

WHAT TO EXPECT WITH YOUR RESCUED WESTIE

By: Beth Widdows January 8, 2002

Updated 4/3/2010

Transition Period

(Usually things are under control within the first month although some dogs may adjust much more quickly and others a bit more slowly.)

Any dog that is going into a new home from any circumstance, will have some issues. They are likely to be nervous and insecure. In many cases, they have been taken from the family they have always known and are suddenly in a different environment. No matter how wonderful your home is, this little one is going to be a bit confused. The issues may be very subtle and, to you, almost nonexistent. Or they may be very obvious. You may see none, one or many of the following things:



1. Housebreaking – Even the most perfectly housebroken dog may suddenly regress when faced with this new situation. It might be minor or it might require almost complete retraining. All depends on what is going on inside that dog's head and that is something you and I cannot know. Think about some of the following possibilities:
 - o Smells – This dog is in a new house that doesn't smell at all like him!! He/she may just want to improve your décor by making it smell a little more familiar. In this case, you must be firm in letting him know that this is not acceptable behavior.
 - o Insecurity – The dog may just be nervous and insecure. Like a little kid, he might truly be having an accident or two because he is having trouble controlling himself. In this case, it is important that you don't make the situation worse by hollering at him. If he is scared and you holler, you will only make it worse. And, above all, NEVER EVER HIT THE DOG!! If you have reached a point where you can see no other way to handle the problem except by hitting, please call Rescue and return the dog. You may need to find another type of pet!!! Instead, speak very firmly to the dog and take the dog outside. If this is a repeated situation, you may need to go back to crate training as though the dog were a puppy. You can find instructions for this type of training at <http://www.thedogspeaks.com>.
 - o Other Pets – Do you have any unneutered/unspayed dogs in the house? If so, and they are not being actively shown, please get them right down to your vet and have them taken care of. There is no reason for most people to have unaltered dogs. And unaltered dogs create a lot of other problems including more difficulties in the interaction between them and your new Westie. Their state may be what is causing your rescue to mark.
2. Undue Shyness and Subdued Behaviors – Again, this dog is in a totally unfamiliar situation. Some dogs will not react to this at all but some will take quite some time

to become "themselves". Don't expect their shyness to be a lifelong thing. They may just need to gain the confidence that they are finally in their forever home.

3. Over Active Behaviors – Other dogs will behave in the opposite way. You will need to let them know they are loved and that there are rules and limits.

In both of these cases (2 and 3), you may find that a basic obedience class, after about a month in their new home, will be a great help to them.

4. Lack of Interaction with the other dogs in the house – This, again, is very common. All of the dogs have to get to know each other and sometimes this takes longer than other times. It is especially hard if the new dog has never learned to play with other dogs. It may take some period of watching to figure out how to play appropriately.
5. Fighting with other dogs....most dogs packs fall into their place without a lot of uproar; but sometimes it can take a "fight" to get things settled. Most experts will tell you to just let them settle it themselves without interference as long as no one is getting seriously hurt (bloodied). This can be hard to do but if you interfere, they will probably fight again because nothing was settled.

General Care Information

1. Grooming Tips

Coat

- o Remember....any creature with hair WILL SHED!! Even a Westie will shed. The difference is in the degree of shedding. I always tell people that when I find a white hair, I cannot tell if it is mine or my Westie's! She sheds at about the same rate that I do which is no problem BUT I do some things to keep her shedding under control and to maintain her skin's health.
- o You can either "strip" your Westie or you can "clip" your Westie. Most pet owners opt to clip. If you are interested in stripping your Westie, ask a breeder for tips on how to go about it. You can also find much advice in various Westie books.
- o If, like most pet owners, you prefer to have your dog clipped, the biggest challenge is to find a shop that knows how to do a "Westie" cut. I suggest you ask around; anyone you see with a Westie, may be able to tell you where you can get him groomed. Ask the club in your area; they may have a member who lives near you and has their dog groomed. If you go into a shop cold, ask them if they have any experience with Westies. Tell them you have heard horror stories about Westies who came home from the groomer looking like Scotties or Schnauzers....be sure they understand what you don't want. Go in armed with pictures and information. Ask to see a picture of a Westie they have groomed. Make sure they know you are fussy!!! Also, you may want to ask them if they ever leave the dog on the table unattended. (Of course they will not admit to this but it will let them know you are someone who is interested and will not be easily dealt with if you find they are less than careful!!)
- o Plan to take your Westie to the groomer every 4 to 6 weeks (maybe 8 in colder weather)
- o Make sure they clip or grind the toenails each and every time (including the

- dewclaws if your pet has them)
- Consider giving them a rinse such as Humilac to use on the dog in the final rinse. (You can get this from your vet or from on-line stores.)
- Every day, comb or brush your dog's hair. This will get keep the undercoat cleaned out and let the skin breath. It will also pull out the loose hairs that would later be left on your furniture. It serves as a very nice "bonding" experience between you and your dog. If your dog doesn't like it at first, he will learn to. It will also avoid matting. If the hair is combed daily, it won't have much chance to matt and become a painful experience. The tools you use will depend on the type of coat your dog has. My dog has a fine coat so I use a flea comb on her all over. Some dogs have a soft, thick coat which requires a slicker brush.

Teeth

- Brush your dog's teeth regularly, daily if possible. Dog's teeth build up plaque just like a human's teeth. If left uncared for, they will have to have their teeth cleaned professionally much sooner than if regular care is given. When a dog has their teeth cleaned, they must be anesthetized. This always presents some risk...not to mention cost. The medical community has discovered that badly cared for teeth cause other internal diseases such as some heart diseases. Brushing your dog's teeth can prevent a lot more than just dental disease.
- Use a doggy toothpaste and either a brush or a finger cot. Get the paste on the teeth, especially in the back. The toothpaste has an ingredient that works without doing a lot of brushing. The dogs like the taste of the toothpaste and it is safely swallowed.

2. Car Riding

Please make sure your dog is protected when riding in the car. Just like a child, in an accident or sudden stop, an unsecured dog will become a flying missile that endangers not only the dog but all other passengers in the car. You can either keep the dog in a crate which has the seat belt threaded through the wires or you can put a seat belt harness on your dog and thread the seat belt through the harness strap. NEVER let your dog ride in the front seat where there are air bags.

Don't limit your dog's car rides to only "bad" things such as going to the groomer and the vet. Make sure most of the dog's car rides are happy things so that the dog will look forward to going in the car. Take him to the park, the pet store and even to McDonald's or the Dairy Queen occasionally. But be careful about leaving your dog in the car alone. Besides extremes in temperature that can endanger your dog, there is also the risk of dog theft.

3. Food



You will have to make decisions about your dog's food. I recommend that you do some research into this subject. There are many resources to review. I highly recommend <http://www.monicensegal.com>.

For a listing which gives the label ingredients of almost all dog foods: <http://www.doberdogs.com/> We (Westie Rescue Michigan) have had a lot of success with Hills J/D for the dogs with skin/allergy issues, as long as they aren't allergic to any of the particular ingredients. This is something which only you can decide for your pet.

4. Skin Problems

This is an area where, of course, your vet is the expert. But it never hurts to do your own research so that you can help make intelligent decisions for your dog's care should your Westie have skin problems. Also read the "Allergy Dogs" article on this website under the "Medical - Westie Issues" tab.

5. Safety

Remember that Westies are bred to hunt small animals. It makes things like squirrels and rabbits absolutely irresistible to them. Therefore you MUST have a fenced area where the Westie can't get free to chase OR you must ALWAYS keep your Westie on leash. This means ALWAYS. In the winter when it is snowy and in the spring when it is pouring down rain, you cannot say, "Well, just this once I'll let him/her out loose and watch from the door". If the dog takes off, you will succeed only in watching him run into the street. You won't be able to stop him. If you choose to tether or use invisible fencing, you MUST keep an eye on the dogs while they are outside. Realize that you have made them absolutely defenseless in an attack by another animal or a teasing child.

6. Children

Each Westie has its own personality and experiences. Some do very well with children but many do not. For many Westies, a child is something to be feared or hated. Imagine if you were a small puppy and a child pulled your hair, hurt you or teased you. You might remember this and react to it for your entire life. When a different child comes along who is gentle and caring, the Westie whose was teased while young may not be able to make that distinction. And some Westies who were not bred for temperament may simply not be able to contend with the constant activity and fast movements of children. Many rescues have policies that prohibit placement of Westies with children under the age of ten. Remember that a Westie coming into rescue is often there because of problems with children to

begin with. We cannot put that type of Westie back into a home with children. Often a better choice for kids is a larger dog such as a lab or retriever whose personality tends to be more "laid back".

(To determine if a Westie is right for you, there is a quiz at <http://www.westieclubamerica.com>. If you do get a Westie, it is important to remember that interactions with children must be carefully supervised. When you can't supervise, it is best to put the Westie in its crate or another room. Children should be instructed that this crate or room is the Westie's space and they are not allowed to bother the Westie while it is there.

Note: If you are an adult family whose Westie was having "problems" with children, please redouble your efforts when children are around. It would make sense to isolate the Westie before the children arrive and keep the children completely away from the dog. An amateur may have no idea of the "signals" a dog is sending and may not recognize the warnings. Some dogs may not be provoked with less than overt actions by the child BUT some dogs may be set off with something as simple as a child walking past the food dish. If you aren't a professional, is it worth taking that risk?

7. Other Links and Books

- Books
 - The West Highland White Terrier by Seymour Weiss (small, inexpensive)
 - West Highland White Terriers by Martin Weil (small, inexpensive)
 - Westies from Head to Tail by Ruth Faherty
 - The New West Highland White Terrier by Daphne S. Gentry
 - A New Owner's Guide to West Highland White Terriers by Dawn Martin
 - Paws to Consider by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson (Are you sure a Westie is right for you?)
 - Child proofing Your Dog by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson (important for Westie owners)
- Links
 - <http://www.thedogspeaks.com> THE DOG SPEAKS
 - <http://www.westieclubamerica.com> WESTIE CLUB AMERICA
Select the site map to see an overview of the site to find training tips and lots more
Also, choose Regional Clubs and click on each; many will have a link back to their own web sites
 - <http://akc.org> AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB
 - <http://www.westiemed.com> WESTIE MED
This is an organization which has recently started up with the intent of raising funds to help pay medical costs for rescued Westies.
 - <http://www.westiefoundation.org> WESTIE FOUNDATION
This is an organization that funds medical research projects on problems related specifically to Westies.