

WDR Slow Intro Protocol

05.27.2020



This protocol should be followed by all WDR foster homes and adoptive homes.

Issues often develop when you provide a dog with too much too soon (and also when you reward freely without requiring the animal to earn his reward). This can create many behavior problems that can take months of counterconditioning to undo. It's better for everyone if you spend a little time setting ground rules at the outset – for both yourself and the dog. These are the keys to building a successful relationship from the start.

Take everything SLOW when bringing a new dog into your home. And when you think you've gone slow, go slower. When you think you've taken enough time, take more. Restrict access, limit freedom, reject emotionally, and practice NILIF (Nothing In Life Is Free) from the moment you pick the dog up from the shelter.

Be prepared and have your foster dog's quiet space set up and ready for his arrival. You will need an appropriately sized crate and bedding, a slip lead (or regular clip leash and collar), appropriate treats for crate training, and possibly a baby gate for separation. Music and natural anti-anxiety aids (such as Rescue Remedy, Blackwing Farms or DAP spray) are also great to have on hand.

Day 0

This goes first because you need to begin this before you pick up the dog. Emotional rejection. You must emotionally reject the animal and school yourself not to gush, coo, coddle, pay too much attention, reward freely and profusely, or spend too much time with your new foster dog at first. You will regret it. We know this is a hard ask for anyone because you're excited to have a dog in your home, a dog that you saved. You absolutely must control yourself or you will create problems as noted above. It's temporary, just for a few days. Just do it.

What happens if you don't do this: Separation anxiety and all that comes with it.

Day 1

Once you pick up your foster dog from the shelter, bring him/her home; take a very brief, low stim walk up and down the street; tell them to Go Potty, and Go Poop (do not permit marking, ever); then go in. Allow the dog to explore your home on lead. If you have yard space, allow the dog to explore outside on lead for a few minutes only. Ask him to Go Potty and Poop again, consider offering a little water. Then return inside and crate the dog for the rest of the day. Use treats to lure dog into crate on his own, tossing one or several into the back of crate. Shut the door once dog is inside. Reward one more treat, door closed, when they turn back to face you.

*Feed both meals in crate, door closed. Do not free feed. Food should be left down for 10 minutes only. If they don't eat it, remove it and offer again for the next meal.

A new dog needs time to just chill out and get over the shock of leaving the shelter (or previous foster home) and finding themselves in a new environment with new people and possibly new animals. Their world just turned upside down, even if we know it's for the best. They don't know that. Close all extra doors in your house to limit access for now. Baby gate the staircase to restrict access upstairs. You can grant access to other parts of the home as trust is earned. Baby gates are a great tool to provide separation.

What happens if you don't do this: Dog remains stressed and anxious because they were not given time to decompress which may in turn lead to other undesired behaviors.

Week 1, longer if needed

Restrict freedom while practicing NILIF. Foster dog should either be crated door closed, or leashed to you in the home. No free time off lead in home for the first few days.

What happens if you don't do this: Dog will pee and poop all over your nice house; destroy something because they're off amusing themselves without supervision; assume they can do things such as climb on your furniture; counter surf

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for snacks; raid the pantry; chew a shoe because it smells so good, etc. They also may eat a toxic grape or household cleaner and have to be rushed to the hospital. Don't leave them unsupervised until they earn trust, however long it takes.

Week 2 (day 8)

If dog has earned trust by now, you can begin loosening up on restrictions and granting more freedom and access. Dog can enjoy time out of crate not connected to a human, if earned through proper elimination outside, with leash around neck inside home so you have something to grab if needed. Your foster dog should still spend time in his crate, door closed during the day, even if you are home. We don't want them to associate the crate with you leaving and prefer to teach the crate as a positive place where only good things happen (such as food, treats, safe enrichment items, security, slumber).

Other info

- Crating – there's no easing into crate training so just do it, Day 1. Dog also sleeps in crate overnight.
- Crate safe enrichment items (appropriately sized for dog)
 - Black or Red Kong Classic (depends on dog)
 - Whole naturally shed elk antler
 - Nylabone Durachew
 - Goughnuts
 - Benebone
 - NOT safe for crates or unsupervised time
 - Rawhide (NEVER)
 - Stuffed toys
 - Tennis balls
 - Bully sticks, pig ears, hooves or other body parts
 - Red Kong products for dogs who require Black
 - Nylabone edible products
- Feeding
 - Dogs may go off their normal 'feed' when they first arrive in your home. It's okay and usually they figure things out after the first 2-3 days. Don't worry, they won't starve to death.
 - Do not hand feed or coddle with food. If you play food games, you must deal with the food monster you create. Dogs will eat when they are hungry. It is not in their DNA to allow themselves to starve to death when something edible is available.
 - DO NOT FREE FEED. Do not leave food down all day. Food should be offered for 10 minutes once in the morning and once at night. Only. Unless your dog has a medical condition requiring more frequent meals.
- Rewards
 - Freedom is a reward
 - Attention is a reward (including eye contact and speaking to them, does not have to be physical attention)
 - Food is a reward
 - Toys and play time are rewards
 - Bed or couch space is a reward
 - Your foster dog must earn all of these rewards through good behavior.
- Do not permit your foster dog to mark. If your dog isn't empty when you return from a walk, guess what. They're going to pee in your house. Girls mark too fyi.
 - Walk in the middle of the street if necessary to prevent marking on a walk. Tell dog to Go Potty (on cue) at the end of your walk.
 - If they don't eliminate as expected, crate them and try again in 20 minutes. Don't take a nap.
 - This is a habit that CAN be broken if you invest a little time from the start. Housebreaking a dog should not be an impossible task in 99.9% of all cases.

Sample Day (at the beginning) in the Life of a Well Managed New/Foster Dog

- 6am – wake up, exit crate (calmly, on lead), go immediately outside to eliminate
 - Free time out of crate if empty
- 9am – breakfast followed by elimination
 - Followed by down time in crate; no running or romping on a full stomach due to risk of torsion
- 11am – potty break on lead
 - Free time out of crate if empty
- 2pm – nap in crate
- 4pm – afternoon walk and elimination
 - Free time out of crate if empty once back home
- 9pm – dinner followed by elimination, then bed time

One of the first places we expect a foster dog to earn trust is overnight. We should all be sleeping overnight anyway. Once your foster dog has been with you for a while and has demonstrated ability to overnight without any accidents (limiting water end of day if necessary), we hope they'll earn freedom to sleep on a dog bed at night instead of in their closed crate. (Of course, if they want to sleep in their crate, door open, good for them!) Use your own judgment, ask for advice if needed, and award more trust as it is earned (and not a moment before!).

****NOTE** – The exact times/days are not important. The presence of a relaxed and slow, consistent schedule is what's most critical to your success. People tend to rush things even when they believe they're taking it slow, so the timeline presented here is more to give you an idea of what 'slow' really means to us ☺ Days/weeks/months, not hours. If you provide a schedule and routine, restriction, rejection, etc. – everything else will fall into place (barking, crate training, potty training, and more).