

## Matt Beisner's Top Tips for Welcoming a Dog into Your Home

Matt Beisner (CPDT-KA, L FDM-T) is a certified professional dog trainer, the founder of THE ZEN DOG, and star of the popular international show "Dog: Impossible" on Disney+ and National Geographic WILD. Matt has spent his career dedicated to serving dogs whose behavioral challenges are a normal response to the very environments they hope to be rescued from. Matt, an ambassador of the Texas Humane Network, and a long-time supporter of the shelter and rescue community, has helped change dangerous, fearful and confounding behaviors by working *with* these dogs, rather than relying on fear, force, or commands to control them. "What's good for a dog will be good for our world," says Matt. He now lives in Austin, Texas with his wife Brooklin, their son and daughter, and their once "impossible" dogs.

Matt has put together some of his top tips for welcoming a new furry friend into your home! Whether you are thinking about adopting or have recently expanded their fur-family we hope Matt's expert advice can be helpful in this transition..

### **#1 BRINGING YOUR DOG HOME TO 'FOREVER'**

Facts: You are not alone. There's a wealth of humane resources available to help you prepare for bringing home a new fur-family member. Ask your local rescue or shelter to recommend a) a fear-free veterinarian and b) a certified humane trainer or Family Dog Mediator (FDM) for insight on how to plan for the best welcome possible. You may also want to find a breed-specific social group to connect with, since breeds generally come with specific needs and a knowledgeable group can provide an instant community for you and your dog.

Talk with your support team openly about your concerns and expectations. Be clear about your lifestyle, long term goals and, most importantly, your needs in this new relationship. And what about *your dog's needs*? The Five Freedoms are a really good place to start:

#### The Five Freedoms

- Freedom from Hunger and Thirst, by ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor
- Freedom from Discomfort
- Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease
- Freedom to Express Normal Behavior. (Identifying "Normal Behavior" is paramount to a human's ability to provide a dog with what it needs, as well as the dog's long-term success.)
- Freedom from Fear and Distress

The willingness to match your expectations with your dog's needs will go a long way toward building a bond that can change both your lives. Lastly, keep in mind that your new dog doesn't owe you anything, ever. Think you're ready for that kind of Fierce Love?

Okay then, on to the swag that gets wags. Choose a comfortable bed that will allow your dog to lay out completely. The location will also be important (see Tip #2). Provide plenty of enrichment toys and activities. Did you know that 30 minutes of chewing, licking or sniffing is equivalent to about 60 minutes of physical exercise? That means you don't have to walk a dog to "tire it out" (brain work is drain work). Find treats and food that are both nutritious and easily digestible. Introduce a noise reducer as part of your environment to ease the stress for a sound-sensitive dog. I like a box fan because it cuts sound better than music or a noise machine. Get gear that will minimize pressure on your new dog's body. A well fitted harness with a back hook, coupled with a chew-resistant leash (6'-20') can set the tone for a great walking experience for both of you (see Tip #3). It's important to remember that your dog's consent in wearing anything is vital to their positive association with what they do once you've put it on (see Tip #4).

I know, it's all a lot to consider, even for the most experienced pet parent but remember you're not alone. The connections you make by asking questions and asking for help will make the transition easier for both of you. Because when dog people feel connected, they can better connect to their dog, which is what it's all about.

## **#2 MIND THEIR Ps & Qs**

Think about the layout of your home and dedicate a space that will be the dog's own – private, peaceful and protected. This could be the corner of a room, a gated off area, a crate that allows the dog ease of movement, your bedroom, and in some cases your bed. What's most important is that your new friend can sleep deeply at night and rest quietly during the day. This can go a long way in creating a sense of security, safety, and relaxation for your dog and the whole family.

## **#3 TAKE A ROAD TO NOWHERE**

One of the best things you can do to help your newly adopted dog feel good about their environment is to go on a "sniffari." Grab that positively associated harness or collar and the long leash and let your dog explore the new world. Sniffing fulfills a major part of the sensory needs, and is a rich equivalent to physical exercise. Find a field, take a trail, slow your roll and let your dog lead the way (no, it won't make them the "alpha"). It may feel counterintuitive but be generous with your time and patience because the freedom you afford your dog will be the first steps of your future together (see The Five Freedoms: Freedom to Express Normal Behavior).

#### **#4 CONSIDER CONSENT**

Few experiences will strengthen the relationship with your new dog like knowing how to read, and respect, their need for consent. Remember when I said that your new dog doesn't owe you anything? Here's where that really matters.

Take the time to learn what your dog's consent cues are - and aren't. Sometimes it's easier to learn it backwards. For example, my dog showed this behavior: turned head, stiff body, licking of lips, pinning of ears, change in breathing, whale eyes, yawns, licking of paws, moving away...*after* I did this: moved my body, face or hands towards it, spoke louder, sat next to it, put something in its face (toy, treat, food, my face), touched its body, moved quickly, introduced a new/strange object, or someone else entered the room and/or came close to me. If that's the case, then look for your dog to do something different in its behavior when you start to do something different in yours. You might almost think of it like a game of 'Red Light, Green Light'. My 2.5 year old daughter and I came up with the phrase, "When the head turns away, no pet no play."

#### **#5 LOVE FIERCELY**

Most of us adopt a dog because we have a lot of love that we *need* to give. The tip here is to embrace that, the fact that there is so much more to a new dog than we'll ever know, and that we'll never stop trying. Our dogs' L.E.G.S. (Learning, Environments, Genetics and Self) make them more than just a pet, they are partners for our souls. Seeing a dog for who they are helps us see ourselves for who we hope to be.

Still, it can take time to teach the shelter out of the dog. I encourage people to have compassion when their dog is exhibiting behaviors that are difficult to deal with, like resource guarding, stranger danger, leash reactivity, aggression, noise sensitivity, separation anxiety and other post traumatic stress disorders. When a dog, like a human, grows up without secure, loving connections, lacking basic affordances, all of these behaviors are sadly predictable. That's why there is no such thing as a bad dog. And no dog is "unfixable", because they're not broken.

Dogs behave in a way that is totally appropriate to their experience of the world. It's our calling to help change their world. From hopeless to held, from weary to wanted, from abandoned to adopted, each of them speaking the secret we all know: that when we do what's good for a dog we change for the better. That what's good for a dog is good for the world.

They are ready for us to love them. We are ready to love them fiercely. And we are not alone.

For more support, private or group training visit us at [www.THEZENDOG.com](http://www.THEZENDOG.com)