

Foster Care...Moving Dogs From Home To Home-They Are Resilient

By: Deb Duncan

In people-think, we tend to believe that each move/bonding and then separation is hard on the dog but in reality they grow with each bonding. People do think this is upsetting to the dogs. For MOST of the dogs, they are so incredibly resilient and adaptable and they do quite well.

Granted, there are some of the dogs that have had such a traumatic life and each change is very hard on them. But, if handled properly and not too much, too soon...even these dogs do build "coping" skills. However, for some I really would not recommend it. The latter two categories are the exceptions, rather than the rule.

Now, where this would not be good is if the dog were moved from one unstable environment to another unstable environment or one bad situation to another bad situation. But, when the experiences are of a positive nature, the dogs really do quite well with this.

It can be emotional and mental development to "the real world". Conceptually, this isn't much different than the premise of exposing your new dog to as many different things, places, and people as you can...always ensuring that each exposure is a positive experience. Most of us know about doing this with pups, but the same would apply to any dog. If some one adopts or buys an older dog from a shelter or breeder or whoever, I do have them put the dog on a "socialization" program that is somewhat similar to puppy socialization. I have some of the Rescue groups (all different breeds) down here bring their new rescues to the agility trials. For many of them, we do have to do short socializing segments combined with decompression segment away from all the commotion. This is done to not cross the dog's "threshold limits". And, always have treats in the pocket to "divert" them from any stressful situation, in addition to people meeting them with a treat. The rescue folk often have me assess the dog first and come up with a program/schedule for how to proceed through the day.

Again, when approached properly these exposures and new experiences and people and places do help the dogs, no matter their age...much as we socialize a pup.

I do believe this has to be judged on an individual (dog by dog) basis. When a dog is very old or ill or emotionally traumatized to an "extreme" degree", I do feel you need to ensure that they have the chance to fully settle in, adapt, and acclimate before moving them again. The reason is that these dogs would not be well served if they had to stay in an "almost constant state of instability". That being said, even these dogs if given enough time in one environment to come out of their trauma shell and develop some "trusting and coping" skills, they can handle another change....when the change is a good one that maintains and/or furthers their emotional development.

When the dogs are moved from one environment to another, they need time to adjust, acclimate, and learn the pack rules of the new "pack" they have joined. In each new home, they will go through the sensory and stimuli overload period that I discuss on my website (<http://www.thedogspeaks.com>) in the article UNDERSTANDING YOUR "ADOPTED" DOG...A DOG WITH A PAST. While the title of the article says "adopted" dog, it applies to fostering situations as well.

The key to all of this is to realize that what the dogs need most is "time, patience, understanding...and, above all...LOVE! When they experience pure love, they can handle anything and it will most often bring them back from anything. I discuss this in my article **DOG/PEOPLE COMMUNICATION...THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE**. And, the "universal" language between dogs and people is love.

All of that being said, certainly we would all hope the dogs can find their forever homes, sooner rather than later.