



Before your new dog arrives home

1. Have a family pow-wow.

A dog is a big commitment, so before you take the plunge, make sure you're all together on wanting this newest member of the family. Then decide who's going to be the primary caretaker—otherwise you'll spend lots of time arguing while your new dog stares at his empty food bowl. To avoid confusing the pup, hammer out the house rules ahead of time (will the dog be allowed on the bed? On the couch? Where will the dog sleep? Are any rooms of the house permanently off-limits?).

2. Stock up on the right supplies.

Buy some of the basics ahead of time, so you and your dog can settle in without too many mad dashes to the store. Here's what you might need:

- crate
- food and water bowls
- food and maybe some treats for training. Try to get the same food your dog's been easy since a sudden switch in diet can upset his stomach.
- collar and leash
- bed
- toys, especially chew toys
- stain- and odor-removing cleaners
- possibly some baby gates to block off sections of your house

3. Prepare your house.

This requires a little more work if you're getting a puppy, since they can be champion chewers and have a knack for getting into things they shouldn't. But no matter what your dog's age, you'll want to do some organizing ahead of time.

Create a temporary, gated-off living space for your dog or pup, where she can't damage your belongings or eat something that will make her sick. She'll stay in this area whenever you're not with her to prevent her from having house training accidents.

Pick a room that's a center of activity in your household, so your dog won't feel isolated, and be sure it's one with easy-to-clean floors. The kitchen is often a good choice; you can block it off with baby gates if needed. Make sure you remove anything that you don't want chewed on or soiled.

What's in your dog's area will vary a bit depending on their age and how you're house training.

Puppy-proof to make sure anything that could hurt your dog—medicines, chemicals, certain plants—is out of reach.

4. Find training.

Group obedience classes are great for bonding with your new dog and for learning how to communicate with and train your dog. They're especially recommended for young puppies, since they give pups a chance to get comfortable being around other canines and people—a key part of raising a safe, friendly dog.

Dog training is unregulated, and pretty much anyone can call herself a dog trainer, so you'll want to do a little research to make sure you've found the right class and teacher.

5. Plan the trip home.

Find a helper to come along when you go to pick up your dog. Young puppies who've never been on a car ride before may get rattled, and even adult dogs can get nervous—and a terror-filled car ride can turn into a long-lasting phobia of car travel. Ask someone to sit next to your dog on the ride home, soothing him and keeping him from hopping into your lap while you're driving.

If your dog's used to a crate, you can stash him in the crate for the ride home. Just make sure it's secured; sliding around the backseat will make the drive more stressful.

Once your dog is home

1. Keep it pleasant but low-key at first.

For a shy puppy or dog, being taken to a new place and then deluged with lots of loud, lively strangers can be overwhelming. The first day or two, keep the mood mellow and calm and find your new routine with your dog. Take walks around your neighborhood to get your dog familiar with its' new environment. As difficult as it might be, allow your dog the time it needs to decompress and get use to their new home.

2. Introduce your dog to his crate.

Crates are the best way to house train while keeping your dog and house safe, but most dogs need a little time to warm up to them. This isn't hard to do; you just need to know how to introduce your dog or pup to his crate. Dogs are natural den animals, and when properly shown the crate can be a very secure environment for your new friend. Reinforce the crate by providing a tasty treat once your dog goes into the crate.

3. Start your training.

The earlier you start, the faster and easier it will be to teach good manners and the better the lessons will stick. The two most important things to teach your dog are:

- house training (show your dog where they need to go to relieve themselves and then reward
- getting comfortable around people and other dogs

4. Set up a routine.

A routine helps with house training and is reassuring to your dog. Figure out a schedule for walks, meals, bathroom breaks, and exercise, –and try to stick to it.

5. Find a vet.

It's especially important for a puppy's first vet visit to be a pleasant experience so that your dog he learns to take trips to the vet in stride. Ask around for referrals, and schedule your first appointment. Your dog will need a check-up and possibly some vaccinations.

Bottom line: Your dog's first few weeks' home will likely be a period of huge adjustment for both of you. You can make the transition much easier all around if you prepare your home in advance, and set up a routine right away.