



**METRO NASHVILLE**  
ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

## Decompression Leads to Success

### WHAT NOT TO DO:

New Owner Reaction:

- *I adopted a dog!*
- *I introduced her to 15 people!*
- *He was a bit leery but seems to like my other 3 dogs*
- *I took her everywhere with me*
- *He seems to like rough housing, and he gets really excited*

...all in the first few days of the new home.

### THE RESULT OF THE ABOVE:

In a week, the shelter receives the following email:

- *"I think we will have to rehome the new dog!"*
- *"The new dog barked and nipped at my kid!"*
- *"We had a dog fight, what do we do?"*

### WHAT TO DO

The big secret: **The Two Week Shut Down!**

**WHAT IS IT:** Giving the new dog, post adoption, time to adjust to you and your family, and any existing dogs (or cats) in the new environment without stress.

### THE REASONING BEHIND THE PROCESS

Why the Two Week Shut Down? The Two Week Shut Down is a time familiar to a dog, as it mimics the whelping box when first born, as the puppy's eyes are not open, and it relies totally on the mother's ability to take care of it. By smelling, sensing, and listening, the puppy starts his journey into the new scary world. Post adoption, new adult dogs come into our home the same way, "a journey into a new and scary world." By giving the dog time to decompress and take in all the changes that are going on in their life, the dog can learn its new world, its new people and begin to relax and blossom under the care of the new caregiver. We all want to run out with our new dog, show everyone our new pet, but we forget that even an adult or senior dog is now

back to his or her newborn-like mind; all is new, the voices speak a new language, cars might be new, leashes and handling under new people – **the dog needs time to decompress and trust**. Even petting and acceptance of a pet is stressful on a new dog. The dog thinks, "Who are you? Where did you come from? Where are we going? What is expected of me?"

### **VIEW THINGS THROUGH THE DOG'S EYES**

Step back for a minute and think how you might feel if you were never going to go back to your "home", and that you were expected to live with new people who didn't understand your language. What if these new people took you to all sorts of different places expecting you to greet everyone happily and feel comfortable with an overload of attention all at one time? How might you feel after all of that, to have to go to your new "home" and interact with a bunch of strangers? It's very likely that you'd feel exhausted, overwhelmed, and ready to retreat but really have no place to go to. You might begin to act out and yell at people for coddling you and insisting that you do this and do that.

Even the most docile, well-behaved dogs who are newly adopted, without time to decompress, can act out or misbehave – because that's the only way they know how to get their point across. The dog may act out by nipping at children because he didn't understand them and was corrected harshly before knowing how he was supposed to act around them. Growling when being moved off furniture? The dog may not know he couldn't be on the furniture. The dog may think starting fights with the other animals in the home is his only option because he has not identified you as the leader; he or she may be thinking, *"that dog was giving me the evil eye and I don't know if my new humans are leaders, so I must defend myself!"*

For the first two weeks (sometimes even longer depending on the dog), a dog takes in the new environment, who is the top person, dogs, who ARE these people! By pushing a dog too fast and throwing too much at the dog, the dog can feel it MUST defend itself, as the leader is surely no one he has met so far. By shutting down the dog, it gives the dog TIME to see you, meet YOU, hear and take in the new sounds and smells of your home in a calm manner.

### **WHAT YOU NEED TO PERFORM A SUCCESSFUL TWO WEEK SHUTDOWN::**

- A crate with enough room for the dog to stand up and turn around. You should consider placing a crate pad in the crate for the dog's comfort. Many people also recommend covering the top and sides (not the front) with a blanket to create a "den" like feeling with which dogs naturally are comfortable.
- A leash
- Treats

### **CORE CONCEPTS:**

- **The Crate** – The crate is a positive place. Think of it like the dog's bedroom. During the two week shutdown, the dog will spend a lot of time in the crate. **It is important to associate positivity with the crate.** Even while the dog is out of the crate, leave the

crate door open. Toss treats in the crate for your dog to retrieve and they will start to associate the crate with good things. Never force your dog inside a crate, because it will create negative association. Instead, encourage the dog with positive things like calm praise and treats. Crate the dog in a room by itself if possible. (Dogs are sensory animals, they know more than you think without seeing).

- **Leash – Inside and Outside** - Having the dog on leash both inside and outside the home during this transitional period removes the need to have any harsh corrections if the dog is doing something you prefer it not do. **Instead of yelling or jumping across the room, all that is required is a light tug of the leash which is a lot less abrasive than the alternative.** It also stops the dog from reacting if you have to get him off of something like the couch. You are not reaching in and grabbing onto him, just tug gently on the leash, say "come on" and there you go. No conflict! It also teaches the new safe zone for the dog is around you and the humans in the home. Leash the dog right to your belt or under a piece of furniture while you're hanging out.
- **New People and New Dogs** - Do not introduce the dogs to new people or dogs (or cats or other animals) for these two weeks. Some dogs will bond instantly with the other dogs. If the new owner doesn't bond FIRST with the new dog, this can lead to some other issues, as the dog will look to the other dog(s) for guidance and not to YOU!
- **Bad Behavior** - Ignore bad behavior in the crate or on leash like crying and/or barking. If you run to the dog each time they bark, whine, or cry, you are teaching the dog that doing those things gets your attention. **The dog must learn to be secure when you are not there.** Use the leash to correct jumping, exploring counters, etc.
- **Praising** - \*Praise Gently. Good behavior example: Dog is sitting nicely next to you, touch or softly pet the dog saying "*good boy/girl*" to let them know you appreciate GOOD behavior. This makes naughty behavior not so fun if you ignore THAT but praise the good!
- **Obedience and Correction** - No obedience training at all during the shutdown period. No car rides all over town, no other dogs, no pet stores, nothing but you, your home and your yard, and some walks away from others – all on leash or in the crate (unless of course the dog needs to go to the veterinarian).
- **Handling and Petting** - Don't go crazy petting and handling the dog! Even petting and being "out" in the home puts pressure on a dog, as everything is so new. Allowing the dog time to absorb and the decision to come to YOU for pets and affection can do a lot in taking pressure off a new dog.
- **Walks** - No super involved walks yet! Walks with lots of other animals around can be stressful because there is so much newness coming at them. If you live in an apartment, and walks are unavoidable, keep them confined to the same general, low distraction

area (as devoid as possible of cars, humans, and other animals) so as not to unnecessarily over-stimulate the dog, which can happen easily in a new environment.

- **Establish the Leader** - TEACH the dog by doing the shutdown that YOU are the one to look to, that you are now here for the dog! He can trust in you and look to you as his new leader! Then later, on walks you will see the dog look to you when he sees something like a kid or a dog to see what your reaction is, lessening his mind about having to defend or control the environment, as he has YOU - the dog now can relax and enjoy the walk more.
- **In the House - ALWAYS on a leash.** After you come back in from a short period outside allowing the dog to “do his business” or when you get back in the house -- PUT THE DOG AWAY in the crate. Let her absorb and think. Even if just for a little bit. If the dog happens to go to his crate on his own, he is telling you *"I need a time out"* -- allow him this time.

### **THE TAKEAWAY:**

In two weeks, you will see a change in the dog and begin to see her honest and true personality. After the shutdown, they relax, and their true personality begins to shine through! If you do nothing else for your new dog, give her the time to learn you as you are learning her. This method works on shy dogs, confident dogs, abuse cases, chained dogs that come in, rowdy dogs -- all temperaments. It is the expression, the way they start to look at you for guidance that is the most rewarding. Gaining their trust and showing them, calmly and fairly what this new world is like, they relax and feel safe. There is no need to force on them that you are the leader. Slow easy guidance, patience, and showing them what we do want them to do in a new home, instead of correcting them when they do wrong, is how you convey you are the true leader of the home. **For the sake of your new dog, slow down...waaaay downwn. Give them a chance to show you who they can really be and help them decompress and become familiar with their new home.**