

# Behaviors of Rescue Dogs

By Sheila Scaggs

This section deals with common behaviors found in rescues and which might still be present to some degree after adoption. You will find suggestions on dealing with the specific behaviors following each.

- **The dog may not be housebroken.**

Treat him/her like a new puppy regardless of age. (See House Training a Rescue Dog)

- **The dog will be unfamiliar with grass and defecating outside.**

Place him/her on the grass with kind words of encouragement and repeat for as many times as it takes. It could take a few days.

- **The dog may be afraid of you or hand-shy and may flatten down on the ground.**



Positive reinforcement – kind words, treats, and time – should overcome or minimize this behavior.

- **The dog may be unfamiliar with a collar and leash. The dog might be terrified of the leash and restraint.**

Let the dog drag the leash around to get used to it. Walk around the yard with your dog to insure his/her safety while dragging the leash. Once the dog gets used to the leash, take him/her for a walk. At first let the dog lead; don't tug or pull on the leash. Encourage him/her with "let's go", "walk", "come on", etc.

- **The dog may be afraid of doorways and going through them.**

Give the dog lots of room, hold the door wide open, and stand to the side.

- **The dog may bolt out of an open door leading to an unsecure area; many are "runners".**

Be alert when opening a door that doesn't lead to a fenced area. (See General Training Tips)



- **The dog may not eat for a day or two.**

Don't worry if your new foster or adoptee doesn't eat for a few days as long as s/he is taking in liquid. A healthy dog can go four or five days without food with no serious effect. A healthy dog will eat when it is hungry.

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- **The dog may fear being in or going into his/her crate.**

With time, positive reinforcement, feeding the dog in the crate and giving treats, it will come to accept and like the crate.



- **The dog may run from you.**

Don't run after the dog. In time it will learn to trust and come to you.

If it runs away and ignores you when you call, endeavor to catch the dog's attention. Waving an enticing piece of rag, a toy, or even treats are all techniques you can use to get the dog to come.

You can also try running away from the dog. The instinct to chase is very strong. When the dog is running after you, stop and praise him/her, even if the dog does not come all the way up to you. Do not praise if the dog turns and goes away.

- **The dog may not understand your speech or commands (come, sit, stay, good dog, etc).**

It takes time & repetition. The dog may have a temporary hearing loss from the noise in the "puppy mill" or it may have to learn how to "learn".

- **The dog may not know his/her name.**

Repetition, repetition, repetition, and praise, praise, praise!

- **The dog may be a "pooh" eater.**

Pick up waste as soon as possible to avoid this behavior.

- **The dog may run from one "safe spot" to another in your home (couch, chair).**

As the dog gets comfortable in your home, you will see the "safe spot" expand until it extends to the whole house.

- **The dog will not be familiar with stairs, won't know how to go up or down.**

You might need to carry the dog up and down until it gets the idea and the courage to master the stairs. Again, use lots of praise for any attempt.



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- **The dog may not be familiar with the TV/radio or mirrors. It might be afraid of them, think what it sees or hears is real and bark at them.**

When the dog acts afraid of something that it should not fear, do not pick it up and ooh and ahh over it. Simply tell the dog it is okay (or if the dog is barking, tell it NO), and show him/her the object, person, etc. Your confidence will make it a confident and dependable dog. If you reinforce imaginary fears, the dog will become a snappy and untrustworthy animal.

- **The dog may exhibit compulsive behaviors, like fly biting, nest building, or paper shredding.**

If the behavior does not diminish as the dog gains confidence, you may need to check for health conditions that could cause these behaviors.

- **The dog may be afraid of thunder/lightening.**

Do NOT coddle and say "Good dog, that's OK" as that rewards the fear behavior. Be as matter of fact as possible. A body wrap or "thunder shirt" or a child's tee shirt pinned tightly around the body will work the same. Confining in a closed crate covered with a blanket so it is dark can be reassuring. There are also calming agents for sale, such as Canine Calm or Rescue Remedy (a Bach Flower Essence). Remain calm yourself and even joke about the noise if you can.

- **The dog may snore!**

No cure!! Try to think of it as cute!

