

September 2011: Is It Wise to Adopt an Adult Dog?

Dear Doctor: You recently gave information on training and behavioral development for puppies. After reading this information, I am curious if you would recommend adopting an adult pet for those of us that do not have time to devote to training a puppy?

**Signed,
Alex in Amherst**

It would seem logical that an adult dog would be ready to adapt to a new home much more quickly. There definitely are instances where you may be able to find a well trained adult dog that needs to find a new home. In these cases, the transition is generally very smooth. However, many times an adult dog is in need of a home because of history of some type of behavioral or temperament issue.

Having said this, an adult dog can often be taught to adapt to a new environment, but this transition will require a fair amount of training. My current dogs are both adults that were adopted from Humane Societies. Ronnie, our energetic Labrador mix was thirteen months old when we found her at the Waupaca Humane Society. She was surrendered by her previous owner when she was seven months old because she did not know how to behave in his home. I saw something endearing about her, even as we watched her jump onto the counter and get in to the garbage within the first three minutes of meeting her. She had separation anxieties, and she needed to learn basic commands, how to walk on a leash, to respect our cats, and to urinate and defecate outside. Housetraining a full grown dog that has spent months in a kennel can be a challenge. We attended three different training classes after having a personal trainer start with home visits. The entire process took nearly two years to have what I would now classify as a well trained dog most of the time!

Our other dog, Logan, was adopted when he was four years old from the Forest County Humane Society after he had been surrendered three months earlier. With his prior family, he had been chained outside without much social interaction. He did not know his name, but would respond to a whistle. He had never walked on stairs, did not seem to enjoy petting, and also needed to be housetrained. He needed to learn all basic commands, including bite inhibition when taking treats. After two training classes for Logan, he is now doing very well.

As you can see, my examples would indicate that adult dogs may take just as much, if not more, patience, time and training. I truly believe that the time spent is well worth it, as it will create a strong bond with your dog as s/he learns how to behave properly. I always encourage adult adoption, as these pets are in desperate need of loving homes. Consider visiting your local Humane Society or search PetFinders.com. If you know are interested in a particular breed, check to

see if there is a rescue group for that breed. Many of the rescue groups will have the dogs placed in temporary foster homes. The beauty of this arrangement is the pet's temperament and behaviors will be assessed by the foster family, and basic training will be done prior to adoption of the dog. Very often, this will allow for the best possible transition.

Regardless of the route you choose, it is important to allocate time daily to the care of you new family member. Dogs of all breeds need daily exercise, even in winter. Many breeds also require frequent grooming. If you cannot commit time to your pet each day, perhaps it would be best to wait until you have more time in your schedule. Good luck with your decision.