THE 3-3-3 RULE

Helping your newly adopted dog feel at home

Adoption is a major life change for a dog. The 3-3-3 rule describes three common stages of adjustment: the first 3 days, 3 weeks, and 3 months. It is a useful guide, not a strict schedule. Every dog settles in at their own pace.

3 DAYS

Decompression

Your dog may feel overwhelmed, sleep more, hide, seem unusually quiet, or be unsure about eating and exploring.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Provide a calm space, predictable potty breaks, food and water, and plenty of rest. Keep visitors and outings to a minimum. Allow your dog to approach you on their terms.

3 WEEKS

Finding a routine

As your dog becomes more comfortable, their personality and preferences may emerge. You may also notice behaviors that were not apparent during the first few days.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Keep routines consistent. Reward desired behavior, practice short training sessions, and introduce new people, pets, and environments slowly and thoughtfully.

3 MONTHS

Building trust

Many dogs begin to feel secure in their home and strengthen their bond with their family. Some need more time, especially after stressful experiences.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Continue positive-reinforcement training, offer enrichment and regular exercise suited to your dog, and respect their individual comfort level.

A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

Practical guidance for the weeks ahead

Keep expectations realistic

Progress is not always linear. A dog may have a confident day followed by a fearful one. Give them time rather than expecting an exact milestone.

Create a predictable routine

Offer consistent feeding times, potty breaks, exercise, rest, and quiet time. A familiar daily pattern helps your dog learn what comes next.

Build trust through choice

Avoid forcing hugs, greetings, or interaction. Reward calm behavior and allow your dog to retreat to a safe space when they need a break.

Introduce new experiences gradually

Busy gatherings, dog parks, and too many visitors can be overwhelming early on. Supervise interactions with children and other pets.

Ask for help when needed

Contact your veterinarian if your dog seems ill, refuses water, or has persistent appetite changes. Seek qualified, reward-based training support for ongoing fear, reactivity, or unsafe behavior.

REMEMBER

Patience, consistency, and positive experiences are more important than the calendar. Your dog does not have to be fully settled by day 90.