

Adopting a Puppy Mill Rescue Dog

Puppy mills are essentially large-scale dog breeding factories, where the dogs are typically housed under deplorable conditions, living in overcrowded, soiled cages with wire floors. Inadequate veterinary care, food, water, physical and psychological stimulation (e.g. exercise or toys), and socialization to species other than dogs are the norm. Females are bred continuously until they no longer can reproduce, at which point they are often killed. The puppies are taken from the mother between 6 and 8 weeks of age, and are sold to pet shops or sold over the Internet.

To the puppy mill owner, profit, not the welfare of the dog, is of utmost importance. Due to the living conditions of these dogs, physical, as well as psychological problems are common. Physical conditions may include heart and kidney disease, visual and hearing impairments, epilepsy, musculoskeletal problems, and respiratory and intestinal disorders just to name a few. Anxiety and fear of humans, and fear of novel situations and objects, due to inadequate exposure during critical periods of development are the most common emotional problems. Puppies removed too young from their mother and littermates, at 6 weeks of age, may also develop behavior problems including aggression. Housetraining the adult dog can be a challenge given their lack of housetraining experience. Leash walking will be a nonexistent skill, and adults in particular will have to learn how to play. Lastly, these dogs tend to be overly sensitive and fearful of handling, including hands reaching toward them to pet them.

Some puppy mill rescue dogs will make fantastic strides in their recovery, yet some may never fully overcome the effects of the puppy mill. The recovery process could take months to years because all dogs have different personalities. Therefore, it's important to be aware of what you are getting into before you adopt a puppy mill rescue. The recovery of some puppy mill dogs goes faster if there is a resident and confident dog friendly dog in the household. In this case ARF adoptions' coordinators should be informed of the existence of a resident dog so that introductions can be scheduled and supervised.

With a lot of patience, persistence, compassion and love, having adopted a puppy mill rescue dog will be an enriching and rewarding experience for the adopter.

Preparing for your Newly Adopted Puppy Mill Rescue Dog

Purchase the following items:

- 🐾 a dog crate that is the appropriate size (tall enough for the dog to stand in, long enough for the dog to lie down in). Try a wire and plastic airline crate to determine which one is preferred by the dog. For some dogs wire crates may bring back bad memories of the puppy mill, whereas plastic airline crates are new to them, and more enclosed which may make them feel more secure in their new environment (so don't feel as though you're punishing the dog by using a crate). The crate can also protect them, and household items, from destructive chewing and ingestion of potentially dangerous objects. Some dogs may be petrified of any crate, in which case they could be enclosed in a small area blocked off with baby gates.
- 🐾 a nylon leash, 5-6 feet in length, and collar (if not provided by the rescue organization)

- 🐾 a no pull harness (good for those dogs that do pull on leash, or brachycephalic dogs such as Pugs or English Bulldogs)
- 🐾 high quality dog food, treats, and some toys
- 🐾 baby gates to contain your dog to a small area of your home
- 🐾 bedding
- 🐾 a dog license from your town hall to help locate your dog in case the dog gets lost.

Rehabilitating your Newly Adopted Puppy Mill Rescue Dog

- 🐾 Designate a small, quiet room to your dog. Place the crate, food, water, bedding, and wee wee pads or newspaper on the floor. Be sure to dog-proof the room if your dog is not going to be crated while unsupervised. For the very shy dog, allocate a couple of hours of alone time, peeking in occasionally to make sure your dog is okay. Traveling or having loud parties at this point is not recommended.
- 🐾 Begin to establish a regular feeding, sleeping, and walking routine if you're able to walk your dog outdoors on leash (3x daily for no less than 20 minutes per walk is recommended). If not, have your dog get used to the leash by attaching it to the dog's collar or harness, and have your dog drag the leash around the house while being supervised. Hand your dog treats while attaching the leash to the collar to help establish a positive association with the leash, and give some more treats while your dog is walking around wearing the leash. Next, walk around the house holding the leash loosely at first, and then increase the resistance slightly so that your dog feels a bit of tension against the collar or harness. Lastly, walk your dog outside. If you're afraid that your dog will slip out of the collar or harness, put both a collar and harness on and attach a leash to both the collar and harness. Always remove the leash if the dog is not supervised. Collars should also be taken off of young puppies when not supervised to avoid accidental choking.
- 🐾 Over the course of the next several weeks allow your dog to explore more areas of the house if your dog is interested. If not, that's fine too. Do not push your dog to do anything that will make the dog uncomfortable. Spend quiet time with your dog, perhaps just sitting and reading a book while in the same room. To gain trust, sit and pet your dog while giving the dog some treats. If your dog is uncomfortable being pet, and then just try to offer some treats. Move slowly around the dog and avoid sudden movements and making loud noises (so please no vacuuming in your dog's area). Introduce new people slowly and individually. Always have special treats for your visitor to offer your dog.
- 🐾 Finally, many dogs gain confidence by engaging in basic obedience training. If your puppy mill rescue dog is ready, consider enrolling the dog in a basic obedience class. Check www.arfhamptons for upcoming classes.

Barbara Pezzanite, Ph.D., CPDT-KA
Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist