

New Dog, New Home

Congratulations on the adoption of your Lab! We are so pleased that you chose to save a Lab through rescue. During the adoption of our dogs, our volunteers and foster homes go over each newly adopted Labby's medical information, evaluations and current eating, sleeping and activity routines so that the transition of the Lab to his new home will be much easier. Dogs are extremely routine oriented, so it is good for you to find out as much as you can about your new Lab's previous schedule so you can duplicate what you are able and slowly reorient him to your schedule without too much fuss. We include the following hints with our adoption packet; we hope they may be useful to you as well.

When you arrive home

Your Labrador Retriever will be excited, and most likely a little anxious, about his new home. This stress can take the form of panting and pacing; housebreaking accidents; excessive chewing; and/or gastric upset in the form of vomiting and diarrhea or loose stools. If you have received written evaluations/information concerning your new Lab, you should consult them to determine how quickly the Lab settled into his foster/previous home. Don't worry if your Lab suddenly seems a little "homesick" or nervous. He is not sure what is going to happen to him next. He may have just gotten comfortable at his foster home and now he is being uprooted again. He feels like a guest in your home--is he allowed on the furniture? How should he tell you he needs to go out (and which door)? It is very confusing for him in the beginning.

When you bring your new Lab home, be prepared to leash walk (even in a fenced yard) him outside for at least 10-15 minutes or until he relieves himself. Let him get the "lay of the land" by sniffing and becoming acquainted with all the smells associated with your yard. The combination of the car ride home, coupled with all the excitement of a new family and home, will cause him to have to relieve himself more often. So give him plenty of opportunities in the beginning. If you have a special place in your yard you wish him to use for urination and elimination, encourage him to go in that area (and then praise him warmly when he does.) If your new family member is a male that was not neutered early, he will most likely want to mark his new territory (especially if he detects there have been dogs living here previously.) This is his way of making himself at home and should only occur outside.

A male may still accidentally mark a doorway, plant or chair when he first walks in your home. This is out of nervousness (or he may smell remnants of another dog), so it is best to keep him on the leash when first bringing him inside. If he starts to lift his leg on

something, take the leash, tell him "No, (name)" and take him immediately outside. He should stop and remember his manners. Be sure to praise or reward appropriate outside potty behavior. Bear in mind that if your dog has a few accidents, it does not necessarily mean he is not housebroken. We can't emphasize enough how much nerves and excitement can cause uncharacteristic accidents the first day or so. Once he begins to settle into a routine in your house and he learns what is acceptable behavior and habits with you, he should relax and all of his manners will likely return!

Making introductions to other 2- and 4-legged family members

We require all human and canine family members to participate in the selection and adoption of one of our Labs. For the adoption to work, everyone must be in agreement including your other dogs. We also try to let you know how your dog will be with cats if possible.

The meeting between dogs may have gone wonderfully at the neutral turf of the introduction (e.g., a park or PetSmart). But now you are bringing another dog into your current dog's home. He may not be comfortable with that initially and make his displeasure known in a number of ways, including excessive marking; housebreaking accidents; and the sudden attachment to toys he used to not care about (but doesn't want the new dog to have.) In a nutshell, he is simply a little insecure about his place in your family's pack. He will need reassurance too during this time, but should not be permitted to misbehave or treat your new Lab poorly. While it may be hard on you to watch either or both dogs being insecure during this transition period, don't be tempted to spoil either dog or otherwise encourage bad habits you will later have to break. This short-term transition will be over before you know it.

If you are bringing your new Lab home to meet the rest of your canine and feline pack for the first time, be sure that your pets are in a secure place and unable to escape when the new Lab arrives. Meeting outside (preferably in a fenced yard) can be less threatening for canine introductions. Introduce each dog one at a time. Do not force an interaction and make sure all dogs are leashed. If there is any sign of hostility, correct the dog inciting it with a firm "No." You must keep control at all times and show the dogs YOU are the alpha of the pack and must be obeyed. Don't be concerned if they don't warm up to each other immediately. The more socialized your dog and the new Lab already are, the less time it will take for them to become friends (and playmates, if ages allow). As hard as it may be, try not to be nervous yourself, or you will telegraph it to the dogs. Your dog may feel you are in need of defending from the new Lab or even vice versa. As each dog becomes comfortable with the other, you can drop the leashes (if in a fenced environment). However, with the leashes still on, you can more easily grab one and make a correction if needed quickly. As the dogs come inside, you

may find this tighter, more personal space will cause a squabble or two, so you may still want to leave the leashes on for quick control if needed. You may also want to put all toys (and especially all treats, like rawhides, etc.) away until everyone is comfortable.

You will need a more controlled environment to introduce your Lab to a new feline friend. Keep your Lab on leash and have him meet the cat where she cannot run away and hide. (You may need to hold or even leash your cat during these introductions.) Being a Lab, he will most likely only want to chase the cat if she runs, but occasionally, a stronger prey drive may make the Lab more cat aggressive. Again, firmly correct your Lab and don't unleash him around your cat until you feel comfortable with their interaction. Praise your new dog for positive interactions with the cat or ignoring it. Chances are once the cat can leave your "meeting room," you will not see her for several days or even weeks until SHE is ready to accept your new Lab! She may also take a liking to sleeping on tall tables and perches until she feels comfortable around him. Be prepared for there to be some litterbox accidents, as cats can be even more routine oriented and angry when their world is changed. You may need to also rethink how you feed your cat, so that your new Lab will not get into her food.

Since all family members have participated in the selection of your newly adopted Lab, then those introductions have already been done. But you may have friends and neighbors anxious to come over and meet him. Don't forget that he is already nervous and with too many people reaching out to touch him or crowding around him, he might panic a bit – especially in the beginning. He has no idea what those intentions are and has not yet become relaxed in his new environment. You may want to put off introductions to outside people for at least 24-hours and after he has had a chance to settle in. Teach your children and any others that will come into contact with your new Lab how to properly behave around the dog, and never allow them to mistreat or harass the dog. It is also wise to not let young or inexperienced kids be unsupervised around your new dog (or any dog). New human introductions should also be one at a time, preferably on leash for extra control should it be needed. Let the dog take the initiative to greet the new person. He may want to sniff the person first, before any petting is done. Take your cues from your new Lab--how comfortable does he appear with all of this extra attention? Many Labs are real hams and love to be engulfed by people and attention. For them, the more the merrier with new people. Others may be a bit more overwhelmed with their new situation. Common sense should rule the day. We also strongly recommend you become familiar with pack behavior and why dogs do what they do. There are many fine books that will explain and clarify what seems to humans as strange canine behavior. The more you can understand your dog from his canine perspective, the easier it will be to modify behaviors and integrate him into your pack.

Feeding time

Because of your new Lab's nerves and excitement, it is best to withhold food and water for the first few hours (or until he begins to relax). If it is a hot day or your Lab is extremely thirsty, it is better to offer a few cracked/chipped ice cubes. (Nervous Labs have a tendency to drink too much water too quickly, taking in too much air and causing them to throw it back up almost immediately.)

The previous owner or foster home will have given the new adoptive owner(s) an information sheet outlining the dog's current schedule. This will include his feeding schedule and what he is currently eating. If you do not have such information, try to establish a routine that will be as consistent as possible. We suggest two feedings (morning and evening). Most likely your new Lab will be so overwhelmed with his new home, he may not be interested in eating at all the first day. Still, put the food bowl on the floor where you wish him to eat and leave it there for 15-30 minutes. At the end of that time, remove the bowl and any uneaten food. Do not offer food again until the next scheduled feeding time. This teaches your Lab when and where mealtime occurs, and that he is expected to eat at this time. Free feeding (leaving food out at all times) encourages housebreaking accidents since he may be nibbling constantly. If you have a dog that is used to nibbling, he can be retrained to eat at a scheduled time. In fact, until everyone is comfortable, other dogs should be fed away from the new Lab to prevent fights over food.

Try to get information concerning what your new Lab is eating, so you will know what food to buy. You may also want to check with your vet to make sure it is the right type (i.e., puppy, adult, light, senior.) We suggest premium foods since they generally have less byproducts resulting in less dog waste. They also tend to have less preservatives or other products which can trigger food allergies. Feeding dry food will help to keep his teeth cleaner. Try not to get in the habit of feeding table scraps. Not only does this often produce an overweight dog, but many human fatty foods can cause gastric distress in dogs, including pancreatitis. There are times when adding (or replacing with) plain rice and pasta to your dog's diet will help him get through a gastrointestinal problem. And, plain green beans added to his food can help a dieting dog feel fuller. If your dog needs to be on antibiotics, adding plain yogurt to his food will help replace the good bacteria in his system. So, there are times when certain PLAIN (no seasonings) human foods might be helpful for your dog, but they should never be fed from the table and only given in his food dish at meal time.

Sleeping arrangements

There is a good chance that your new Lab will show his insecurity by following you everywhere. This will include trying to go in the bathroom with you (and perhaps the shower!), watching TV with you, checking the garden with you, and undoubtedly wanting to sleep with you. You (or one of the members of the family) will become his new security blanket until he becomes comfortable in his new home. If another family member throws a ball, he will bring it back to whichever family member he has temporarily latched onto. Eventually, he may choose another family member with which to bond, but for now, he may very well be needier than you might expect (or than you witnessed at his foster/previous home). It is perfectly natural for both new family and new dog to be nervous, so don't be too concerned if he appears shy or withdrawn for the first few days.

The first few nights you may want to confine your new Lab in the bedroom with you or in a crate. Age, behavior, and your preferences will dictate which you choose, but you will not want to give him too much freedom until you are sure he is trustworthy. Typically, a dog will not relieve himself where he sleeps. If you are confining the dog to your bedroom, close the door and be on the alert during the night for a signal or movement from him. You may wish to place a bell on your door knob that he can nudge with his nose to signal to you that he has to go out. Continue to keep your new Lab confined until he sleeps through the night with no accidents and/or does not go on a destructive chewing frenzy.

It is not unusual for your new Lab to bark or whine if confined to a crate to sleep. While some of our dogs are already crate trained, they will still often cry the first few nights in a new foster or adoptive home. Labs are people dogs, and they don't like to be separated from their pack when it is time to turn out the lights--and especially in a new place. (This is why Labs who are kept outside often become nuisance barkers or destructive chewers and diggers. They want to be with their pack as much as possible, and are very miserable and nervous when they are not allowed to be.) If the dog needs to be crated at night, you need to be as consistent as possible. If you can put the crate close to your bedroom or someplace he can see you, he may feel more secure. Safe chew toys in his crate (especially if he is teething) will give him something to do until he falls asleep. It is best to ignore barking but if it persists for more than 15 minutes, take the dog outside for a final potty break. Bring the dog back into the home and give him a treat in his crate so he can associate good things with it. If needed, a verbal correction of NO BARK or GO TO BED can be used. If the dog is persistent and the humans in the house are not getting much needed sleep, a leash tied to the bed or a heavy piece of furniture can be used to tether the dog for sleeping. The faster you can establish a sleeping routine; the more sleep everyone will get! You may eventually want to wean him

from his crate. We suggest you pick a day or weekend when you will be home all day and able to get him especially tired (and less likely to have any out-of-crate problems.)

Develop a routine

Try to develop and use a consistent daily routine for feeding, exercising, and bathroom duties. Dogs are creatures of habit. If you do the same things in the same way and in the same order, he will settle in more quickly and learn what is expected of him and when.

For example, walk your new Lab or let him out in the fenced yard as soon as you rise in the morning. If you will be feeding him in the morning, do so after a short walk or romp in the yard. Give him one more chance to relieve himself after breakfast and before you go to work. Upon return from work, he should get an immediate bathroom break and exercise. If he has exercised heavily, wait about an hour before you give him his evening feeding. He will need another bathroom break anywhere from 30 minutes to several hours later depending on his age. He should be given at least one more potty break right before you retire for the evening. To keep middle of the night bathroom breaks to a minimum, you may need to withhold water and dog biscuit snacks after a certain time in the evening. (If he is really thirsty on a hot late night, treat him to a little cracked or chipped ice instead.)

Leaving your new Lab alone during the day

Initially, your new Lab may have varying degrees of separation anxiety when you leave him. Crating the dog in the beginning will eliminate accidents, chewing destruction (which may be dangerous besides frustrating), and any other mischievous activity that may be rooted in nervousness and insecurity. A crate can provide a place where the dog feels safe in your absence. It may also be a lifesaver should a fire or natural disaster dictate the need for people other than you to rescue your dogs from danger. A crated dog cannot panic and run to another part of a house unfamiliar to a fire fighter or rescuer.

If you prefer not to crate (or your dog is not good in the crate) but still want to confine, you may want to try baby gates in the kitchen or hallway during the day. This allows your dog to be in a familiar place with familiar things without being totally confined. If the area of confinement is too large, however, you may begin to have problems with housebreaking accidents. For those with bigger Labs, you may need to piggyback a set of gates atop each other.

Each time you leave your dog confined, whether to an area or crate, make sure the dog knows he is a good boy. If the Lab is particularly anxious or emotional, try making the goodbyes

(and hellos) as nonchalant as possible. When you return, if all is in order, praise the dog for being good while you were away and take him out immediately. (Note: It is not fair to get upset with the dog if he has an accident, but was left alone for 10 or more hours. How long can you hold it?) If you must be away from home longer than the dog's bladder (whatever his age) can comfortably hold it, you may want to consider hiring a dog walker for a mid-day walk. Most Labs will go out of their way to earn their owner's praise and affection, so he will do his best to please you (as long as you are realistic and consistent in your expectations and demands.)

Other questions and comments

1. Is it OK to change the dog's name? Adoptive families are free to change their new Lab's name if they so desire. Many times, the Labs come to a rescue/shelter as strays, and names are given at random. The dog usually learns the new name quickly, especially if you overuse it in the beginning. Many folks believe changing the dog's name will help the dog to build a deeper bond with his new family. We have seen dogs 10 years + have their names changed to something completely different and do just fine. It is in no way traumatic to the dog (or the rescue person that named him!)

2. When should we go to the veterinarian? Brookline requires its adoptive homes to visit their vet within the first 3 weeks for a baseline visit, regardless of health. This ensures that new dog owners will find, select and begin a relationship with a vet before needing one in a panic. Owners who already have vets will be able to introduce their new pet to their doctor while he is reasonably healthy. Make sure you take whatever medical records you were given with you so your vet can become familiar with your new Lab's medical history (if available).

3. How important is obedience training? Extremely important!! One of the best ways for you to bond with your new Lab is through obedience training, and this is why it is required of most of our adopted Labs. Even if you are not a new dog owner, obedience training can be as valuable for you as it is for your dog. A class taught by a professional instructor and full of positive reinforcement will get you and your dog off to a great start. If you go to a class with other students, you will not only learn heeling and commands, but also how to communicate effectively with your dog with distractions, and it will provide an opportunity for him to practice socializing. The more socialized you can keep your dog, the more places you will feel comfortable taking him. Many AKC dog training clubs offer the Canine Good Citizen test. This tests your dog's ability to behave himself amiably in a variety of situations. Often telling a hotel your dog is a CGC, coupled with bringing his crate, will open more doors to you and your dog when traveling. Learning a command like the emergency down, where the dog must

drop to the ground instantly when commanded to do so, may save his life someday. There are many practical reasons for taking a series of obedience classes, and all family members should participate to reinforce their control and their bonds.

Above all, be patient, firm and consistent with your new Lab. Use positive reinforcement and lots of praise when he is a good boy. When he makes a mistake, correct him when it is happening, and then praise him when he modifies his behavior correctly. Undoubtedly, you will get lots of advice--good and bad--from other dog owners. Read and research as much as possible to become familiar with responsible dog ownership practices. But, understand that sometimes you need to try more than one approach to a problem because each dog is different. Brookline volunteers will be following up with our new adoptive families to make sure all is going well. Don't be afraid to ask questions and bring up situations that you were unsure of how to handle. Our goal is to make sure our rescue dogs never have to be uprooted again, so we are quite interested in helping you troubleshoot any problems--the sooner the better before they become big problems. Most of all, be prepared to give and receive more love, affection and loyalty than you ever thought possible. Enjoy your Labby for many years to come, and thanks again for helping us rescue him!

This information was adapted with permission from Labrador Retriever Rescue, Inc.; 2008