

## WHAT TO EXPECT WITH YOUR NEW RESCUE DOG



### GERMAN SHEPHERD RESCUE OF SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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Congratulations on the new addition to your family! We are delighted that you made the decision to give a second chance to a "pre-owned" dog.

Below is a discussion of some issues that might arise in the course of the next couple of weeks as you, your kids, and/or your existing pets try to integrate your rescue dog into your home.

### How do I Get the Dog Used to His New Home?



One of the most important parts of having your dog make a good adjustment is one simple word - ROUTINE. Dogs love routine!! This is not to say that they don't enjoy a walk in a completely new park or the addition of some special treat or food to their diet, but, overall, they do better when they know what to expect. Dogs are creatures of habit and the more they can come to anticipate what is going to happen when and rely upon your consistency, the less stress they will feel and the less likely they will be to act out. Therefore, to the extent reasonably possible, try to walk your dog around the same times each day, feed the dog (preferably twice

a day to reduce the risk of bloat) approximately the same time each day and in the same place, let the dog sleep in the same place each evening, perhaps give a small treat right before bed each night to let the dog know it is time for sleep, etc. Especially during the first few weeks with you, this predictability and routine will help to calm your new dog and ease his adjustment into unfamiliar surroundings.

It is also very important during your initial acquaintance with your new dog to establish boundaries and to make it clear that you are leader of the pack in the household. For this reason, we suggest that you not pamper and cater to the dog too much, although you should give it attention and love in order to establish bonding. Some things we **DO NOT RECOMMEND** during your first few weeks (or in some cases - ever!!) with the dog are:

1. allowing the dog to sleep on the bed;
2. allowing the dog to sleep on any other furniture;
3. laying on the floor with the dog (this is a dominance issue and should be avoided until your family and the dog are fully acquainted);
4. playing any type of tug game (another dominance issue), whether with a toy or with the dog's leash during walks;
5. allowing the dog to nip at you or bite on your hand or arm;
6. allowing the dog to get away with growling at you when you attempt to make it do what you want it to do (a very firm "NO" is in order); and
7. allowing the dog to ignore the commands you give it (when you know perfectly well the dog does know that command). You must make the dog comply or the dog will simply begin to ignore you!

### What Should I Feed The Dog?

This question is frequently asked and GSR-SP does not believe that there is any one brand of dog food that you must use. We do recommend that you purchase a quality food, generally sold at pet stores and boarding kennels. We also recommend that you start off, if at all possible, by feeding the same food the dog was getting at his foster home. You can mix this food with the new food you plan to feed and gradually wean the dog off of it, but it will be helpful to the dog's initial adjustment to at least have some continuity in the food he is being fed.



We do suggest that you feed **ONLY DRY FOOD** for at least the first few days. Canned food tends to give some dogs a case of the runs. Your new GS may already be prone to diarrhea simply based on the fact that he is stressed by not knowing why his home has changed again and, often, by a change in the water he is drinking. You can gradually add some canned food, initially in small amounts (1/2 can or less), after the first 3 or 4 days. **DO** premoisten the dry dog food, however to reduce the risk of bloat (you can use water, a little gravy from your human food, canned broth, etc.)

**DO NOT FEED YOUR DOG ANY KIND OF BONES FROM COOKED MEAT (I.E., CHICKEN, PORK, BEEF) AS THESE BONES MAY SPLINTER AND CAUSE SERIOUS INJURY.** If you wish to give your dog any kind of bone, purchase **UNCOOKED** beef bones (shin bones, etc.) at your butcher or

market.

**DO NOT FEED YOUR DOG CHOCOLATE** - It is poisonous to dogs!

We do recommend feeding **two times per day** in order to reduce the risk of your dog suffering an episode of bloat, a truly life-threatening disorder caused by the buildup of gas in the stomach. It is believed that large quantities of dry food, especially when coupled with consumption of water, may lead to the expansion of the food in the stomach and the inducement of a bloat condition. It is also **strongly recommended** that you do not allow your dog to engage in any rigorous exercise or running around within approximately one (1) hour after eating, also to reduce the risk of bloat.

### Does the Dog Need Any Medications?

Prior to being adopted, your GS was tested for heartworm and was probably put on heartworm preventative medication. This medication needs to continue to be given once per month in order to guard against heartworm, a serious and potentially life-ending problem. You should visit your veterinarian and purchase heartworm medication (available in various forms, including chewable tablets) and keep your dog on this medication 12 months of the year. Otherwise, you will have to get your dog retested (a blood test) before you can begin giving the medication again. GSR-SP should have provided you with the last date on which heartworm meds were given and when the next dose is due.

If your particular GS dog has other medical problems or needs, these will have been discussed with you prior to adoption and all veterinary records given to you. Please visit your vet if you have questions about any medical conditions.

### How Do I Introduce My New GS to My Existing Pets?

#### Other Dogs

If you own one or more dogs already, you absolutely **MUST** introduce the dogs on neutral territory. This means that you cannot simply walk in your door with your new GS and expect your existing dog(s) to greet the GS with open arms!!! Dogs are territorial animals and your existing dogs have already established your house, your yard and your car (if they get car rides) as "their" territory. Therefore, they are unlikely to welcome another animal in those areas and, in fact, are likely to become aggressive and protective of that space.

The best way to introduce the new GS is to take him and your existing dog(s) for a walk down the street or to a park together. Keep the dogs on leash and under control while you allow them to sniff and get acquainted. Quickly reprimand either dog if it starts to become aggressive. You may notice the dogs bumping against one another, doing



various spins and turns and engaging in a great deal of sniffing. All of this is part of the normal "get-acquainted" ritual and is the beginning of defining what "pack-position" each dog will occupy. If either dog lunges or attempts to bite at the other dog, they should be separated, given a cooling down period and then you should begin again to try to introduce them. Sometimes walking the two dogs on opposite sides of a fence (which creates a physical barrier) is advisable for dogs who seem to be acting somewhat aggressively toward each other.

There is no specific period of time which we can tell you to spend introducing the dogs. Some dogs will hit it off in a matter of moments, others will take weeks to accept each other. Occasionally, the dogs simply will not be compatible and you will not be able to keep both dogs.

It is also important to remember that your rescue dog may be somewhat frightened and unsure of him or herself in the first few days, or even weeks. This can mean that the dog can act more aggressively than usual (out of fear or stress) or it may mean that the dog will seem very submissive and then evolve into a more assertive dog as it begins to gain its confidence. For this reason, we recommend that you do not leave the GS alone, **unconfined**, with your dog(s) for at least the first couple of weeks. You can crate the GS and/or your existing dogs, you can leave them in separate rooms, but they should not be left freely wandering alone in your home until you are more certain of their compatibility!

Finally, remember to give the dogs some separate space at feeding time. Even best-buddy dogs can become possessive of their food, sometimes leading to a dog fight. Furthermore, if you are feeding different foods (i.e., your one dog is fat and trying to lose weight and your new GS is an underweight stray that needs to put on the pounds), separate dining avoids the cross-over effect of the dogs switching bowls.

### **Cats and Other Pets**



People always ask how to tell if the dog is going to be "good with the cats" and there is no easy answer to this question. There are many dogs who will chase cats in play, although it is very unlikely that the dog will ever hurt the cat. There are a few dogs who are truly predatory and who cannot co-exist with cats or other small pets. The question asked time and time again is: "How do I know the difference?" In general, predatory dogs are very obsessive about the cat or other small animal. It is very difficult to break their concentration on the cat, they will lunge, they will become fixated on the animal. If the dog bites the cat (as opposed to just mouthing it) or picks the cat up in his mouth and begins to shake it, it is definitely NOT cat compatible. Such a dog does not belong in a household with cats, with many small breeds of dog or with other small pets like gerbils, hamsters and/or birds. Truly predatory German Shepherds have been known to literally rip open a bird or small rodent cage and kill the animal.

On the other hand, there are a great many dogs who will chase a cat, may even paw it or mouth it, but all of this is done either in play or in an almost maternal manner and the dog is not a threat to the cat. Shepherds, being herding dogs, sometimes decide to take responsibility for the "rounding up" of the cats. Again, it is not aggressive or predatory behavior. You partly must read your cat's signals to determine whether the dog is a threat. This does not mean, however, that a dog is incompatible with cats simply because your cat runs!! The cat's reaction to the dog will also depend upon the cat's personality (i.e., is it bold?, is it afraid of its own shadow?, etc.) and upon how much exposure the cat has had to other dogs.

As a general rule, it will almost always take a cat longer to adjust to a new dog in the household than it will take a dog to adapt to another dog. Cats are not fond of change in their routine and your introduction of a new dog into your home has upset the status quo. Therefore, be prepared to give your cat several months to make the adjustment. Make sure that your cat has a safe place to escape from the dog when it doesn't want to be bothered. As with the dogs, do not leave your new GS alone with the cat in the first few weeks or so.

## What About a Crate?



Keeping your new GS separate from your other household pets raises the question of HOW? The best and safest answer is a crate. For people who have never crated a dog before, the concept often seems cruel and inhumane. Time and time again, we have adopters tell us that they do not feel right "caging" the dog. It is an understandable feeling, but it fails to take into account some very basic principles.

First, dogs have descended from wolves, animals who make their homes in caves and dens. These caves and dens provide a safe haven for the wolf and, similarly, a crate provides the same kind of security to a dog. If properly introduced to the crate and if used in a way that does not send a message of punishment and chastising, a crate can be a wonderful tool for you and your dog. There are several important factors to remember:

1. The size of the crate must be right for the dog. The crate should be large enough for your dog to stand in and to turn around in, yet not so big that he literally only occupies half of it.
2. The crate should have a towel, old rug or old blanket for your dog to lay upon (unless your dog shreds these items or always seems to push the liner aside!).
3. If you are leaving your dog crated for long periods, there should be an available source of water in the crate.
4. Again, if your dog will be spending extended time in the crate, some toy or bone for him to occupy himself with is a good idea.
5. The crate should face out to an open area so your dog can see what is around him and should be fairly close to a door where you can take him directly outside when you release him.
6. You must build your dog up to spending time in a crate. If, for example, you adopt a dog who has spent little or no time in a crate before, you cannot put him in there for 10 hours on the first day and leave for work. You must do short increments of time in the crate and gradually increase the time spent there.
7. Whenever you return to your home after crating your dog, the VERY FIRST THING you should do is let the dog out to relieve himself. Crates are very effective at helping to housebreak a dog as the dog does not want to soil in the area where it is confined. However, you have to let the dog know that it can expect to be allowed out to use the outdoor facilities as soon as you return home! Otherwise, you need to find someone that you and the dog like and trust to come and walk the dog or let him out to relieve himself while you are gone. There are many pet-sitting/pet-walking services available these days in the age of the active family!
8. Do not use the crate for punishment. If every time your dog does something you disapprove of you respond by saying "Bad Dog - Get in the Crate!", your dog will come to have a negative association with the crate. You must make the crate your dog's personal space and let him come to think of it as his own private den. You may notice that your dog, over time, begins to go into its crate on its own whenever it feels the need for some quiet time (i.e., when the kids have been tugging on the dog too many times, when you have lots of house guests and the dog is feeling overwhelmed, etc.)
9. Some dogs enjoy sleeping in their crates at night, particularly if they are near to where the humans in the family are sleeping. Other dogs, when crated at night, become howlers and whiners! If you want to confine your dog at night, especially during the first few days with you (advisable, again, if you have other animals in the house), then you may experience a few sleepless nights while you "wait out" the howling. The dog will eventually settle down - you just have to outlast him!! Sometimes covering the crate with a blanket or towel will help the dog to settle down.

10. Finally, there are a few dogs that are really just not crateable. We refer to them as "The Great Houdinis". Seems no matter what kind of crate you put them into and no matter how much you rig it up to keep it closed, they break out. For this reason also, we suggest that you test the dog in short spans of time at the beginning before leaving your home for several hours thinking your dog is safely confined to his crate, only to return and be met at the door by the "crated" dog!!

### **Dogs and Kids**

Dogs are wonderful companions for children and most German Shepherds adore kids. However, there are some basic guidelines which must be followed for the safety of everyone:

1. Do not leave your children alone unsupervised with the dog, particularly if they are very young, until you really know the dog's personality and how your kids interact. Children under 3 years of age should probably never be left completely alone with a dog. Injuries sometimes result completely accidentally when the child is knocked over by the dog or when the child starts trying to play tug or some other game that causes the dog to play a bit rough. [NOTE: Tug is a game you should avoid encouraging with your dog, especially if he shows some aggressive tendency to begin with.]
2. Do not let your kids put their hands into the dog bowl while the dog is eating. Many, many dogs, although wonderful in every other respect, become territorial about their food. Avoid problems by keeping children away from bowls during doggie dinner!
3. The same rule should apply when the dog lays down to chew on a favorite bone - let the dog have some "private time" and encourage the kids to leave him alone then.
4. Teach your children the proper way to behave around animals. They should approach a dog they do not know in a cautious manner and allow the dog to sniff them before attempting to pet the dog. Most of the time, it is best to teach your kids to avoid direct eye contact with a dog since some dogs perceive this as a dominance/aggressive behavior. Children should also be taught that it is unkind to pull on a dog's tail or ears, poke it in the eyes, pull toys out of its mouth, etc. Although many dogs will tolerate this from the "small people," it is best that children be taught to show respect to all dogs to avoid possible injury. When a dog is sleeping, it should be left alone and not startled awake.
5. Do not let your kids walk the dog alone until you know that they can control the dog on a leash. Some dogs (and many German Shepherds are this way) become very protective when on leash. They may, therefore, become somewhat aggressive toward other people or dogs who walk close to them and their master. Children are usually unprepared to handle and control the dog in these situations. Please exercise some caution in this area!
6. Allow your kids to bond with the dog by participating in grooming activities, training activities, etc. Let your dog know that it should consider a "SIT" command from your 7-year old just as seriously as it would consider such a command from you. This may require more work, but most dogs can be taught to obey commands from children. Sometimes, dogs are willing to allow the adults in the household to be leader of the pack, but they are less likely to see children in the same role. Help the relationship between your child and your dog by making sure that the dog understands it cannot control the kids! A "command voice" (sometimes more difficult for women and children to achieve) must be used to convey a stern, firm, no-nonsense tone when giving your dog orders or direction. This does NOT mean screaming - it simply means the tone must be a bit more sharp than when praising the dog. Kids should be permitted to reward compliance from the dog with lots of praise and hugs and an occasional treat (too much "treat reward" makes for a fat dog!!).
7. Be sure to teach your children's friends, as well as your own kids, about the proper way to approach and treat a dog. In particular, you need to help children understand that German Shepherds are protective by nature. As a consequence, they often feel the need to defend their home and their family. This may mean that the neighbors' kids cannot just run right past the dog or let themselves in and out of your back door, particularly if they have not been properly introduced to your GS. Make

sure that you are there to supervise during the initial period of acquainting your GS with neighbors and friends.

### **Behavior Problems**

There are far too many behavior problems that can arise to deal with them all in this handout. Many of the behavioral problems we see in our rescue dogs are simply the result of early-stress in the dog and they "outgrow" the problem as they become acquainted with their new family and comfortable in their new home. All dogs should be given a minimum of two (2) weeks to adjust unless you are truly encountering serious aggression behavior. Some common problems which may occur are:

**Lapse in Housebreaking** - This often occurs due to a combination of factors. First, as mentioned time and time again, the dog is extremely stressed in its first few days with you as he has been moved yet again and doesn't know what is happening, nor is he familiar with its surroundings. This can lead to increased water consumption which, in turn, leads to increased urination and diarrhea. Second, the dog may not really understand where the door is, how to notify you that he needs to go out, etc. Third, the dog may be communicating and you just don't yet know his signals. For example, your existing dog may ask to go out by scratching at the door or sitting by the door and barking; on the other hand, your new GS may ask to go out by licking your hand or by engaging in some other behavior that you think is just attention seeking. It may take you several days or longer to read the dog's signals, but it should usually start to work out within a week or so.

**The Dog Won't Go to the Bathroom** - We frequently get calls from people who are frantic that they have had the dog for a day or more, have walked it miles, and have yet to see the dog relieve itself. Particularly when it comes to finding a "poop spot," some dogs can be very choosy. It is highly unlikely that there is anything wrong with the dog - just be patient. If this problem persists, you do want to contact your vet. However, frequent walks and allowing the dog to sniff until it finds that just right spot will usually take care of the problem! When the dog finally finds a spot, try to make sure that you return to the same area on subsequent walks so the dog will be more likely to relieve himself in the same area again. Eventually this won't be an issue and your dog will probably pee wherever it is walked.

**The Dog Pees Every Time We Say Anything** - Referred to as submissive urination, this can sometimes be a problem with dogs who have come from abusive or other bad home situations. It may be as simple as changing the pitch or tone of your voice when speaking to the dog. It may just be a matter of a few days passing so that you can gain the dog's trust and he begins to outgrow his fear. The absolute worst response to this situation is to begin yelling loudly at the dog or striking him - this will generally cause the problem to grow worse.

**The Dog Loves My Family But He Won't Let Anybody Else in the House** - Part of this may be the fact that your GS has a strong protective streak in him, certainly a trait of the breed generally and stronger in some dogs than others. If your dog is reacting in a protective way, you must communicate that the people coming in are friends and let the dog know that it is okay. Alternatively, it could be that your dog's "over-protectiveness" is a result of a fear-aggression problem. This usually presents itself most apparently when the dog is allowed to go to the door as people are coming in. Often the dog will lunge or nip at the person as they enter. You, as the owner, concerned for the welfare of your guest, will often attempt to deal with this problem by holding the dog back or reprimanding him. Unfortunately, in the fear-aggressive dog, these behaviors generally make the problem worse. To determine if your dog is fear aggressive, look at whether the dog's tail is tucked when it is barking or snarling and whether it is both lunging and backing away when approaching the guest at your home. These are often signs of fear-aggression. The way which we have found most beneficial in dealing with the fear-aggressive dog is the combination of a couple of rules:

1. Train your dog to sit and stay in a spot NOT in front of the door when people are entering. Then follow step #2.
2. If you cannot initially get your dog to comply with the sit-stay command, instruct people entering your

household to ignore the dog for the first several moments -- DO NOT allow them to make eye contact; DO NOT allow them to pet the dog; DO NOT allow them to try to talk to the dog. Often, if the dog is allowed to simply sniff the person and you tell your dog it's okay, everything will be fine after a few minutes.

3. If neither of these approaches works, you may wish to crate your dog or put him outside while somebody is entering your house. After your guest is in and seated, allow the dog to wander over to sniff your guest and again, instruct the guest to just totally ignore the dog. Often the dog will be fine in a few minutes or so.
4. Finally, you can sometimes successfully distract your fear-aggressive dog by either giving him a treat or some kind of toy as people are entering so that he is otherwise occupied and comes to have a good association with this whole process. Again, some dogs will outgrow this behavior as they settle into their new home and gain more of a sense of confidence and belonging.

**The Dog is Chewing Up Our Stuff** - This is usually a combination of a couple of factors. One, you have not given the dog enough "things" that belong to him to occupy himself with - chew bones, stuffed toys, balls, whatever it is he likes. Two, you are leaving your dog loose in your house while you are away instead of using a crate. Your dog may be extremely stressed by this situation and this results in his destructive behavior. Buy a crate and begin using it!



**The Dog Throws Up Every Time We Go In the Car** - This is not an uncommon problem, particularly with dogs who have not done much car riding or whose only association with the car is a bad one (like they only got a ride when it was time to go to the vet for shots!). We have had great success in overcoming this problem with a very simple plan. Purchase a box of BONINE at your local drugstore. It is sold in the same section as Dramamine and other motion sickness remedies, but it is less likely to cause drowsiness. The cost of a box of 12 is probably less than Four Dollars. Give the dog **one** tablet approximately 30-45 minutes before going for a ride. Take very short rides at the beginning - no more than 15 to 20 minutes. Gradually increase the length of the rides, always giving a Bonine before hand. Eventually, you can try discontinuing the Bonine and your dog will probably be fine riding without any medication. Also, remember not to feed your dog within 3 or 4 hours prior to going in the car!

One other note about car rides, please remember that it is LIFE-THREATENING for your dog to be left in the car during warm weather. Your dog can suffer brain damage and/or die from the build up of heat in the car, even if your think you are just leaving him "for a minute." We all know how those big brown eyes and that pathetic face saying "Please take me with you" can sucker you in, but remember that it is for your pet's health and safety that he cannot ride in the car when temperatures start rising above 65 or so, especially on a sunny day.

**The Dog Was So Good When We Got Him and Now He Won't Do Anything We Tell Him To Do** - Many of our GS rescue dogs have spent significant time in a foster home where our volunteers have worked on training commands. Therefore, when you picked up your dog, he probably knew some basic commands. Unfortunately, dogs require continual rehearsal of what they have learned or they seem to conveniently forget to respond! You may have wanted to coddle your dog in its first few days and, unintentionally, you have been allowing it to get away with a lot. Most dogs like to have somebody in charge as being leader of the pack is a heavy responsibility and they would just as soon somebody else take on that job! Your dog will be happy to have you call the shots, but you must be consistent and persistent in doing so. If your dog's response to commands has lapsed, start working on training again and rehearse commands daily. He'll be back in shape in no time!

We hope this information sheet helps to answer a few of the questions you might have. There are no hard and fast rules as every dog is an individual, but there are certain patterns of behavior that we seem to see over and over again and we have found that many of these suggestions help smooth the transition for your new rescue dog and your existing family.

If you have other specific questions or problems persist after you have implemented some of these ideas, please feel free to call us to discuss your concerns (215-969-4115). GSR-SP wants to help you and the dog have a great life together.

**GOOD LUCK!**