

Settling your dog into a therapeutic role

There are many different ways for family members and pet dogs to interact; physically, verbally and emotionally. Different interactions will suit different families and dogs, so be prepared to get to know your dog and be creative!



It is important however that new dogs entering the home, whether a puppy or an adult, are given time to adjust and learn about their new environment. This plan is designed to make that process as smooth and safe as possible. **Family Dog** staff are also always available for you to contact if you need more detailed information and advice.

This structured plan is also very useful for those who already have a dog; it is worth checking this is all covered before progressing with your dog in their new role.

Safety first

The safety and welfare of the child and dog should be ensured at all times.

- Assess your dog's temperament around food e.g. Do they snatch treats, growl when they have food items, gobble their food really quickly? Any problems with this please contact us and put on hold activities that involve food and the children.
- Supervise children and dogs at all times, watch out for any signs of anxiety. Make sure other members of the household where possible are aware of the dog's body language and what it means. Again this is covered in detail in workshop 2.
- Limit as much as possible children having direct contact with the dog and concentrate on the 'non contact' interactions we discuss in the workshops e.g:
 - **Treats hidden under plant pots**
 - **Guess which hand the treat is in**
 - **Interactive toys** - as demonstrated in the workshop
 - **Treasure hunts for toys and treats** - child hides dog treats, stuffed KONGs, dog toys, or parent makes treasure hunt with a dog treat attached to every clue
 - **Hansel and Gretel trails** - trails of treats/toys around the house and garden
 - **Bubbles** - catching dog friendly bubbles
 - **Hide and seek** - hiding in the house and garden while parent/carer holds the dog for them to find the child
 - **More ideas in workshop 2 & 3.**



- Establish your dog's 'safe space' - see 'Crate training' factsheet for more information. Your dog should be choosing to use this space and should appear relaxed. Make sure your dog has plenty of things to chew that can be rotated. **Have separate dog and child areas so both the child and dog feel safe and secure.**
- Whenever you cannot 100% supervise, encourage the dog to their safe space and give them a prepared KONG or treat ball to keep them occupied even if you are just popping to make a tea.

1st month of joining your family

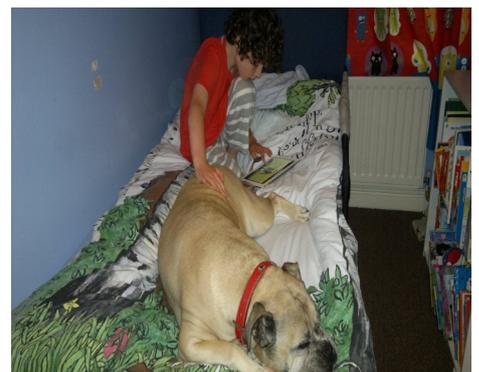
- Get a full vet check to make sure your dog is in good health. Ensure your dog is vaccinated, and treated for fleas and worms.
- Establish the team leader role— this is discussed in detail in workshop 2—one adult, usually the parent/carer who has attended the workshops, is responsible for ensuring all tasks maintaining the dog's health and welfare are completed, such as walking, feeding and grooming.
- Continue 100% supervision around children. This should remain for your dog's life. If your child does not want to interact with the new dog or puppy, do not worry and do not force participation. Casually setting up opportunities for fun interactions e.g. The use of dog activity toys, whilst allowing time for the relationship to develop is essential.
- Establish a good routine with your dog. This will help them settle as they know what to expect.
- Limit the number of new situations you are exposing your dog to and keep everything as consistent as possible e.g. Keep walks to quiet areas only, keeping them the same and not introducing them to the school run etc. straight away.
- Find out what your dog's favourite things are, such as favourite food items and types of toy. A good activity for the children is to rate different food items or toys out of ten.
- Start to introduce the dog to handling, including imitating interactions that children may want to do with the dog and grooming (such as the zoom groom).
- Leave the dog for short periods e.g. behind a baby gate with a KONG while you are still in the house. Walking in and out while your dog is occupied so your coming and going is of no consequence.
- Introduce your dog to very short rides in the car.
- For the time being don't try to train the dog particularly; your priority is that your dog finds their feet. Focus on managing your dog so they learn good decision making e.g. If they jump up, use a baby gate and treats on the floor when entering a room, if puppy biting is a problem see 'Puppy biting' factsheet. By managing your dog in this way so they can't help but get it right, you will help them settle in the home and get them in the right habits.
- Communicate the house rules by rewarding correct behaviours as it occurs and use visual prompts for what is expected e.g. If you don't want the dog on the sofa all the time, only allow them on it when their blanket is out, so rules are clear and predictable.
- Start to think of ways to strengthen dog/child relationships ready for the next stage e.g. Think about what activities children like and how the dog could be involved.

1 - 3 months after joining the family

- Start to think of ways to strengthen dog/child relationships ready for the next stage e.g. Thinking about what activities children like and how the dog could be involved.
- Continue to ensure the team leader role is cemented. Your dog should now be looking to the team leader for support and direction.
- Start to list in order of priority what you will need to work on with your dog over the coming months. **'Life skills for puppies'** (see 'Equipment list' factsheet available at workshop 3) is a great book to work through with a puppy or newly acquired adult dog. Finding a good dog training class will also help you with this if you feel it would be useful.
- Teach your dog one or two tricks that the children might like to do with the dog. If your dog is a puppy, teaching sit is helpful for interrupting mouthing and jumping up.
- Start to identify any problematic behaviours in the home that you have noticed in the last few months and work with us to resolve them. Consistently reward desirable behaviours and remove undesirable behaviours by ignoring them and removing any rewards your dog might be getting from exhibiting that behaviour.

3 - 6 months after joining the family

- Start to introduce one or two new walks to your dog, being careful not to overwhelm them. If you notice any anxiety to new things, add them to your gradual introductions checklist (See Training for a safe well adjusted dog).
- You should notice your dog becoming more settled in the home. Slowly start to work through your gradual introductions tick list, see 'Training for a safe well adjusted dog' factsheet.
- Check what your dog's behaviour is like around other dogs, don't put your dog into situations with other dogs, observe their behaviour from a distance first before considering getting closer. If your dog is a rescue dog and has a history with other dogs, good or bad, take this into account when out and about.
- Your dog should now be looking to the team leader for support and guidance. Once this is happening, the team leader can start to involve other family members where appropriate in the daily routine such as walking, feeding and grooming the dog. The team leader should still be ultimately responsible for ensuring that all tasks maintaining your dog's health and welfare are completed.
- Start allowing children to have more contact with your dog, still closely supervised and intervening if not interacting appropriately.
- Start to introduce basic training like lead work and general life skills, taking into account your dog's age and what your priorities are.
- Start to use your dog as a role model where a relationship has developed between child and dog, such as teeth cleaning, reading your dog a story, transitions from outside to inside, putting on school uniform e.g. Dog has a bandana in the school uniform colours.



6 – 9 months after joining the family (dogs and puppies 12 months and older)

- Very thorough vet check to make sure nothing has developed. Get ears, claws, teeth, joints and weight checked.
- Your dog should now be confident with everything that happens inside and outside the home. Make sure you have gradually introduced your dog to anything you are likely to want them to intervene with e.g. If you would eventually like them to intervene in a meltdown, your dog needs to be confident around meltdowns first.
- Start advanced training if basic training and gradual introductions have already been done and any problems have been resolved e.g. Introducing the harness and lead for the school run and road safety. See 'Interventions' factsheet for more ideas. Basic training will be covered in workshop 2 and how to teach advanced task work is covered in workshop 3 such as nose nudge, button push, and head rest.
- You may want to look into structured activities available for families and individuals to take part in with their pet dogs. These include training classes, agility, flyball, and cani-cross. These are varied and different activities to suit different people and dogs. As well as allowing both dog and handler to gain skills and bond through a fun activity, taking part in classes will help family members to meet other dogs and dog owners. See www.ykc.org.uk/ and <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/8249/activities.pdf>.

Your dog should now be all set for their **Family Dog Service** role— any problems along the way please contact us. Now the fun can start with creative ideas for dogs and children to continue to build on your success.

