

My First Foster Dog



Tips for a successful first foster

A RSR Foster Guide

There are some important factors to consider when you're selecting your first (and every) foster dog. Carefully considering the home you can provide when selecting a foster will help to create a successful first fostering experience for both you and the foster.



Resident Dogs

Have you introduced your dog to other dogs before?

If not, it's a good idea to try it out and see how they do before bringing home your first foster. You could start by bringing them somewhere to socialize, such as a pet store or pet-friendly hardware store. But to really experience how they will react to a foster dog coming into your home, have a friend bring their dog to your home to see how welcoming your dog is on their own territory. Go for a walk together, and follow slow introduction guidelines and see how they do!

Is your dog friendly to other animals, or are they intimidated or annoyed by other animals?

If your dog does not seem welcoming at first, that doesn't mean you can't foster. You will just need a way to keep them separate at first and follow guidelines for slow introductions. You can also experiment with different types of dogs - large, small, puppies, seniors, male, female, low energy, shy, etc. to see if they have a preference. Temporary fostering (relieving another foster for a short time for travel or other commitments) is a great way to try out different types of dogs in your home. There are also other species (cats, critters) that might work well, if your dog is too stressed by new dogs coming and going.

(i) Consider Dogs initial reactions to other dogs are sometimes unpredictable. Do you have a way to separate the animals in your home (separate room, crate, etc.)? Is your resident dog crate trained?



Resident Dogs

✗ Keep Scrolling Unless you have the set-up to crate and rotate or keep the dogs separate indefinitely, avoid dogs who are not dog-friendly or are reactive to other dogs. Dogs who are cautious but need slow introductions are fine, as long as you have the means to keep them separate for weeks or longer while doing slow intros with your own pets. Dogs who resource guard are fine – just be aware that they will need to be monitored and fed separately.

✓ Look for dogs that have passed a "dog test" or have a history of getting along with other dogs. Dogs who are strays are often dog-friendly because they may not have survived if they were not.



No Resident Dogs

✗ Keep Scrolling Some dogs are shy, lack confidence or haven't been in a home before and need another friendly, confident dog in the home to help them successfully transition. These may not be a good choice for you. This may or may not be called out explicitly in a posting, but ask questions before taking a very shy dog into a no-dog household.

✓ Look for dogs that would do better as an only dog. Of course, you are free to volunteer for any dog that you think would fit well in your home, but we always need more fosters who can provide an only-dog environment for those who haven't been socialized and have a harder time getting along with other dogs



Kiddos

Do you have children living in or visiting your home often?

✗ Keep Scrolling Avoid dogs who are nervous around children (e.g. bite history, fearful of sudden movements, loud noises). Depending on the age of your children, be cautious about physical size and playful exuberance (e.g. jumping, playing in a way that would scare or knock littles over.) Intake posts will often reference suitability for homes with young children.

✓ Look for dogs who have a history with kids, or have none of the red flags listed above.

(i) Consider *This is a great opportunity to teach children good manners and respect for our dog friends!*



Cats & Critters

Resident Cats or Critters

i Consider Are your cats or critters dog savvy? Do you have a way to separate and keep them safe from a dog if they do have a high prey drive? Even "cat-friendly", dogs should be introduced to your cat slowly to be safe.

✗ Keep scrolling Avoid dogs who are noted as not cat friendly, and/or a high prey drive.

✓ Look for dogs that have been cat tested and deemed friendly, cautious or disinterested. If this isn't mentioned specifically, you can ask the poster, but sometimes there is no way to know. Before taking a dog that is "unknown" with cats/critters, be sure you have a reliable way to keep your resident cat/critter separate and safe!

No Resident Cats or Critters

✓ Look for dogs who like critters a little TOO much. You're a great candidate for those dogs with a high prey drive that shouldn't be trusted with cats or critters!



Yard

Fenced Yard

i Consider Is the fence in good shape? Could a determined dog find a way over, under or through?

✓ Look for high energy, playful dogs and puppies; dogs that are a flight risk and need that extra security of a fenced yard (remember all fosters need to be double leashed, even in a fenced yard!)

Small or Unfenced Yard

i Consider Do you have areas to walk nearby? Is your neighborhood "dog friendly?" Be prepared to ensure your foster gets mental and physical exercise from daily walks and/or puzzles and games. Sniff walks are a great way to exercise them physically and mentally!

✗ Keep Scrolling Avoid dogs who will not walk on a leash - some dogs are terrified and will not walk on a leash; avoid dogs who are extremely shy and may be a flight risk - a fenced yard requirement may be indicated in the post.

✓ Look for smaller dogs who don't need as much space to do zoomies; couch potatoes; low energy or senior dogs. Large or high energy dogs are fine if you have the time to provide plenty of leashed exercise and mental stimulation.



Schedule

Foster may often have extended time alone (~4-8 hours)

✗ Keep Scrolling Avoid dogs with known separation anxiety; crate escape artists; destructive dogs; dogs who are not comfortable in a crate.

✓ Look for shy dogs who will need some alone time; low-energy or senior dogs; dogs who are crate trained

(i) Consider *If you are attempting to house train a puppy, they should be let outside to potty regularly during the training phase.*

(i) Consider *It can be helpful for foster dogs to have a resident dog also crated nearby when left alone. (Do not leave your foster loose alone in your home with resident animals.)*

Short periods alone

✓ Look for dogs who need some help overcoming separation anxiety; young puppies who will need to be let out for potty breaks; dogs who will benefit from regular interaction for socialization.



Home

Busy Household

✗ Keep Scrolling Avoid dogs that need a quiet home to feel comfortable, or dogs with stranger danger or are easily overstimulated. Avoid flight risk dogs.

✓ Look for active, high energy, people-friendly dogs and puppies; dogs that need socialization; confident dogs who have not had a lot of trauma.

(i) Consider *Can you keep multiple barriers between your foster dog and the outside exits? When there are a lot of people coming and going who may not watch for escapees, use baby gates, enclose them in a bedroom, secure them with a leash, use garage door exits, with the garage door closed, etc.*

Quiet Household

✓ Look for shy, shutdown or traumatized dogs who need peace and quiet to heal and recover.

(i) Consider *Do you have a quiet, secluded spot in your home that you could keep a new dog to decompress, away from the busyness of people and other animals in the home?*



Experience

Experienced with dog behaviors or medical issues

✓ **Look for** dogs who have some known behaviors you have experience with and are comfortable with strategies to address the behaviors; dogs with familiar medical concerns.

Limited experience

✗ **Keep Scrolling** Avoid dogs with severe behaviors where the post indicates specific experience is required.

✓ **Look for** owner surrenders with some training under their belt; puppies without established behaviors and only require basic training; dogs with minor behaviors that you are interested in learning about.

① **Consider** Remember that all foster dogs will require some training or refreshers to keep them happy, mentally healthy and good canine citizens!

① **Consider** Keep an open mind – we will not know what possible behaviors may be exposed as they get comfortable and settle into a home. We do have a group of volunteer trainers to help with advice, and the possibility of trainer consultations if needed! You're not in this alone!



Neighbors

Shared Walls or Close Neighbors

✗ **Keep Scrolling** Depending on your neighbors, you may want to avoid dogs or puppies who are vocal, particularly when alone, but possibly anytime. Be cautious of dogs with known separation anxiety, as this may be manifested as vocalizations when left alone. You may also want to avoid certain breeds such as hounds who are notoriously vocal about anything they perceive in their world.

① **Consider** Do you live in a dog-friendly neighborhood? i.e. Many dog owners, high tolerance for typical dog behaviors, etc.



Foster Dog Information

This guide relies heavily on information we may have before a foster arrives. But information may be sparse as foster dogs often come from unknown circumstances. Please be prepared for the foster dog that you take into your home to be a little different than you expected in some cases. Dogs can and will act differently in different environments. The first 72 hours can be a very difficult transition for both the dog and the foster parents. Their initial behavior may not be exactly what you were expecting. But they don't know what they "should" be. They have likely been through a lot of change and are just scared and confused about what is happening; their behavior may reflect their mental state. They will be grateful for any kindness and compassion shown to them. As dogs settle into a home environment, different behaviors may appear as they get more comfortable and their personality starts to show.

Foster Manager Approval

All foster matches are required to be approved by the assigned Foster Manager. The Foster Manager may have additional questions for you before approving. The Foster Managers are great resources for helping you to decide if a foster may be a good fit for your household, and how to prepare for their arrival.

Temporary Fosters

There is always a need for temporary fosters at Ruff Start Rescue. Our regular foster families need the freedom to go on vacation or fulfill other commitments on occasion – availability of temp fosters allows them to keep fostering and maintain their personal lives. These opportunities are a great way for new fosters to feel out what type of animal would be a good fit in your home for a week or long weekend. If it's not a good fit, you've learned something, and it's a very limited time commitment.