



THE RESCUE LAB'S PERSPECTIVE

WHERE AM I?.....AND WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

Imagine being air-dropped, alone, into a strange country where nothing is familiar; you do not know anyone, the rules of acceptable behavior have changed and you cannot speak the language. It would be confusing, if not downright scary and you would be bound to upset a few people before you got the hang of things. This is probably how your new rescue Lab is going to feel, although he may not show his/her confusion. As far as he/she knows, you are just another part of the parade of people who have passed through his/her life lately, and your home is just another stopover...

The Lab you are adopting has been through a difficult journey that started when his/her family gave him up or he became lost. He may have been under stress or neglected in his past life or frightened by being homeless. His first stop was at a shelter, town pound, or concerned stranger's home.....then, we were contacted and saw him. Next, he was temperament tested, medically updated and neutered/spayed. Sometimes these dogs are brought by their owner directly to us, and then the people simply drive away. From here, they enter into our foster program, either in a home foster or a kennel. Although, it is designed to be a low stress stay, it is still a confusing situation for most dogs and produces some anxiety.

In the process of transforming your dog's confusion into security, it is important to look at things from *his perspective*. Labs are eager to please their owners once they understand the rules. It is your job to communicate clear rules in a way your dog can understand. Be sensitive to the fact that in your dog's previous home he may have been encouraged to sit on the sofa, beg for food, jump up for attention or play roughly. If it is not permissible, *teach him, do not blame him*. Be kind and patient. Dogs need repetition and consistency and to learn. Instruct him using *positive reinforcement* so that he does not feel defensive or confused. Reward him for good behavior with treats, hugs and a happy voice. Corrections for inappropriate behavior should be used *sparingly*. *Labs can be sensitive, and often a calm but firm verbal reprimand is enough*.

We strongly suggest taking an obedience class, even if your new Lab is well trained. You will find it a fun and rewarding way to bond with your new family member and no dog or owner is ever too old to learn. A new owner will learn updated teaching techniques based on positive reinforcement. Obedience classes are also a great environment for dogs that need to improve social skills with people and dogs. Classes also provide a resource of information and support for you and your dog during this adjustment phase.

As your Lab settles and starts to learn the rules in his new home, he will get more comfortable. The transition time for each dog is different, taking from a few weeks to a few months for him to completely settle in and adjust to his new life. Like people, dogs deal with change and stress in many different ways. Some dogs will be overly active (pacing, panting, drooling), other dogs will be a bit depressed (lethargic, won't eat) by the loss of family and surroundings, some are needy and clingy, still others might be a bit defensive and worried and then there are those dogs that take it in their stride. No matter what your dog's reaction, remember to go slowly, start teaching the new rules from day one and be respectful of the difficulty of being airdropped into a different world.

It will take time for your new companion Lab to bond with you. Offer love and guidance but never force yourself on your new dog. *Children must be closely supervised when with your new dog and excessive contact should be limited during this time*. Keeping the environment quiet for the first few days will be important. Allow your dog to get comfortable with your home and new rules before he meets your friends, family and the neighborhood. Your rescue Lab may drink excessive amounts of water his first week; this is due to stress. He may make a mistake, therefore, try to be aware of water

intake and take him out more often. Be consistent on what door he goes out in order to relieve himself so he can begin to let you know when he needs to go out.

Be realistic about your expectations during the transition period. Never assume that your dog can cope with all the new situations in his life without a problem or two. Set up precautionary measures when he is alone in the house, when he first meets new children, when around unfamiliar dogs and get him outside more often to help him to adjust to a new toileting schedule.

Be extremely careful when taking your dog “out and about” for the first few months. Do not assume that he will come to you when called or he will automatically stay with you on a walk. Use a Martingale type of collar or well fitted collar when out walking so he can’t slip or back out of his collar if panicked. Well fitted harnesses also work well. Regular nylon collars should always have i.d. tags affixed. Keep this on all the time, even if you’re using a different collar or harness for leash walks. Most importantly, *do not allow him off leash* in an unfenced area until you are *sure* he will come when called, even when distracted; **NEVER** allow your dog off-lead near any road with passing cars or train tracks. Getting your new dog to come when called takes practice and must always be a positive experience. Food rewards combined with praise work well. Letting your dog off lead before he is ready could teach him bad habits or worse case scenario cause a horrible tragedy.

Now that you had had the opportunity to consider this new relationship from the rescue Lab’s perspective, we know you will do your best to make this strange new land into a safe and happy home. Be positive, be consistent, work out a daily routine and use lots of praise and positive reinforcement. *Your time will be well rewarded with a devoted lifelong companion.*