs pick up on apprehension in people and one of them may try to “protect” you or other family members. There is no need to rush things when it comes to

introductions. You may find you'll end up with less-than-desirable results if the greeting is rushed. If an episode of aggression or stress occurs during the introduction process, back off and go back a step or two in the procedure until things go smoothly.

### Potential Problems

Problems may arise that you were not expecting, but many of these can be fixed or minimized with simple solutions. Dogs can chew on things we would rather they not chew on such as furniture and shoes. Keeping shoes and other personal items put away and out of reach is the simplest way to avoid this problem. Offering chew toys and diversions such as leash walks or a game of fetch in the yard can be of great help. Bitter apple spray can be used on furniture to help solve the issue of chewing. The chewing may be a nervous reaction to finding himself in unfamiliar surroundings and the problem may disappear once he becomes more comfortable in the home. Whining and barking are also behaviors that may be exhibited early on, but may also lessen as time goes on. Playing soothing music on the radio or situating the crate where he can better see you may help. Dogs who have not been house-broken or who are frightened may have accidents in the house. Frequent potty breaks outdoors along with praise for "successful" outings help in this instance. Never scold or strike a dog for having an accident in the house. Instead praise and reward him for going potty outside.

These are just some basic guidelines and suggestions to help your fostering experience go smoothly. It is extremely fulfilling to watch a dog make progress, become more trusting, and develop his true personality and you will be rewarded in knowing that you helped a dog in need and filled a vital gap in his transition from being a homeless, neglected, or abused dog to one with a brighter future with a family in a forever home. You can make a difference in a dog's life!