



RESCUE · INSPIRE · ADVOCATE

Rescue Dog: *First 30 Days*

A Practical Guide for Your First Month Together

From The Axee Bear Company
theaxeebearcompany.com

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Welcome

I'm Bailey, and this guide exists because of a dog named Axel.

In 2013, we adopted a scared, skinny Labrador mix puppy who'd been pulled from an open-intake shelter in Kentucky with his littermates. We had no idea what we were doing. We made mistakes. We also got twelve wonderful years with a dog who became family the moment he walked through our door.

This guide is what we wish someone had handed us that day — not a strict manual, but a realistic map of what the first 30 days actually look like, written with input from our local rescue partner, A.D.O.P.T. Pet Shelter. Every dog is different. Take what's useful and leave the rest.

A Note Before You Start

There's no such thing as doing this perfectly. Patience matters more than precision — for your new dog, and for yourself.

Before They Come Home: The Day-One Checklist

A little preparation goes a long way toward a calmer first day. Here's what's worth having ready before you bring your dog home, and why each one matters:

- **A properly sized crate** — Big enough to stand, turn around, and lie down comfortably — not much bigger. A crate that's too large can feel less secure; a den-sized space helps many dogs settle faster.
- **A flat collar with ID tag, plus a standard 4–6 foot leash** — Skip retractable leashes for the first weeks — they give you far less control in an unpredictable moment, like a sudden bolt at a new sound.
- **Food and water bowls** — Simple stainless steel or ceramic bowls are easiest to keep clean and won't retain odors the way some plastics do.
- **The same food your dog was eating in foster or shelter care** — Sudden food changes are a common cause of upset stomachs in the first week. If you want to switch food, do it gradually over 7–10 days once they're settled.
- **A comfortable bed or blanket** — Something that's theirs alone, placed in a quiet corner, gives them a landing spot that isn't tied to your furniture or space.
- **Enzymatic cleaner** — Accidents happen even with house-trained dogs during the adjustment period. Enzymatic cleaners actually break down the odor rather than masking it, which helps prevent repeat accidents in the same spot.
- **Baby gates** — Useful if you're limiting access to certain rooms at first — gates let a new dog see and hear the household without being overwhelmed by full access right away.
- **A few chew toys and a treat pouch** — Having appropriate things to chew on hand from day one heads off a lot of “why is my shoe destroyed” moments.
- **Poop bags** — Obvious, but easy to forget until you actually need one on the first walk.
- **A vet appointment scheduled within the first week** — Even if your dog had a health check at the shelter, an early visit with your own vet establishes a relationship and a baseline before anything urgent ever comes up.

The “3-3-3” Decompression Timeline

Rescue and shelter professionals often describe the adjustment period using a simple rule of thumb: 3 days, 3 weeks, 3 months. It won't be exact for every dog, but it's a genuinely useful way to set expectations before you dig into the week-by-week detail below.

Phase	What's Happening	What to Expect
First 3 Days	Decompression & overwhelm	May not eat much, hide, avoid eye contact, or seem “shut down.” This is normal — not a sign of a bad fit.
First 3 Weeks	Settling in	Appetite returns, routines start to click, true personality begins peeking through. Boundary-testing is common here.
First 3 Months	Trust & belonging	Full personality emerges, routines feel natural, and the bond you came for finally settles in.

The dog you meet on day one is rarely the dog you'll have in three months. Try not to judge personality, trainability, or “fit” too early.

Week 1: Arrival & Decompression

Keep the world small. Limit visitors, skip the dog park, and hold off on introducing other pets beyond brief, calm meetings. Many dogs eat less, sleep more, or seem unusually quiet this week — that's a nervous system settling in, not a lack of appetite for life. Focus on establishing where they sleep, eat, and go to the bathroom, and let everything else wait.

Week 2: Testing the Waters

Personality starts to emerge. Your dog may become more playful, more vocal, or start testing boundaries — jumping on furniture, pulling harder on the leash, or getting choosier about food. This is progress, not regression: they're comfortable enough to start being themselves. Keep the routine steady even as their behavior shifts around it.

Week 3: Building Confidence

Most dogs are noticeably more settled by now — walks feel purposeful rather than overwhelming, and they're starting to anticipate the daily rhythm of meals, walks, and bedtime. This is a good week to introduce light training and short new experiences, one at a time, always ending on a positive note before they get overwhelmed.

Week 4: Finding Their Rhythm

By the end of the first month, most dogs have a visible routine and a visible personality. Some dogs need considerably longer — that's normal too, especially for dogs with a harder history before they came to you. Use this week to reflect on what's working, what still needs adjusting, and whether any behavior is worth outside support (see “When to Ask for Help”, later in this guide).

Building a Daily Routine: A Printable Tracker

Consistency does more to build trust in the first month than almost anything else. Dogs coming from shelters or foster care have often had unpredictable schedules — a steady rhythm of meals, walks, and rest helps them relax faster, because they can start to predict what happens next.

How to use this tracker: print this page, fill in your target time for each activity in the left-hand columns, then check off each box as you complete it through the week. If a day gets missed, that's normal — the goal is a consistent pattern over time, not a perfect streak.

Time of Day	Activity	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Morning	Wake up & first potty break							
Morning	Breakfast							
Morning	Walk / outdoor time							
Midday	Alone-time practice (short)							
Evening	Dinner							
Evening	Walk / play session							
Night	Wind-down & final potty break							
Night	Bedtime							

Gentle, Trauma-Informed Training First Steps

Formal training can wait. In the first days and weeks, the goal isn't obedience — it's building enough trust that training will actually work later. Here's where to start:

Let them decompress before asking much of them

A dog that's overwhelmed isn't in a state to learn — their nervous system is busy managing stress, not absorbing new information. Give the first few days room before introducing structured training.

Use positive reinforcement, not corrections

Treats, praise, and play work better than punishment at every stage of dog training, but it matters especially early, while your dog is still deciding whether this home is safe. A correction-based approach can teach a nervous dog that unpredictable things happen here too.

Introduce their name and a simple reward marker first

Before anything more complex, teach a consistent word (like “yes!”) that means “that was right, a reward is coming.” This becomes the foundation every other cue builds on.

Make the crate a safe, positive space — never a punishment

A crate used as a timeout spot teaches a dog to fear it. A crate paired consistently with treats, meals, and calm alone time becomes a place they choose to retreat to on their own.

Go at their pace with new people, pets, and environments

Don't force greetings, even friendly ones. Let your dog approach on their own terms, and step in calmly if they show signs of wanting space — turning away, lip licking, stiffening. Respecting that now builds trust that pays off for years.

Keep sessions short and low-pressure

A few minutes at a time is plenty at first. Short, successful sessions build more confidence than long, demanding ones — for both of you.

When to Ask for Help

Most bumps in the first month are normal. A few signs are worth reaching out about — to your vet, a certified trainer, or the shelter/rescue your dog came from:

- Not eating at all for 48+ hours
- Resource guarding (growling or snapping over food, toys, or space)
- Signs of fear-based aggression toward people or other animals
- Extreme destructive behavior beyond normal puppy or anxiety chewing
- Any signs of illness or injury

Asking for help early is a sign of good ownership, not failure. Most rescues and shelters, including A.D.O.P.T. Pet Shelter, want to hear from adopters navigating a rough patch — that's part of what they're there for.

A Final Note

Axel wasn't an easy dog for the first few months. He chewed three pairs of shoes, a couch cushion, and (memorably) a section of baseboard. He was also, within a year, the most loyal, gentle presence in our home for over a decade.

If you're in the hard, uncertain early days right now: it gets easier. Keep going.

— Bailey, *The Axee Bear Company*

About The Axee Bear Company

The Axee Bear Company creates rescue-inspired apparel and gifts, named for Axel and built to fund and spotlight animal rescue work. 10% of our net profit is donated monthly, split between A.D.O.P.T. Pet Shelter and Best Friends Animal Society.

To be transparent: we don't have a formal partnership, sponsorship, or endorsement agreement with either organization. Our giving is a direct financial commitment, calculated from our own sales each month — not a co-branded arrangement.

This guide was created by The Axee Bear Company, with some layout and illustration elements produced through an AI-assisted creative process. The guidance itself reflects real experience and input from our local rescue partner, A.D.O.P.T. Pet Shelter.

Learn more, read our Blog, or visit the Shop at theaxeebearcompany.com — every purchase helps fund the next dog's second chance.