

Getting to Know Your New Rescue GSD

Whilst many people adopting from this rescue have previously owned a German Shepherd, your new dog will need time to get to know you and his new home.

We have learnt from many years of experience in GSD rescue, that following a few basic rules will help your new dog quickly settle into his new home and bond with his new family.

Please take a moment to read these tips to ensure that this is a happy and successful rehoming.

Taking Your New Dog Home

Please take either a choke chain or body harness together with a secure lead when you go to collect your new dog. Do not rely on a normal collar as dogs can easily slip these. Once your dog knows you a normal collar or half choke will be fine.

When you go to collect your dog, make sure you spend a little time with him first and not just bundle him into the back of your car. Take him for a walk on his lead so that you become familiar to him.

You should ideally transport the dog in the back of the car behind a dog guard or in a traveling crate at the back if you don't have a guard. Do not let the dog jump all over the seats. The dog needs to be safely confined whilst you are driving. Leave his lead on so that you have something to grab hold of when you get home and need to take him out of the car.

Prior to opening the back of the car, it is a good idea for someone to get into the back seat and hold onto the dogs lead so that he can't bolt once the back is opened up. The person at the back can then take hold of the lead and allow the dog out of the car.

Arriving Home

German Shepherds are usually wary of strangers so don't overwhelm him with fuss and attention when you first take him home. He doesn't know you and you don't yet know him.

Don't arrange a welcoming committee. Do not invite friends, relatives or neighbours around to meet your new dog until he has had at least a few days to settle in.

On arrival at your home take the dog on his lead around the garden and let him have a sniff and maybe go to the toilet. He will be naturally curious.

Take him into the house and make sure that all external doors and low windows (possible escape routes) are shut. Leave his lead on but drop it on the floor so that he is free to wander around and have a look at his new home. If you have stairs block them off if you don't want him to go upstairs.

Put a bowl of clean cold water down for him where you will normally be placing it. Make sure he knows where it is. Do not make a fuss of the dog, just let him get to know his new house while you sit down and keep a watchful eye on him.

You may have bought him a new bed so make sure he knows where that is and encourage him to use it.

Exercise

GSD's need more exercise than just about any other breed but for the first 1-2 weeks you should concentrate on regular lead walking exercise.

Do not let him off his lead for the first 2 weeks or until you are sure that he will come back when called. Encourage your dog to toilet whilst out walking and ensure you pick up any solid waste and take it home with you.

Don't chastise your dog if he has the odd accident in the house, he will soon learn where he should be going to do it.

Feeding

When dogs go to new homes they often go off their food for a couple of days. Do not buy fancy foods to try and tempt him to eat, stick to what you want him to have as his normal diet. Do not worry if he doesn't eat at first, he will not starve himself. Large breeds like GSD's should have their food allowance split into 2 meals a day.

Put his food down, and leave it for 15 minutes. If he doesn't eat it, lift the dish and cover. Try doing the same again 2 hours later. Again if he doesn't eat, lift the dish.

Never leave food down on the floor for him to help himself when he feels like it.

He eats when you give him food not when he feels like it. This is important to establish his correct position in the pack.

Do not over feed a GSD. They should be lean and muscular not fat and flabby

Sleeping

It is advisable not to allow your German Shepherd dog into the bedroom but let him sleep in the kitchen or other suitable room where he should have his own bed or blanket to lie on. If he whines, do not give into him. He needs to learn that he has his own place to sleep.

Introducing strangers

GSD's are naturally protective and territorial so when new people visit your house, he will need to be introduced to them properly so that he accepts them being there. You may need to put your dog into another room, let your guests into the house and then introduce your dog to your guests. If you are unsure how he will react to your visitors keep him on a lead until he accepts them being in his house.

The more you allow your dog to meet people the less of an issue it will become.

Establishing order

When a dog is introduced into a new home it has to go through a period of adjustment. If you have other animals in your home the new dog will need to establish his position within the new canine and human pack. The first few weeks of bringing your GSD into your home is the most important time for establishing rules for the dog, it is up to you to make rules that your dog needs to abide by in order to be a happy member of your family. The most important thing is consistency.

Once you have made the rules you must ensure your dog abides by them every time, if you change the rules or only apply them sometimes then your dog can become confused. Unfortunately many dogs who end up in Rescue kennels have not been given clear rules from their owners in the past and this may have contributed to them entering Rescue premises.

So before the dog comes home, sit down and decide what will make the relationship work for you and your family. This can be things like, where he will eat, will he be allowed in all the rooms of the house, how you expect him to behave when you have visitors, etc etc,

Some pet owners make very common mistakes with their dogs. For example they allow the dog on the furniture or bed, this is asking for trouble with some dogs. Some dogs see the bed or the furniture as being the best place and in canine terms the pack leader gets the best place. It is a fact that most dog bites occur in the home and the most common place is the bedroom because the dog has taken control of the bed. If your dog is dominant in any way and you allow it to take over the bed or furniture you may well find that problems will develop. Avoidance is better than cure.

Think about a wolf pack, in every wolf pack there is an alpha male and female. They are the pack leaders and it is their role to protect their pack, the other members of the pack defer to the leaders. In the human canine pack the humans must always be the leaders. The dog is the bottom of the pack.

It is simple to make yourself a pack leader, there is no need for aggression or dominance of the dog. A quiet and calm but assertive attitude is necessary; the dog soon gets the message.

The following are very simple guidelines to help you establish your role with your dog. It is suggested you establish your role before taking your dog to dog training of any sort as he will respond much better to you if he respects you as his leader.

- Never allow dogs on furniture or beds – this is the place of the pack leader ie you and your family
- Toys are for fun and play times, however they are YOUR toys, after a game take the toys away, your dog will soon begin to really look forward to playing games with your toys. Leaving toys with dogs can sometimes create dominance or possible aggression problems, until you know your dogs personality it is better to remove the toys and avoid conflict.
- Feed your dog after you have eaten – pack leaders always eat first.
- Make the dog earn everything – before he is fed ask him to sit, when he sits then he gets his meal. Don't give tit bits you will make your dog fat, Use other rewards such as a ball. Your dog should be happy to obey on voice command not for food. If you are taking him a walk make him sit while you put the lead on. He is earning a reward for something he likes and at the same time realizing that you as pack leader are giving him the opportunity of doing something he likes.
- If your dog is prone to dominance refrain from tugging games that encourage him to growl and use strength to win a game. You as pack leader should be winning games and if you are playing tug with a 90lb GSD then it is unlikely that you will win!
- If the dog persistently does something wrong for example jumping on furniture, do not lose your temper, simply remove the dog and tell him NO firmly. If he continues to behave badly then remove him to a crate or another room. Dogs catch on very quickly, he may try it again but if you keep the same consistent approach the message will go in.

- Daily grooming is a must, not just because the dog needs it or enjoys it, it also establishes you as the leader of the pack. Pay attention to the back of the shoulders and top of the head, dominant dogs will try to avoid this area being groomed but gently persist and he will get the message that you are in charge.
- When going through doors or down stairs your dog should allow you to go first, this is your right as his leader. A lot of dogs push their way out of the house or run downstairs before you. If this is the case you need to get your dog into the habit of sitting and allowing you through first.

Pack structure is a fascinating subject and there are many articles about this, the above guidelines are easy to apply and could make the difference between you having a family pet that is well behaved and minds what you say or an out of control dog. Some dogs will never ever challenge their owners but some dogs coming into a new environment may try it on. These simple measures will ensure your dog is treated fairly and consistently and know the rules of your household.

NEVER USE AGGRESSIVE DOMINANCE METHODS WITH YOUR DOG LIKE EYE TO EYE CONTACT OR ALPHA ROLLS, THESE METHODS ARE ASKING FOR TROUBLE

The important thing to remember is that dogs like routine, it makes them feel secure so try and get into a regular pattern to help him quickly become accustomed to his new home and family. He needs to have set boundaries so that he knows what is and what is not acceptable.

INTRODUCING YOUR DOG TO CATS IN YOUR HOME

This can be achieved with most dogs if the owner is consistent in their approach. There are exceptions, some dogs will never take to cats and will always be a danger to cats in your home.

Most dogs learn to live with cats but will still regard other cats outside the home as prey. Some dogs live well with their own cats in the house but will chase the family cat in the garden. It is up to you to put the groundwork in and learn how your dog will react with cats.

In the first stages never allow the dog into the home and allow it free reign when your cats are about. Restrict the cat to another room initially; this will prevent any possible accidents occurring.

Once you know your dog a little better you can begin introducing cat to dog. The easiest way to do this is to use a crate or cage. The dog goes into the crate and the cat is allowed into the room. Most cats will hiss and arch their back, but curiosity eventually gets the better of them and they will begin to investigate the dog crate. If the dog begins to growl or bark at the cat, verbally tell him off. This exercise gives you a good indication of how the dog will react to the cat when he is out of the cage.

If the dog continues to show off, cover the cage with a blanket and ignore the dog, he will normally quieten down. If this happens the introductions will take longer and require more patience on your part but eventually the dog should learn that the cat is there by your request and he has to obey your rules, i.e.: be quiet and tolerate the cat smelling round the cage.

If he continues to bark and growl it may be worth getting a spray bottle and spraying clear water at the dog when he begins barking, give the command NO firmly. The spray of water should get his attention and make him listen to your command.

Do this exercise with your cat and dog daily at least. At all other times the cat and dog must be separated during this training period. After a week of the dog not barking or showing any aggression towards the cat you can move onto the next stage.

You will have assessed your dog's reaction to the cat during this period. If the dog was initially noisy and showed aggression it may be best to introduce your dog to your cat whilst he is wearing a muzzle. It is better to prevent an accident. Once he has reached the stage of not barking then allow him out of the cage, but keep him on the lead. If he begins to react then you must give him a firm command NO and use the water spray if necessary. He has to learn that you will not tolerate his behaviour.

If he was always accepting of the cat whilst he was in the cage, you may feel you trust him enough to meet the cat without a muzzle. Use the lead though as that gives you extra control if he gets over excited. You must monitor this meeting very carefully to ensure that your cat is safe; it takes less than a couple of seconds for a dog to snap at the cat.

Hopefully all will be well and your dog will be ok with the cat. Normally the cat will retreat to a safe height when this introduction is made.

Continue with these sessions, the dog on the lead and muzzle if necessary and the cat in the same room. Sit and watch TV or read a book. Eventually the dog should just lie down and ignore the cat and you may find the cat will also relax and settle down to sleep.

You should find that the dog will begin to ignore the cat, when this happens you can take the lead off and have them together still under supervision.

It can take a long time if the dog was initially cat aggressive. Never assume that because your dog is ok with the cat when you are there that he will be ok on his own. Out of sight is out of mind and he may go back to his previous behaviour. Also remember that a lot of GSDs have a prey drive instinct, this is what makes them good working dogs, however it also makes them prone to chasing small animals. If you are in the garden with the dog and the cat appears the dog will more than likely chase the cat, try to make allowances for this and give the cat escape routes that the dog can't get through. Cats are clever creatures and if they are chased once they will often find an alternative route into the house.

Don't rush these introductions, its better to take time and make sure rather than push it and let accidents happen.

Training

We do not recommend the use of food tit bits as a reward for training. Not only is there a good chance that you will make your dog fat, but he may only then do what you want him to, if food is on offer. Your dog should be trained to voice command and praise will be enough reward for him if he gets it right. At the end of a training session you can reward him with a toy such as a ball for a bit of fun time.

Do not attempt any formal training until your dog has had time to get to know you. Once your dog has settled in you may wish to consider joining a training club so that you keep your dog well socialised with other dogs, gets used to lots of people and ensure that he learns how to behave in public. It is your responsibility to keep your dog under control and ensure that he does not become a nuisance or a danger in public.

Recall

The most important exercise to train your dog is the recall. Until your dog comes to you every time you call, it you should not let your dog off the lead when out.

Begin training recall in your own home, call the dog to you by saying the dogs name to get his attention and then give the command 'Come' As soon as the dog shows he is coming towards you continue to call him to you and move away from the dog. Just keep doing this in the home until he knows the command.

Once you feel your dog knows the command you can then move into an area with more distractions ie the garden. At this stage we do not want the dog to fail, so putting the dog on a long lead or line is a good idea. If he becomes distracted with smells ect. You can tug the lead to get his attention and draw him in towards you. Do not scold him if he make mistakes, he is still learning.

Walk around your garden with your dog on a long lead and let his attention wander, let him smell etc, when you feel he is distracted say his name and give the command 'come'. If you have done the ground work in the house he will know the command and know he is going to be praised. Reward as soon as he returns to you, he doesn't need to sit unless you intend to go on and do more formalized obedience, the recall you are training is for your dogs safety. Once you feel confident, bring in more distractions, keep the dog on a long lead, but have your partner or kids come into the garden. Let him socialize with them and then when his mind is off you, call him and give the command 'Come'. If he does not come at once, use the lead to draw him into you, praise him and make a big fuss. Repeat the exercise until he gets it.

In this exercise the dog must respond to you as soon as you give the command 'Come' It takes time and patience with some dogs. Never rush this training, going to fast will result in mistakes, and those mistakes are handler mistakes never the dogs, you are the one assessing the level of understanding your dog has.

When you are having consistent good results in the garden practice the exercise when out walking with your dog. He still needs to be on a long lead for this exercise. Just call him to you when he is otherwise occupied. You are looking for an immediate response. At this stage he should know the command and know he is going to get praised. If the outside attractions are too much for him then you may need to consider changing tack and maybe use a toy as a reward

Only when he is coming every time should you consider doing this exercise off the lead, try it first in an area where there are few distractions eg not many walkers etc. Confidence will grow as you realize the early groundwork is paying off and you have an obedient dog that comes every time you call.

Down Stay

To get your dog to go down, hold your hand down to the floor and encourage your dog to go down for it. It may take several efforts initially to get your dog into the down position but eventually he will get the message. As soon as he begins lowering his body to the floor, begin praising him and gently ease him into a down position. Then continue to praise

Eg 'good boy,stay down'. This is positive re enforcement, he is in the down, he is learning the word and getting a reward for being in that position. Continue with the command 'stay down' until you feel he has been down for long enough (a few seconds in the first instance and moving onto 2 or 3 minutes) Then pat the dog and tell him he is a good dog and release him from the exercise.

Continue these short sessions around the house for a week or until your dog goes down readily and stays down while you are talking to him and praising him.

In the early stages do not call you dog to you from the down position; this may encourage him to break the down in later training. At this stage always return to your dog before releasing him from the exercise.

Once you feel your dog knows the word down and will stay down patiently you can begin to take a few steps away from him, always returning and praising him and then walking away again if he has not broken the down stay. Push forward gradually with this training, its better to take time than to allow the dog to make mistakes.

Begin to walk right around the dog, still giving the command 'stay down' in a calm voice. Praise him when you get back to his side. Then release him from the exercise with loads of praise and fuss or even a game with a toy.

This continues until you can leave the dog for a few minutes without him getting up. Once this stage is achieved try the exercise when you are out walking with the dog, keep him on the lead though as there are loads of distractions. When training this outdoors go back to the basic stay exercise until you are sure he will not break the down stay and gradually build up.

Sit Stay

This is often one of the easier exercises to teach as most dogs will naturally sit if you hold your hand over their head to make them put their nose in the air, if you move towards the dog as he does this you will probably find his rear end goes down. As soon as this happens give the praise and command 'Good dog. Sit'. Practice the sit for a time until it is second nature to him, this normally does not take long.

Once he has the sit command practice having him sit whilst saying 'Good boy- sit and stay' continue to give him commands whilst he is in that position which will reinforce the training.

Gradually take two steps away from your dog, all the time giving the sit and stay command in a calm voice. If he gets up just go back a stage in the training.

Build up on this exercise in the same way as in the down stay until you can sit your dog and walk away. If he breaks the stay at any stage it is best to ignore it and just go back a stage until he is really steady.

Remember training does not have to be done in a week! There is no time limit on training your dog and it is a really good time for bonding with your dog.

Remember. There is a wealth of experience in the rescue so if you do have any problems we are here to offer help and advice.