



RESCUE S.M.A.R.T

Structure – Management – Activity – Red flags – Training

5 STEPS TO SUCCESS WITH YOUR ADOPTED DOG

Everyone knows that adopting a dog from a rescue saves lives and makes us all feel good. Our social media feeds are packed with heartwarming stories of people giving homeless dogs a well-deserved chance at a do-over. It's feel-good central and we eat it up.

What people *don't* talk about as much, though, is what the first few days and weeks at home with a new dog are like, particularly if it's difficult. And even less talked about is the fact that many dogs are returned to rescues and shelters within just a few weeks. *Some statistics say as many as 20%*. Why is this? How can things go from happy to, well, crappy, so quickly?

The truth is that a lot of us are simply doing it wrong. With loving intentions and full hearts we're inadvertently setting our new best friend up for failure. Trust me, as a frequent flyer in the dog foster and adoption world and before I was a professional dog trainer, I made every mistake in the book. Some of these were little mistakes, which merely resulted in a dog that wasn't pleasant to live with. But some of these were BIG mistakes, a few of which resulted in injury to dogs and me, and the subsequent re-homing of dogs.

Obviously I didn't set out to create chaos for my newly adopted dogs. In fact, I now realize the problems were a result of the things I *wasn't* doing. Because I wasn't proactive with structure, management, activity, red flags, and training (S.M.A.R.T) I ended up having to "fix" problems that arose for dogs both new and existing in my household.

Before we jump into the S.M.A.R.T. protocol we should address a couple of truths I wish I had known.

Lose the baggage!

Let's talk about the suitcase in the room: your new dog's "back story". The circumstances that led your new dog to end up in a rescue. The baggage. *Let's lose it.* By hanging on to what we may or may not know about our new dog, and viewing it through a lens clouded by the dog's perhaps-not-ideal past, we do it a great disservice. The dogs are ready to move on, and so must we.

A guide for dog adopters and fosters

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The rule of 3/3/3

Keep in mind the rule of 3/3/3 – 3 days, 3 weeks, 3 months. These are common milestones when we often see changes in behavior as the dog settles in. Emerging behaviors may be old habits resurfacing, or they may be new behaviors brought on by the environment. What we do (or don't do) in these early days and weeks affects both. These time frames are important in setting new routines and helping build new habits. Resist the temptation to back off on the elements of the S.M.A.R.T. protocol during the first 3/3/3.

Step 1: STRUCTURE

Regardless of our new dog's previous experiences, the unfamiliar smells, sights and sounds in her new environment, not to mention the change in daily routine and caretakers, can present some challenges for her. The more "figuring it out" we leave up to the dog, such as offering it free reign of the house, the more likely she is to be overwhelmed or make mistakes (such as peeing in the house). Your new dog needs *structure*.

NOTE: materials and videos referred to in this article can be found at www.RescueSMART.net

- **Supervise** – No matter the age of your new dog, pretend she's a puppy. Keep a close eye on her in the house and outside in the yard. Confine her (we'll discuss more in the Management section) when you can't supervise.
- **Drag a leash** – When you are home and supervising, have your dog drag a light, short leash in the house. Say "Let's go" and use it to gently guide her off furniture, through the house, to her bed. Step on the leash to keep her from bolting out the front door. Use the leash to keep her with you (aka "umbilical cord" training); free access to the house is a recipe for trouble in the early days and weeks.
- **Show her the potty spot** – Walk her to the potty spot when you first get home, after she eats, naps, or when she starts sniffing with purpose. I recommend using a long training lead (15 or 20 feet, make sure it's light for small dogs) so the dog has room to walk and smell, which stimulates the urge to potty. Don't distract her while you're waiting; ignore her entirely and then reward her with a high-value treat as soon as she goes. Keep in mind your new dog won't know how to "tell" you she needs to go, so set an alarm on your phone to remind you to take her out every hour or so at first. Your new dog may not respond well to being put out alone at first, so plan on accompanying her during the first few days and weeks (remember 3/3/3 rule).
- **Food** – Don't be alarmed if your new dog doesn't eat for a few meals. The stress of change to a new environment causes lots of dogs to skip meals. It's OK. Their bodies are built to handle it. But when they are ready to eat, make sure to pony up for a decent quality food with a short list of ingredients. It matters, and you won't miss the extra few bucks. A local feed or pet store will have small bags you can try. Add a tablespoon of canned food and some warm water to dry (boring) kibble. I enjoy adding leftover lean meats and cooked veggies to my dogs' kibble to make a nice stew. Check out article **Foods Your Dog Shouldn't Eat** before you start adding.
- **Specific feeding time** – A delicious meal will help your dog stick to a specific feeding time, which is important in getting on a potty routine. Your new dog also needs a quiet place to eat,

Read "**Foods Your Dog Shouldn't Eat**" at www.RescueSMART.net

undisturbed by kids or other dogs. Crates are ideal (we'll talk more about crates in Management). Give your dog about 10 minutes to eat, then remove the food. Try again at next feeding time. The goal isn't to deprive your dog, but to help increase an already-present food drive every predator possesses.

Step 2: MANAGEMENT

Once we've structured an ideal environment for our new dog, we must then *manage* him through it. I know no one gets a dog so they can practice being the sheriff of boundaries and enforcer of rules, but rules help teach our dog to maintain good standards of behavior. Your new dog will be much more at ease with you in this coaching role rather than if he is left to figure things out for himself. And you'll be much happier with the transition.

- **Resident dogs** – Our existing dog(s) rely heavily on our management of the new guy to feel secure. The rule of 3/3/3 tells us we don't really KNOW how the new dog will respond to our existing dogs, even if they've been in foster care with other dogs. A new dog brings a new energy and can affect the dynamic of the group. In time, all the dogs ideally will become friends, but in the early days we want to err on the side of micro-management.
- **Resources** – Furniture, toys, food, our attention, doorways, entire rooms, "resources" are anything a dog finds valuable (they get to decide, which can sometimes be confusing to us). The early days, weeks and months are the time for us to observe our new dog's resource preferences and to set the rules around resources in the household. Feed dogs separately. Watch how the new dog responds to your presence while he is eating. If resident dogs are allowed on furniture, use a leash to guide the new dog to the desired spot. Don't leave dogs alone with toys and bones, and check the backyard for forgotten but potentially high-value items. There's nothing like a little competition to make something valuable again. Prevent dogs from crowding in high-value areas such as the kitchen, under the dining table, or around the front door where excitement can lead to bad choice-making and conflict. See "Go on" in *T=Training*. See *R=Red flags for spotting problems in the resource department*.
- **Crates** – Nothing is more convenient than having a crate-savvy dog. Dogs that are crate trained can go practically anywhere with us. Crates provide an excellent place for dogs to rest and feel safe, particularly in a new environment. They are excellent tools to help with structure and management. You may or may not know your new dog's experience with crates; don't be too quick to write off a crate if you think the dog doesn't like it. Actual containment phobia exists, but it isn't as common as people might think. Most dogs can learn to like the crate. I strongly suggest dogs sleep in crates (vs. your bed or unconfined) at least for the first 3/3/3. Make that 3/3/6 (months). There's plenty of time to share your bed with your dog if that's what you want to do. We just don't recommend it in the beginning (can create Red flag behaviors if the bed becomes a valuable resource). If you know your dog to be crate trained, start using it for short periods during the day and for sleeping at night. If you're unsure about your new dog's experience with the crate, do the following:
 1. Toss tasty treats into the crate to see if your dog will walk in on his own to get them. Do this repeatedly without closing the door or hovering over the dog or near the crate. Just toss in the treats and walk away.

Read "**Crate Training Guide**" and watch video "**Crate Training: Enter & Exit**" at www.RescueSMART.net

2. Put your dog's delicious meal in the back of the crate so he has to walk in and eat it. Again, don't close the door and don't hover. If you have resident dogs, do this exercise in a room separate from where they're fed.
 3. After a few meals with the door open, try closing the crate door when your dog walks in to eat. Let him out when he's finished eating. If closing the door creates stress (where the dog won't eat and obsesses about getting out), stick to feeding him with the crate door open for a few more days.
 4. If your dog will eat with the door closed, start using the crate as a resting spot while you are in a separate area of the house, i.e. nap time. Start with short periods of 15 minutes or so. If you have resident dogs that are loose, keep the crate in an area away from them. Put a knuckle bone or bully stick in the crate so your dog has something rewarding to chew on. Drape the crate with a sheet to eliminate distracting stimuli. If the dog fusses, ignore and see where it goes.
 5. If all goes well, put the dog in the crate when you leave the house to go on errands.
 6. Move on to sleeping in the crate. Where you keep the crate is up to you, although many people ultimately do not want the dog in their bedroom. I'm one of those people. I don't want to hear them scratching and licking, and I know if I'm *right there* they're more likely to serve as an alarm clock. Feel free to give them their own space out of your bedroom.
- **Confinement in general** – Use baby gates, exercise pens, tethers, to manage your new dog's whereabouts, especially during the 3/3/3 period. Dogs left to roam an entire house or on their own in the back yard for extended periods, like if you're away at work all day, will undoubtedly get themselves into trouble. Ideally you can create a safe space inside and/or outside for your dog. For example, lots of folks give their dogs partial garage access with a dog door that leads to a designated run outside. Tethers are useful to keep a dog in a certain spot while you're around to supervise. Use an O-ring secured in a baseboard with a 3-4 foot tie-out next to a comfy dog bed to create an ideal resting and bone-chewing spot. Keep in mind proximity of resident dogs if you have them.
 - **Furniture** – I don't have hard-and-fast rules about dogs on furniture UNLESS access to furniture is creating problems (like uninhibited invasion of my personal space) or exacerbating problem behaviors (like resource guarding). I do, however, have a permission-based policy. If you're a dog, you must wait to be invited onto the couch. Why? Well, in addition to the obvious safety reasons (e.g. I don't want a jumping dog to cause me to spill hot coffee all over myself and I don't want a jumping dog to hurt my 83-year-old dad or a small kid), I want to be *relevant* in my dog's eyes about such things as access to high-value areas like furniture. In the 3/3/3 period I don't really know if my new dog has the tendency to become a pushy-pants so I'd like him checking in with me for the go-ahead.
 - **Kids** – Monitor and manage interactions between children and the dog. Your new dog should be taught that kids' personal space needs to be respected. And vice versa. Don't leave children alone with your new dog. See how your new dog responds to kids' unpredictable bursts of energy and noise. The #1 reason children get bit by dogs is because the dog's personal space is invaded and the dog feels threatened. See *R=Red flags for more about kids and dogs*.
 - **"No-fly zones"** – If you like a zen-like environment in certain areas of your home (who doesn't), then communicate this with your new dog by not engaging in or encouraging high-energy play in those areas. You'll need to manage the kids to that end as well.

Keep in mind you can always give your dog more freedom and access to the house and furniture in the future. It's easier to prevent bad habits than change them.

- **Excitement in general** – Most annoying (and potentially dangerous) dog behaviors are the result of an overly aroused dog. Keep in mind you're just getting to know your new dog, so you won't really *know* yet what he does in a highly excited state. By managing how and when we give attention to our dogs we can effectively control their excitement. It is normal for a dog to go into high arousal at times, but we want to make sure we're encouraging it during appropriate activities, such as play, not simply when we walk into the room.

Step 3: ACTIVITY

We all know dogs need exercise and mental stimulation; they need *activity*. Too little, too much, or the wrong kind of activity can hinder our efforts to help our new best friend adjust. Plan to spend some time on specific activities with your new dog while keeping the following in mind:

- **Don't overwhelm** – The biggest mistake we make in the early days with our new dog is to overwhelm them with new sights, sounds, and people. During the 3/3/3 period carefully choose activities that are appropriate for your new dog's emotional, psychological, and physical state. See *R=Red flags for specifics on fearful dogs*.
- **"Let's Go" with the long line** – I LOVE this exercise with a new dog. Attach a 20-foot long line to a martingale collar and go to your back or front yard. Keep the line slack and allow your dog to just be. Let him do dog things like sniffing, peeing, looking around, whatever. Say "Let's go", turn your body, and walk in a different direction. Apply a steady leash pressure (don't yank or pull, just hold steady) and as soon as your dog starts to follow, release pressure on the leash. The release of pressure communicates "yes, that's right" and is the "reward" for following you; it's guidance and clear communication. This is not meant to be an energetic training exercise; it's meant to allow your dog to be at liberty but requires he check in and follow you when requested. Use this time to encourage your dog with affection and petting. Tap into a calm state of mind when doing this exercise. Just chill. "Let's go" simply means to check in and follow, and it's an informal command you'll use with your dog in a variety of scenarios.
- **"Find It"** – Another exercise I LOVE to do with a new dog. "Find It" gets a dog moving, so it's great with shy dogs that may not be ready to connect with you (sensitive to eye contact, spatial pressure). It also gives an exuberant dog a way to channel energy. Attach a 20-foot long line to a martingale collar and arm yourself with a bait bag full of small, tasty treats. Let your dog know you have the treats by waving them under his nose. Then, when he shows interest, say "Find It!" and toss a treat. Do this a few times. Ideally your dog starts to look at you expectantly.
- **Structured walk on a short leash** – A neighborhood walk for your dog is essential. Even if you live on property, your dog must be able to walk politely on a leash and maintain a standard of behavior that works in public. A structured on-leash walk is not only decent physical exercise, but it helps build your relationship. By "structured" I mean you are asking your dog to walk *with you*, stopping for sniff breaks on *your* terms. It's important that we become more than just the holder-of-the-leash; we should be the director of the walk. A short leash can inspire a dog's oppositional reflex and encourage pulling, so work with a trainer to find the gear and technique that works best for you and your dog. See *additional info in T=Training section*.

Read "**Let's Go with a Long Line**" (includes section for dealing with reactive dogs) and watch video "**Let's Go**" at www.RescueSMART.net

Watch video "**Find It!**" at www.RescueSMART.net

- **Play** - Let's face it, we ask our dogs to behave very un-dog-like a lot of the time. Don't bark, don't jump, don't dig, don't chase, don't hunt, don't chew, and the list goes on. Play is a great way to allow a dog to express those innate behaviors in a constructive way. Tug toys, flirt poles, balls, seeking games, chase, these are all ways for dogs to express their natural prey drive. The goal is for dogs to play with *you*, the toy being the conduit for the activity. Your newly adopted dog may not jump right into play; the new environment can be distracting. One way to get your dog's play-dial spinning is to have him on a long line and toss kibble or treats so he has to go get them. A stuffed toy on the end of a string can inspire a fun game of chase. Even if your new dog plays with your other dogs, make time to play one-on-one with her.

Watch videos "**Flirt Pole**" and "**Tug**" at www.RescueSMART.net
- **All-out running** – Depending on you new dog's level of physicality, he may enjoy a nice run. If you are someone who enjoys that kind of physical activity, super! If not, I found the coolest invention ever for non-runners who have dogs that like to run: the bicycle attachment for dogs. Walky Dog and Bike Tow Leash are just two of them out there. My dog LOVES this contraption and his whole outing takes about 15 minutes. It's a blast and I literally do nothing but steer the bike.
- **Socialization Outings** – During the first 3/3/3 follow your new dog's lead and carefully choose stimuli and destinations that are appropriate for your new dog's current emotional, psychological and physical state. A happy-go-lucky dog may benefit from a trip to the pet store or a walk around the neighborhood, and may welcome being approached by new people. A nervous, shy or fearful dog will get plenty of exposure to the new smells, sights and sounds in her new home, so don't feel the need to traipse her out and about town the first couple of weeks. Keep in mind that everything is new to your new dog, so simply hanging out in your front yard for 20 minutes with your dog on a long line may be a perfectly suitable activity. Observe how your dog handles cars going by, people walking by with dogs, children playing. Parks and public places with plenty of room to maneuver make good socialization outings. Take delicious treats to create a positive association with the activity. Many stores are dog friendly. A confident dog will welcome being approached by new people. An insecure dog will not. Be ready to abort the mission if your dog looks miserable on an outing and work with a trainer on ways to help your dog become more comfortable and confident in new environments.
- **Dog park** – Let's skip it for awhile, especially during the 3/3/3 period. It's much safer and more productive to have your dog evaluated by professionals in a structured daycare setting to determine if your dog is dog-social. If your dog likes other dogs and can play appropriately, use doggy daycare occasionally to keep these skills alive and well.

For a how-to, read the Socialization section in article "**Get Puppy S.M.A.R.T.**" at www.RescueSMART.net

Read "**Dog Parks: Dog Heaven or Owner Agony?**" at www.RescueSMART.net

Step 4: RED FLAGS

Always, but especially during the 3/3/3 period, it is important you watch for red flags, the behaviors that require help NOW. Implementing the S.M.A.R.T. protocol helps create an environment that doesn't encourage red flag behaviors, but it may not prevent them 100%, especially if your new dog has practiced red flag behaviors before.

- **Resources** – Conflict over resources is one of the main reasons dogs fight each other, and/or bite people. Review the section about resources in *M=Management*. If your new dog is a frantic eater or stiffens up if you approach her while eating or chewing a bone, get in touch with a trainer who has experience in this area. In the meantime, don't put your new dog in a situation where she feels like she needs to defend a resource from you or your other dogs.
- **Personal space** – The other main reason dogs fight each other and bite people is violations of their personal space. Small dogs can be especially sensitive to this and may have large personal space requirements. If your new dog stiffens up or growls during handling or petting, work with a trainer who can evaluate the situation and help you start desensitizing and counter conditioning your dog to these triggers. Advocate for the dog that has a larger personal space requirement by managing boisterous play from other dogs, or asking people to refrain from approaching. (See *Fearful and insecure dogs* in this section.)

Read article "**Resource Guarding and Feeding Exercise**" at www.RescueSMART.net
- **Fearful and insecure dogs** – The most obvious display of nervousness or insecurity we see in our new dogs is *sensitivity to spatial pressure*. We put spatial pressure on dogs all the time: when we look at them, approach them head on, lean over them, bend down to pet them, hold out our hand for them to sniff, reach over their heads to pat them or to put on a leash. For a happy-go-lucky dog, these things are no big deal. For a more sensitive, fearful, nervous, or insecure dog, even eye contact can put them into a threat-response mode. This translates into all kinds of behavior, such as barking, retreating, growling, snapping, and moving away from or toward the perceived "threat". None of it looks like a dog that is happy at that moment. The kindest thing we can do is to become aware of how our body language creates spatial pressure and what triggers our new dog. Give friends and family a heads-up before they come into the house by printing out and hanging the **Dog in Training Door Sign** on your front door. This kindly instructs visitors to completely ignore your dog, which in turn will prevent her from feeling pressured and threatened. Let your new dog approach people on her terms. If we don't ask anything of her (i.e. put pressure on her with our eye contact or body language) she may become comfortable enough to come in for a sniff. *Resist the urge to view this as an invitation to pet*. Don't overwhelm your nervous dog with outings that may be too noisy or chaotic for them to handle. By allowing your sensitive dog to observe the action from a safe distance you are starting the process of desensitizing and counter-conditioning your dog's automatic responses to triggers. Work with a trainer who has experience in this area and be patient. During the 3/3/3 period we often see a nervous dog relax *significantly* in their new environment if we give them the chance.

Advocate for your sensitive dog and help people know what NOT to do: print out the "**Dog in Training door sign**" at www.RescueSMART.net

"**Let's Go**" and "**Find It**" are good activities for sensitive dogs. Watch videos at www.RescueSMART.net
- **Separation anxiety** – True separation anxiety is one of hardest conditions we deal with in dog behavior. Helping your new dog learn valuable life skills such as the ability to be alone is something we should focus on from day 1 with a new dog. Ideally, dogs are being helped with these skills from the time they are in foster care. True separation anxiety, as defined in dog behavior, is characterized by what we would call a panic attack when we leave our dog. Read **Adopted Dogs and Separation Anxiety** article for more about ways to prevent and help separation anxiety and consult a trainer who has experience in this area.

Read "**Adopted Dogs and Separation Anxiety**" at www.RescueSMART.net

- **Resident dogs** – I always say the resident dog gets to make the final decision on adopting the new dog. I say this laughingly, but I'm not joking. If your existing dog(s) have behavioral issues, such as resource guarding or any other aggression problems, integrating a new dog into that mix may be unrealistic. If your existing dogs can handle the presence of a new dog, it's important you pay attention to what your own dogs "tell" you about the new dog. I once had a dog that was a far better judge of dogs than I. If he gave a dog lots of personal space I followed his lead, especially if the other dog had a valuable possession, like a toy. My dog's behavior told me that he was avoiding conflict over a possession, which meant the new dog might have possession guarding issues. If he avoided play with a dog I knew there was a reason (usually the other dog was socially challenged or became too aroused). Implement good Structure and Management and advocate for the dog, resident or new, that needs extra personal space or quiet time. Be patient during the 3/3/3 period while the dogs get to know each other.
- **Leash reactivity** – This is when a dog becomes overly aroused – agitated, barking, lunging, overly excited – when it is on leash and sees other dogs, people, or other triggers. Usually this is a result of frustration: a dog trapped on a leash is unable to interact with its environment. This can be simply frustrating, or because the dog is trapped, scary for the dog. What starts out as simple frustration can quickly become toxic, so if your new dog – even the small ones – is reactive on leash, consult a trainer right away. It doesn't get better on its own, and usually just gets worse.
- **Kids and dogs** – As a general rule, dogs that are confident and resilient make the best pets for households with children. Consider it an immediate red flag if your new dog is extremely frightened by or reacts aggressively to your children or grandchildren. A young and boisterous adolescent dog may simply need structure, management and training to learn not to treat the kids like fellow pups. However, a dog that responds negatively to spatial pressure, handling, or with resource guarding around the children is potentially dangerous and will quickly become a management problem. Work with the rescue to determine your options. A good rescue will take the dog back or pay to have the dog evaluated in your home by a trainer.

Read "**Dog Safety for Kids**" at
www.RescueSMART.net

Step 5: TRAINING

Most people don't get a dog so they can practice their obedience training skills. That said, Structure, Management and Activity help a lot of things, but Training helps dogs learn a standard of behavior that allows us to live more casually with them. Kudos to you if competitive obedience or dog sports are on the docket for you and your new dog. That's a whole super-cool world most dog owners will only get to observe as spectators. For the rest of us who simply want a dog that is pleasant to live with and with whom we can share our day-to-day life, there are a few fundamental things we need to teach our new dog. Some of these are lifestyle things which we should do all the time, and some fall into the category of "obedience training" which we can do in a class, with a trainer, or in short sessions on our own. Incorporate a few minutes of play throughout training sessions to keep it fun for both of you.

- **Greeting skills** – Heavy eye contact, a high-happy voice, and lots of touching – the way we humans greet people – all conspire to create a "greeting disorder" in our dogs. To avoid annoying greeting behaviors like jumping, mouthing, barking and overly invasive sniffing, read article **Help! My Dog Has a Greeting**

Print out the "**Dog in Training door sign**" and read "**Help! My dog has a greeting disorder**" at
www.RescueSMART.net

Disorder and print out the **Dog in Training** door sign to set your new dog up for success in the manners department.

- **Name change** – If you'd like to change your new dog's name, it's easy.
 1. Get a handful of small, tasty treats (use kibble if the dog likes it)
 2. Sit in a quiet area
 3. Say the new name and immediately offer a treat, e.g. "Lilly" then treat.
 4. Do this 20 times rapidly in a row.
 5. Repeat this exercise a couple times a day for a few days.
 6. Is it working? When the dog isn't looking directly at you (but isn't totally distracted by something else), say her name and see if she turns her attention toward you. If she does, she's getting it. If she doesn't, keep at it.
- **"Let's Go" with a long line** – "Let's Go" simply means to check in and follow. I actually use "Let's Go" more often than a formal "Come" command because it has momentum, and dogs love momentum.
- **"Go on"** – The opposite of "Let's Go", "Go on" asks a dog to get out of a certain area or to give you space by turning and walking away. I use this command *a lot* with new dogs in high-value areas like the kitchen. This works well if your dog doesn't have a solid "Place" command (i.e. "Go to your place and stay there"), which most of our new dogs won't.

"Let's Go" and **"Go On"** and **"Wait"** are foundation behaviors all dogs should know. Watch videos at www.RescueSMART.net

 1. Stand with your back to the high-value area (e.g. kitchen or front door) with your dog in front of you.
 2. Give direct eye contact, step toward your dog, raise your arm to point away from you, and say "Go on".
 3. Keep stepping, pointing, and saying "Go on" until your dog *turns its shoulders and walks away*.
 4. I personally want dogs to walk at least 6 feet away, then I really don't care if they choose to just lie down and stare at me. Sometimes they'll just go lay on their beds.
 5. *If your new dog is sensitive to spatial pressure, go very easy on the eye contact, tone of voice, and how forcefully you step toward them.*
 6. *You may not need this command in the early days if your new dog is naturally giving you lots of space. Keep in mind the rule of 3/3/3 and be ready to implement "Go on" when necessary.*
- **"Wait"** – A useful command that requires your dog to check in with you before entering and exiting thresholds like the front door, car, crate, and going up and down stairs. This is to help your dog learn how to respect your personal space and it is for your dog's safety. Bolting out of front doors and cars is dangerous. So is barreling through you as you walk down the stairs. To teach "wait":
 1. Stand between threshold and dog, facing your dog.
 2. If he is crowding you use your body to apply spatial pressure and step toward him. You can hold up your hand in a "Stay" gesture or flutter your hand like "back up".
 3. When he backs up, say "Wait" and give him the "Stay" hand.

4. If in a doorway, simply turn and walk through the door and dog will follow. If, when you turn, the dog tries to rush past you, quickly face him again and start over. You may need to say “Wait” with the “Stay” hand gesture a few times.
 5. If loading into or out of a car or crate, say “Wait” and then “OK” (release word) and gesture into or out of car or crate.
 6. A leash is useful for this exercise, especially if you have a big or enthusiastic dog, but don’t rely solely on the leash. Practice using spatial pressure with your body to communicate the message.
- **Leash Walking** – Unless you have a good amount of dog handling experience, teaching a dog to walk properly on leash without pulling isn’t easy. Start working with a trainer on this as soon as you can. If you want to jump right in, I usually start a dog on a slip lead or martingale collar until I get a sense of her desire to pull (aka oppositional reflex). If she’s a committed puller and will pull until she’s choking herself, try a suitcase wrap with a leash where you run the leash from the collar down the dog’s back and wrap it around the dog’s waist and back under the leash to create a harness-type contraption that will apply pressure under front legs or behind rib cage (depending on where you wrap it) when the dog pulls. It will slow most dogs down a little bit, but if the dog freaks out and starts to alligator roll, abandon mission until you can work with a professional. Harnesses can exacerbate a dog’s pulling on leash, but using a front-clip harness until you can work with a trainer isn’t the end of the world. If you have experience with head halters (like Halti or Gentle Leader or my favorite one-size-fits-all head halter by Genuine Dog Gear) you can try one of those. Keep in mind most dogs will balk at wearing a head halter at first, so proper conditioning is important. Regardless of what tool you use, make sure it’s secure and your dog cannot back out of it. Again, most people need to work with a trainer to teach this important skill to their new dog.
- The “**Suitcase Wrap**” is a way to manage a dog that pulls. Watch the video at www.RescueSMART.net
- **“Touch”** (hand targeting) - This seemingly frivolous exercise actually has many useful applications and is a great activity to get your new dog’s mind into work mode. It’s a great relationship builder, too. Targeting can be used to boost the confidence level of a timid dog and help keep a dog’s attention focused on you instead of on distractions. It’s easy to train, fun and dogs love it! To teach “Touch”:
 1. Stand on the dog’s leash so you have both hands free (or work with no leash if you’re in a safe place and your dog isn’t too distracted). If you have a really small dog, you may need to sit in a chair or on the floor.
 2. Put a treat in your palm; either hold it there with your thumb or put it in between your fingers.
 3. With your palm facing the dog, about 6 inches away from the dog at nose level, say “Touch”. Most dogs will investigate your hand with a nose touch.
 4. When the dog’s nose touches your hand, mark with “Yes!” and give him the treat.
 5. DO THIS 3 TIMES in a row, giving the dog the treat from the target hand.
 6. Then, present the same hand but EMPTY. Say “Touch”. If the dog doesn’t touch your target hand, simply move it a bit, wiggle your fingers, anything to encourage the dog to investigate your hand.
 7. When your dog touches your empty hand, say “Yes” and give a treat from your OTHER HAND. Repeat a few times. Most dogs make a quick connection between touching your hand and getting a reward.

8. When you are confident the dog will touch your hand at 6 inches away (basic rule of thumb is 9 out of 10 times), practice moving your hand a bit farther away so the dog has to stretch to reach it. Some dogs are fine with this change, others will need to go more slowly.
 9. When this is reliable, refrain from rewarding unless you have given the verbal cue “Touch”. This way the dog learns to touch your hand when requested.
 10. Practice moving your hand on different sides of the dog and in different areas of the space you’re working in.
 11. Practice in new environments (adding distractions).
- **“Look” or “Watch Me”** – A command that asks your dog to make and hold eye contact with you. This exercise is useful for all dogs, and is an excellent substitute behavior for dogs that are reactive on leash or are nervous in new situations. To teach “Look” or “Watch Me”:

Step 1: Reward voluntary eye contact

1. Have a treat bag or handful of small, tasty treats.
2. Start in an area with no distractions, someplace the dog is somewhat accustomed to. Use a leash if necessary to keep your dog from wandering off.
3. Stand quietly and wait for your dog to look at you or, for shy dogs, even in your general direction.
4. When she does, say “Yes!” and give her a treat.
5. If she looks away (at the treat bag or your hand) simply wait for her to look back at you.
6. When she does, say “Yes!” and give her a treat.
7. Do the above rapidly and every time she looks at you or as she is holding eye contact.
8. For brief lapses of attention, you can say your dog’s name and reward for eye contact.

Step 2. Reward the choice for attention (rather than looking at reward). Add verbal cue “Look” or “Watch Me”

1. Hold treats in both hands out at your sides (like Jesus on a cross)
2. Most dogs will focus on the baited hands for a few moments before they look at you like “hey, where’s the treat?”. When they do make eye contact with you, say “Yes” and give a treat from either hand.
3. Do this a few times, moving your hands closer to your face if it is too distracting for your dog when your arms are outstretched.
4. Add the verbal cue “Look” or “Watch Me” and use this cue to get and maintain eye contact going forward.
5. Say “Yes” and reward every time she looks at you or as she is holding eye contact.

Step 3: Add distractions to Step 2.

1. Move to the backyard, the front yard, and down the street to practice.
2. If your dog is leash reactive, practice this command in the presence of other dogs but at a distance your dog will still be able to focus on you, or at least give you intermittent attention. Work with a trainer if you’re having problems with this.

Rescue S.M.A.R.T.: not always enough

By following the Rescue S.M.A.R.T. protocol, you're giving your adopted dog the best chance possible at successfully integrating into your home and your life. Wouldn't it be great if following the recipe worked every time? We wish.

Those of us who have been in this game long enough know that even when we do everything "right" with a dog in our care, it doesn't always work. There are times when a dog has problems – behavior or physical – that become more than we can reasonably expect someone to handle. Sure, some folks give up more easily than others, and that can be frustrating, but in my decades of experience I have found that *most people* have good intentions and want to do the right thing. And *most rescues* want to provide fosters and adopters with as much education and support as possible, which was my goal in creating Rescue S.M.A.R.T.

Sometimes we can do everything "right" and it still doesn't work out. There are times when a dog has behavioral or physical problems that are more than we can reasonably expect someone to handle.

All that said, the reasonable dog welfare *advocates* among us know that adopting a dog is a crap shoot: you can do everything right and it still might not work out. Hopefully, if you have to make the very painful and difficult decision that your new dog isn't working out, you are not made to feel guilty or shamed by *activists* who loudly scream from their social media platforms about how they'd live in their car with their dog if they had to. Know that there are real and reasonable folks in dog rescue that don't expect you to take up residence in your car with your dog.

So, thank you for fostering or adopting. And thank you for giving it your best shot. Your commitment humbles us every day and is the reason we in dog rescue are able to do what we do.