



## **FOSTER HANDBOOK**

Thank you so much for fostering! Seeing the progress your foster pup makes because of your loving patience and care will be the best thank you. We want to make your foster experience a positive one. Please do not hesitate to contact us for help or advice.

### **THE MOST IMPORTANT RULES**

- **No vaccinations whatsoever without HALO authorization.**
- **No medications or supplements without HALO authorization.**
- **Your foster must always be restrained in your car – either with a harness and dog seatbelt OR a crate seat belted in. They must be in the backseat to avoid the danger of airbags.**
- **Your foster must be on leash at all times when outdoors unless in your own secured fenced yard.**
- **Any aggressive behavior must be immediately communicated to HALO so that we can determine how best to deal with it. Our insurance requires this.**
- **The adoption of your foster must take place in your home. This is essential. Any exception must be approved by the board. We have found that this procedure allows the dog to meet their forever family in a place they feel secure and relaxed. They sense that their foster trusts these new people. It sets them up for success in their new home.**

#### **1. MEDICAL**

- No supplements or over the counter meds without HALO approval.
- You must get approval for vet care unless it is an emergency. You can usually reach one of us 24/7. If you must go to the vet in an emergency, call or text when you arrive there and your foster is safely in the vet's care.

- Never allow a vet to vaccinate your foster without getting approval from us. In almost all cases dogs are titered before they go to their fosters, and if we determine any vaccinations are needed these are done beforehand. This is not a matter of costs but rather of long-term health. HALO considers it a priority to avoid over-vaccination. It is not ok to go ahead with vaccinations even if you are willing to pay for it yourself.

## **2. DOG SUPPLIES**

- To help with housebreaking, we can recommend and order belly bands for boys and diapers for girls. These are washable/dryable, and close with Velcro so they are easy to put on/take off. Half a sanitary pad can be placed inside them to avoid having to wash them constantly.
- If you need other supplies, please call one of us. We usually know where to order the best and most cost-effective products, and we have many supplies already on hand.

## **3. SAFETY**

- No dog parks.
- Do not bring your foster to places where there will be large crowds.
- Be especially careful when your foster is around children.
- These safety rules are required due to HALO's insurance coverage

## **4. FEEDING**

- Your foster, like all Havanese, needs to be fed twice per day. Havanese are too small to manage with only one meal per day. This affects their blood sugar and health adversely.
- Please check with us or do some research on [www.dogfoodadvisor.com](http://www.dogfoodadvisor.com) if you are unsure about what foods are good quality ones. Please ensure your foster is fed a food that scores 4 or 5 on the Dog Food Advisor list. If cost is an issue, please speak to us so we can help.

## **5. IS YOUR FOSTER READY FOR ADOPTION?**

- We usually can give foster parents the opportunity to adopt their foster dog before we consider other applicants. Let us know at the earliest possible time if you want to adopt.
- If you aren't sure when your foster will be ready to be posted on Petfinder as available for adoption, speak to your mentor or one of us.
- Don't wait until they are fully housebroken since even if they seem to be, they will likely regress when moved to a new home. They should be fairly comfortable in their foster home and able to be around people. They may not be totally comfortable being picked up and may not yet be able to go for walks, climb stairs, etc. We can look for an adopter who wants to help with the remaining challenges. While they are on Petfinder, you can continue to work with them and help them progress.

## **6. HELPING GET YOUR FOSTER ADOPTED**

- Send us 3 good pictures and a draft bio. We can write the bio if you prefer – give us a list of things to mention. Remember that there are thousands of dogs on Petfinder. Great pictures and the bio will spark that first interest or connection. See the articles in this handbook for help.
- You can also post about your dog on the HALO Facebook page but please don't post about them on other Facebook groups. Be sure to use their HALO name. Please keep this positive and remember that a large group of potential adopters are reading – our 800 member HALO group. Make sure your comments are positive and would encourage someone to be interested in your foster. Show how cute and sweet they are or how much they have progressed. If you are frustrated with a situation, please share it with your mentor or one of us, but don't post about it.
- If relatives, friends or colleagues express an interest in adopting your foster, refer them to the HALO website and ask them to send in an application. Let them know that adoption approvals are up to the HALO board and as a foster parent, you don't make that decision. Don't let those interested people come to visit your foster and get attached to him /her in advance of applying. If they turn out not to be approved adopters, we don't want them to be upset with you. We want to avoid putting you in an awkward situation and being blamed because someone you know did not get approved. They may well be excellent pet owners but not meet the board requirements for one of our rescues and their special challenges.

## **7. ADOPTION DAY**

- Please make a copy of the signed contract or print two copies and have both

signed. Give one to the adopter and mail the other to HALO, along with the check: HALO PO Box 787 Huntley IL. 60142. Also give the adopter the medical file if you have one. We would really appreciate having the signed contract as soon as possible. You can scan and email it if you prefer.

- Please send a baggie of the food you have been feeding your foster so the new owners can transition slowly.
- If you can, please post a picture of your foster with their family on Facebook. On adoption day, we will arrange for the new adopter to join our Facebook group.

**These Things I Know Are (Mostly) True**  
- Or -  
My New Puppy Mill Foster Just Arrived, Now What?

By Jill Calvin

Fostering a puppy mill survivor is an experience you'll never forget and one you'll get as much out of as your foster does. The reality of the day-to-day details however can be a little overwhelming, especially when they first arrive. Here are notes from my survival guide.

**1. No Jail Breaks Allowed on My Watch!**

- If my ride home with a new foster is less than 6 hours, I don't stop for potty breaks. It's just too stressful since they don't know how to walk on a leash and are already scared and there's just too much chance of an escape.
- To start with, potty breaks are in an x-pen (even with a fenced-in backyard.)
- A light leash goes on when I pick up my new foster and, at least for a while, it stays on unless the dog is in his/her crate / x-pen in the house. (Even with a leash on, a lot of time is spent trying to get close enough to catch a new foster. Having a leash to step on helps.)
- The other thing that goes on immediately is a tag with "REWARD", my address, and phone number. My fosters go to their forever homes with the tag still on. I tell the new family not to take it off until they've replaced it with their own. (One of these days, when I'm fostering an "R" puppy, he's going to be named "Reward" so the tag fits.)
- If there is an opening to the free world – front door, gate, garage - the foster isn't allowed near it! (Baby gates are a wonderful thing.)
- When we start going on walks, 2 leashes with the loop firmly around my wrist is a must. Also, lots of good treats in my pocket.

**2. Let's Take It Slow**

I resist the urge to start socializing my new foster immediately. As excited as I am for them to start experiencing all the wonderful things awaiting them, for the first two weeks, we take it slow. If I look at it from their perspective, in less than a week's time, they've gone from spending their entire life in a small crate or pen to being dumped at the vet, being spayed/neutered, spending hours driving in a car, and now they've arrived at my house with more new animals, strange smells, scary noises, and even scarier people. Their stress level is through the roof, their hormones are on a rollercoaster, and chances are they aren't in the best health. At this point, even their brain chemistry is completely out of whack. They deserve at least a few weeks to decompress.

**3. What Do You Mean They're Staying?**

A new foster affects everyone, especially my four-legged family members. I'm pretty sure my animals don't care that we're doing a good thing, or that (in most cases) it's only

temporary. They just know there's a new kid in the house who doesn't have any manners, is playing with their toys and getting attention. There will be some acting out, some jealousy, and everyone may not be immediate friends. That's okay, sometimes it takes a while. I try to supervise but not interfere. They always seem to work it out.

I'm always worried that one of my dogs will get sick from a foster. There's usually a good chance the foster will arrive with giardia, coccidia, worms, and or kennel cough. I've talked through the risks with my vet and with Kathi/Cindy/Cheryl. If necessary, I keep the foster isolated from my dogs for a while. This gives the foster time to settle in and keeps my animals safe. (The x-pen outside for potty breaks helps with this too.) Most illnesses or parasites the mill dogs might bring with them my dogs have been vaccinated against and are easily treated. And yes, my animals have gotten sick, but never seriously. I panic for a minute, feel guilty for a while, then call the vet to cure the problem.

#### **4. "See, I'm Not So Bad"**

We really don't know what has happened to these dogs in the mill, but it's a good bet their experience with humans wasn't very positive. So, when we're first getting to know each other, I do it from ground level – literally. I lay down on the floor on my stomach, I don't talk, I don't move, I don't try to touch them, and I let them approach me and investigate on their own terms. Gradually I start talking, then reaching out a hand, then move to a sitting position, then petting. Sometimes I can do it all in one night, sometimes it takes days. And I'm more than willing to bribe them with treats! Every person in the house does this. Anyone coming to visit at least starts in the sitting position with lots of treats to hand out and without attempting to touch them.

If they've spent much time in the mill, it's possible their only interaction with people was to be pulled out of the crate by their ear or leg to be bred. My first command (right up there with "go potty") is "wait". I bend down to pick them up (trying never to reach down from over the top of them), and I tell them what I'm about to do. (Usually only possible after I've finally managed to step on the leash.)

#### **5. "Chase Me!" Isn't Just a Game**

Once the pup starts running and playing, one of the first games I teach them is "Chase Me!" This way, if they do manage to escape, I've got a better chance of getting them back into the yard since they know and like this game!

#### **6. Patience Really is a Virtue**

Fosters arrive having missed out on all the basic socialization skills a puppy raised in a loving home receives. I consider every foster, no matter how old, to be like a new puppy. The concept of not messing their crate doesn't work for them – they've spent their life with no choice but to pee and poop in their crate. It's back to basics with potty training.

- Many of these dogs had no choice but to eat poop because they were hungry – their own, the other dogs, doesn't matter. I make sure to pick up everybody's poop, immediately. (This is also important in case they have any parasite that

could be transferred to your yard, your dogs, or yourself.)

- Crossing the threshold of the door is frequently a tough hurdle. I prop open the door, move into the house, and let them work up the nerve to come in/out. A trail of treats helps. (The game then becomes getting the door closed before they have a chance to run back outside.)
- Much of the coaching on how to become a dog, usually falls to my animals. They are much better at it than I am. That's how fosters learn lying next to a human has its benefits; getting treats are grand; walking on a leash doesn't have to be torture; and running and playing is great fun.

## 7. It's Not My Job

- It's not my job to find my foster a new home. It took me a while to realize most people (friends and strangers alike) who told me they wanted to adopt my foster didn't really mean it. I'd get excited, send Kathi long messages about this wonderful family, only to have them never send in an application. I've learned to explain the adoption process, give them the website, and then wait for HALO to call if they get an application (which hasn't happened yet.)
- It's not my job to decide whether someone meets all of the criteria for adopting a HALO dog. Honestly, I don't want that responsibility. I'll leave that up to Kathi, Cindy, and Cheryl. They've done this thousands of times, and know what to ask and listen for. So I don't make any promises about how I can guarantee they'll get the dog they want.
- It's not my job to teach commands or tricks. If there is time - great, but it's not a priority. It is my job to teach my foster that all of life isn't scary - furnaces turning on, mirrors and pictures on walls, TVs, dishwashers, vacuums, doorbells, furniture, cars driving by, walking on grass, humans. We do start with the basics - potty training, "wait", walking on a leash (in case they go to a family that doesn't have a fenced in yard). Our time together is limited. I'll leave the training to the forever family - it's a great way to bond. (I personally don't agree with the articles that suggest you need to teach commands to make the dog more "marketable".
- It is my job to help this dog leave the horrors of the puppy mill behind, figure out what this particular dog needs in a forever family, and then make that transition as smoothly as possible.

## 8. Show Me, Don't Just Tell Me<sup>[SEP]</sup>

A lot of people suggest that we should be willing to ship our dogs to potential adopters, or arrange transportation for them. As soon as I say I'm going to foster, this dog is part of my family. If at all possible, I want to meet the people adopting one of my family members. I want to see them interact with this precious animal. I want to see how my foster interacts with them. I want to know they're willing to put the time, energy, and money into getting this animal so that if there are health/behavioral problems in the future, I can be confident they'll put the time, energy, and money into a solution.

## 9. I'm Only Human

It's inevitable, I'm going to make mistakes. That's okay, as fragile as they seem, these dogs are pretty darn tough. Look what they've survived so far! I do try to be flexible -

what worked today, may not work tomorrow. What we conquered today, we may be afraid of again tomorrow. I try not to have too many expectations and let them set the pace. Plus, they're very forgiving.

**10. Seek Advice But I Trust My Gut (and Kathi, Cheryl, and Cindy)**

Every foster brings new challenges but we have great resources available to us. I still rely on my mentors and our HALO Facebook community is wonderful, with experienced owners, fosters, trainers, and veterinarians. I'm always willing to seek advice but in the end, I know my foster better than anyone, so I trust my gut and do what I think is best for my foster .... to a point ... I always try to remember that I am only a temporary caretaker for this dog. Right now this dog belongs to HALO and at some point in the near future, to a permanent family. So I never make a veterinarian decision without consulting with HALO first and keeping them abreast of treatments. I make myself available to the adoptive family but let them decide how much interaction we'll have.

**11. Look How Far You've Come!**

Most of all, I celebrate every small accomplishment, laugh at the silly antics, cry when they leave, and treasure the impact one small animal can have on my life.

Have fun!



## **QUARANTINING YOUR FOSTER**

If you are fostering a puppy mill rescue, then it is very important that you quarantine your new foster to keep your own pets from possibly becoming ill. The recommended total quarantine period, according to most vets, is 10 to 14 days. You can confer with your own vet as to what period they recommend.

How long you should quarantine your foster will depend partly upon how long the dog has been out of the puppy mill before coming to your home. This is something you can confirm with HALO when you are arranging to get your foster. Sometimes a foster has been at the vet's to be spayed/neutered, or has been with a HALO representative for several days and in such situations the amount of required quarantine time in your home may be reduced.

You need to ensure the foster and your pets have no contact whatsoever during this period. Therefore, just a gate across a room wouldn't work because they could touch noses. Using an exercise pen inside a room, and a baby gate across the doorway to keep your dogs out is very effective. To protect your floor, a shower curtain from the dollar store, or a tarp can be used. You can then place puppy pads in the pen to start teaching potty training.

The quarantine location should be close enough to where you are that your foster starts to get used to the normal noises of a household. Using a basement or a garage for a single dog doesn't work because the foster will be lonely and not have any stimulation. They will also not be getting used to having kind people around. This is an important period for them in learning to be a family pet. Hearing you talking to other family members on the phone, using household appliances, working around your home are all valuable in helping your foster adjust. You can sit near the pen and talk to your foster, or simply read aloud so they start to get used to your voice, while still feeling safer because the pen is between them and you.

When you have any contact with your foster, either by going into their pen to clean up or sit with them, or by touching them, remember you have to ensure good hygiene. Wash your hands carefully. Be careful that you are not transferring bacteria from the quarantine zone to your own pets or the rest of your home where your pets will be exposed to it.

It's important to quarantine your foster outside too. Taking the dogs out at separate times is not sufficient if you are allowing them on the same lawn. You want to separate your dogs and foster dog's potty areas, otherwise your dogs, who will naturally sniff around your yard, may be at risk at picking up an illness. You can use an exercise pen or fence off a part of your yard. You should pick up after your foster as soon as you can.

If you are transporting a dog in quarantine, use a crate and place a sheet or towel under it on your car seat. Secure the crate so it doesn't slide around. You can run a seat belt through the handle on top of the crate. Be sure to clean the crate before using it again.

At the end of quarantine, be sure to disinfect all materials you have used. Clothing, towels, dog beds, blankets, etc. should be washed in hot water in your washing machine.

Although it initially sounds like a lot of work, fosters find that after a day or two, a routine is established and it becomes easy to follow it. The priority of keeping your own pets healthy is worth the slight inconvenience and we have found over the past 15 years that this method of careful quarantine is very effective.

Of course if you have any questions at all, you are welcome to call any of us, or to ask for assistance from a mentor (someone who has lots of experience fostering).

From: Whole Dog Journal

By Jill Breitner

### **Creating a Great Dog Foster Home**

**It starts with a focus on the dog's health and emotional needs before "correcting" his behavior.**

"I wasn't sure if he was going to make it, those first two weeks," says foster provider Nancy Kerns. Buffet, formerly known as Muppet, was surrendered to a shelter by his owner. He was emaciated, and had become gravely ill in the shelter from kennel cough – an infection that rarely debilitates otherwise healthy adult dogs. He had also apparently been kept confined excessively; his muscles, tendons, and ligaments were so unconditioned that he couldn't stand fully upright on the pads of his feet. Instead, when he walked, he padded along on his "wrists" – the back part of his legs. And he was uncoordinated; he was unsure of how to navigate his world.

That was the bad news. The good news was that he wanted to try – to try to explore the world and make new human and dog friends. And he was adorable, with a sweet, enthusiastic personality. If his body could recover from whatever it had been put through in his first year of life, it would be easy to find him a home. Nancy nourished him in body and mind. He needed two rounds of antibiotics to kick the respiratory infection, lots of high-quality, high-protein food to gain weight and energy, daily walks to gain strength and coordination. Soon enough, he was feeling well enough to require lots of supervision to keep him from chewing things he shouldn't! In roughly six weeks, he was walking almost upright, recovered from his illness, gaining weight, and was almost ready to find a home. Nancy wrote about some of Buffet's time with her in her Whole Dog Journal blog.

Some of my friends had asked me to keep an eye out for a candidate to be their next dog. When I heard about Buffet, I thought he'd be a perfect match. I made arrangements to foster Buffet for another month or so, so I could assess his needs in order to provide support to my friends after they brought him home.

### **Fostering = Setting Up Dogs for Success**

In my opinion, foster or rehabilitation caregivers do not just nurse dogs back to health if they are ill and give dogs temporary shelter before they are adopted out. They are also responsible for bolstering their emotional state and mental well-being. Setting up a dog for success is a big challenge but should be the goal for foster caregivers.

### **Emotional Dog Rescue**

What does it mean to set a dog up for success? Initially, success is meeting the emotional and physical needs of our new charge. This means that we must learn how to read dog body language, so we can understand their emotional state. If we know when a dog is stressed, fearful, or anxious, we can help to alleviate his anxieties and help him gain confidence, which makes him more adoptable. When a dog is relieved of stress, his

ability to learn increases, which also makes him more adoptable. It behooves all foster caregivers to learn how to “speak dog” if our goal is to be the bridge to their forever home. Remember, if we can’t communicate, we can’t bond!

Many dogs in foster homes have come from shelters, so by the time they come to a foster home, they have been in a minimum of three previous homes: One, where they were born; two, their first home away from their litter; and three, the shelter. The foster home is at least number four – and all of these changes can be traumatizing for any dog. This kind of trauma is often responsible for breaking the human-dog bond. It manifests in stress behaviors such as barking, whining, jumping, mouthing, separation anxiety, and even aggression towards humans and other dogs or animals. If a dog’s first two years of life are interrupted by displacement, illness, or abuse, he will suffer emotionally. It’s our job as foster providers to help alleviate this stress by making our wards feel safe and secure; without this, dogs are unable to learn and thrive, thereby making the return rate to shelters and foster homes higher than need be.

### **Dog Fostering Phase Two**

Buffet came to me already much healthier and thriving, thanks to his first foster provider. His joie de vivre wasn’t permanently destroyed by his poor health. He was a happy, goofy, gangly, one-year-old puppy, ready to roll. But he also displayed a lot of anxieties. My goal for Buffet was to make him feel secure in himself and in the world around him, and that process started with observing him without expectations of his behavior, and trying understand his emotional state. He’d been through a lot and still had a very sweet and willing disposition, and I didn’t want him to lose that.

Dealing with his anxiety was the first order of business, however. He had been transported to my town in a car with several other dogs who were being moved across state lines to new homes, and even though his part of the journey lasted only about six hours, he had been stressed enough in the car that when he got out, he had diarrhea and a loss of appetite for a couple of days. (I checked with Nancy, who reported that usually he was a voracious eater and had not previously had loose stools.) There were lots of other clues that Buffet was quite anxious. He frequently barked and whined for attention, “counter surfed” (restlessly looked for items to eat or chew from the counters), chewed any clothing he could get hold of, and humped his bed in an effort to settle himself before he’d sleep. Nancy had reported that he had displayed some of these behaviors early in her time with him, but most of them had faded over the six weeks she had him.

The barking was perhaps the most obnoxious stress signal – but it’s important to understand that he wasn’t being bad; he was anxious, and barking helps relieve an anxious dog’s anxiety. It’s a coping mechanism – albeit not a very useful one, given that many people yell at or punish a dog for barking, which just increases the dog’s anxiety! Buffet barked when he was frustrated or wanted something, because he didn’t know what else to do, and had never been taught a more polite way of getting attention from humans. He barked at the dogs to get them to play and he barked at me when he wanted something from me. If I left him in the house while I went out to my car to get something, even though he could see me the entire time through a window, he would

bark with anxiety, worried that I might leave him behind. He would also bark when I asked him to do something that he didn't want to do, like "sit" on cue.

I ignored the barking; again, if someone punishes this stress-based behavior, it often worsens the situation. Within a few days, he stopped barking at me, and barked at my dogs only when he wanted them to play, or when I was giving them loving attention and he wanted to be a part of it. As he began to feel safe and secure, the barking diminished and vanished by the end of our month together.

Another major indicator of his stress was his inability to settle himself. When I would sit down on the couch or at my desk, he would often hump his bed in an anxious frenzy. I knew that I had met his needs for exercise with walks, play, and short training sessions. I knew he wasn't hungry, didn't have to go potty, and that he indeed wanted to rest but couldn't.

I watched his behavior without reaction or words, and with each passing day, the humping became less and less frequent until he didn't do it at all. Keep in mind that this is not sexual and not a bad behavior; it's just an anxious behavior. It was his way of winding down in his unfamiliar world. Buffet stopped the humping behavior completely while living with me, and started it up again after he met his new guardians and stayed with them in a hotel when they came to my town and stayed for a couple of days of visiting and getting to know him. When he got to his new home, the humping ceased within a few days.

Remember, correcting anxious behaviors is wrong. It perpetuates the anxiety and/or makes the dog shut down. It's our job as foster caregivers to build confidence and trust, not shut down the dog's emotions. Most anxious behaviors go away by themselves when they are responded to with little to no reactive energy, as long as the dog has opportunities to have his emotional needs satisfied with love and affection.

### **Teaching Foster Dogs Positively**

As a dog trainer, I of course want to further my foster dogs' education, but not at the expense of his confidence or enthusiasm. So I aim to keep all teaching sessions short and fun, and use games and yummy treats. In this way, I was able to build Buffet's self-assurance while helping him overcome his anxieties.

It helps to relieve a dog's stress if you make learning fun and rewarding, by doing short sessions – only five minutes each maximum, and ending on a positive note, about four to six times a day. I teach one cue or trick at a time, and if the dog gets at all "stuck," I don't try that trick or behavior again for a day or two. Then, when I do go back to it, the dog usually has it down and is willing to give more and with much more enthusiasm. That said, I always take the time to teach my foster dogs cues in real life situations – because it's real life that will be happening when they go to their new homes! For example, I always teach dogs to "wait" at doors and gates, in the car, and while hiking or in safe public places. I also teach them to "sit" if they want a toy or treat; it's a dog version of saying, "Please!"

I take my fosters to the vet clinic for a weight check and treats from the staff, so that

going to the vet is a fun time, not anxiety-producing. I practice low-stress handling methods for grooming and vet visits, so my foster dogs are comfortable being touched, positioned for ear checks, blood draws, nail trims, and being brushed; this goes a long way in reducing stress. I teach these things slowly and with treats to make it enjoyable and rewarding for them. I also keep these sessions short and positive, and allow the dog to have a choice in how fast I go.

For example, when I took out a brush to groom Buffet, he initially backed away and bit at the brush. He was playing, but underneath his play was an undertone of anxiety about being brushed – or perhaps being forced to tolerate brushing. I stopped immediately and, instead, walked over to a training mat, prepared with brush and treats. (I use a fuzzy sort of bath mat, which gives the dog a comfortable place to sit, stand, or lie down, while also providing a sort of boundary of where I'd like him to remain while we work. I reinforce the dog heavily while he's on the mat, and soon he is happy to remain there, without being forced to do so.) Buffet followed me to the mat, and I showed him the brush and gave him a treat. Putting the brush behind my back and treat ready in the other hand, I brought the brush out front again, and when he sniffed it, I immediately offered him a treat. After about five repetitions of this, I touched him gently with the brush and gave him a treat. I repeated this about five times. Then I did one brush stroke and gave him a treat. I repeated the same sequence with longer brush strokes (brush, treat; brush, treat), until I was able to brush him without biting the brush or moving away – and all this took only about 10 minutes.

Spending just a few minutes each day on this type of positive reward teaching and low-stress handling in real-life situations helps a foster dog build confidence and trust in you. What better way to bond with a dog, but especially an anxious, fearful, or stressed dog! While you're in these teaching sessions, pay attention to the dog's body language and emotional state. It will help you to know when to stop, slow down, or keep going.

### **Canine Stress Relief**

Teaching a dog some tricks is a blast – and they don't have to be complicated! A simple “high five” or catching a toy or treat in the air is fun and rewarding. Watching how a foster dog processes new tricks and games gives you more information that you can offer his new guardian, who can then see how fun and easy teaching dogs can be and how much dogs love to learn. Tug of war is another great game, because while playing you can teach a dog to both take (“take it!”) and release (“drop it!”) the toy.

Buffet learned tricks before I taught him any formal “good manners” behaviors, because I saw that the leash highly stressed him. When I attached a leash to his collar, he would bite at the leash and bark at me; if I took the leash off, he was eager to learn. I recognized these “bad behaviors” for what they really were – anxious behaviors – and understood his emotional state; it was more important to alleviate his anxiety than to worry about the barking and grabbing at the leash. Once he caught on to the teaching process and became enthusiastically engaged, I could put the leash on without him getting anxious and his progress soared.

Four to six short (five-minute max) training sessions a day adds up to 30 minutes. I

would venture to say that many people spend far more time trying to correct so-called bad behaviors, which ultimately is detrimental to their relationships with their new dogs. In contrast, short, fun teaching sessions help to alleviate the dog's stress while building a stronger bond and a foundation of trust. This kind of foundation truly helps prepare a dog for his or her new family, as it's more important that they are happy, healthy, and willing and able to trust and connect with new people than it is to be perfectly "trained" in conventional "obedience" behaviors. If more attention was paid to foster dogs' emotional state from the minute they were taken into foster care, I think their placements would go much more smoothly.

### **Another Happy Ending**

When Buffet left me to be with his new family, he was a more confident dog and able to manage stressful situations with ease. He had the confidence he needed to mature into a well-mannered, well-adjusted adult dog. Just as important, his adopters took the time to learn to be aware of his emotional state, recognize his signs of stress or anxiety, and respond appropriately to those signs in order to help him regain confidence any time he got overwhelmed.

We've been living with dogs for thousands of years and yet it's a relatively new idea to learn how to read dog body language to better understand their emotional state. By getting better at speaking dog, we can help to reduce their stress and fear so they can behave "better" – which, in turn, will help them stay in their original homes, instead of being surrendered to shelters. If we took this education to heart, I daresay that homeless dogs, dog bites, and surrendering dogs to shelters would not be the huge problem that they continue to be today.

## **FOSTERING AWAY – HOW TO SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR FOSTER DOG**

BY VALIA ORFANIDOU

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Fostering is about letting go – I guess that's pretty clear. Foster parents serve as an intermediary, and it all comes down to that precious moment, when our fosters leave for their forever home.

*Goodbyes are for people, not for dogs*

So how to say goodbye to a dog we have fostered, cared for, trained, and loved? I'm not sure you'll like the answer: you simply don't. Goodbyes are for people, not for dogs. While hugging your foster dog, kissing, crying, and whispering in his ear, explaining how much you are going to miss him, overwhelmed by that final farewell, the result is leaving a very stressed and sad animal behind.

*Dogs only understand the present, not the past, and definitely not the future*

Dogs only understand the present, not the past, and definitely not the future. They will never understand what "you'll have a good life" means (future), "I am going to miss you" (future), "we've had some good times" (past) etc. As much as we try to humanize them, a heartwarming goodbye is traumatic for a dog, because he can only comprehend the present, and what he comprehends is you talking and behaving in a way you have never behaved in the past, before leaving him surrounded by strangers.

*A heartwarming goodbye is traumatic for a dog*

Yes, fostering is awesome, and yes, we played a huge role in this dog's life. However, a dog's actual life begins at home, no matter how old he is, and it should begin as less stressful and complicated as possible. The transition from fostering to the forever home should be like a slow fade out – you are not quite sure when one scene ends and when another begins.

*The transition from fostering to the forever home should be like a slow fade out*

Besides, no rescue or foster can ever be compared to the actual adoption, and "stealing" the adoptive parent's thunder, making it all about you is selfish, and makes adoptions complicated and emotionally weird. Fostering must be like caring for someone else's dog for a while; this is how I see it.

*Fostering must be like caring for someone else's dog for a while*

Today my foster girl Christy was adopted. It was a day like any other for her. I did nothing different, nor behaved strange, I took her out as if it was a regular walk, drove her home, spent about an hour with the family and we signed the adoption papers while Christy was lying on our feet. Then, her mum and I took her out, and while she was holding the leash, I let them walk in front of, while I slowed down and faded silently in the background, until they turned around the corner and were out of sight.



*I let them walk in front of, while I slowed down and faded silently in the background, until they turned around the corner and were out of sight*

This was my goodbye to Christy, who I adored. This is my goodbye to all my foster dogs, and as difficult as it may sound, it helps them adjust faster and easier to their new life – it's all about them anyway, not me.

(There are times when I come back home crying, lay in their empty beds and kiss their photos, and I am more than allowed to do that, because it does not affect them at all – besides, I'm not made of stone)

From: [www.theorphanpet.com](http://www.theorphanpet.com)

## 5 Ways to Love and Let Go of Foster Dogs

by Lisa Lanser Rose

People tell me all the time they admire me for fostering dogs. “I could never foster,” they say. “I’d get too attached.”

I know they mean to praise me, but the compliment sometimes feels backhanded. They love too much, therefore I must have something wrong with my heart.

The truth is, I’m passionate about dogs and naturally clingy. Yet, somehow, (so far!), I’ve let all my fosters go—even the ones with whom I deeply bonded.

Here’s how I love and let go of them. I compare them to other strong but temporary attachments in my life. I tell myself:

**They’re my students.** University students are in your class five months at a time, high school a whole ten months. As an educator, I got attached to some of my students; there’s a reason favorites are called the teacher’s “pet.” I tell myself I run a school in my home where lost dogs learn how to be lovable family pets again. I teach them basic obedience and a few tricks so they are good and charming. When they they get adopted, they “graduate.”

**They’re relatives from out of town.** I tell myself things like, “These three puppies are my nephews. This is Grandma Gilly. Here’s Cousin Barkley!” Some I like more than others. Some I can’t wait to see the backside of. Just as when I have relatives visiting, while they’re here, we conflict, we connect. I’m stressed, I’m joyful. When they leave, I’m sad, I’m glad. I find myself looking forward to fosters leaving just so I can reconnect with my own dogs, Mick and Maisie. I know we’ll all be sad, but we have each other. Although I won’t necessarily see my individual fosters again, I will see their like again. (And we do have reunions!)

**No matter their age, dogs are a lot like children.** Like your kids, dogs belong to themselves more than they do to you. If you raise them right, children grow up and leave home. When my daughter was small and warbling enchantments that intoxicated me, I couldn’t believe it was my job to render myself obsolete. But it was. I did it, and the child of my heart lives in a home of her own now. Just like your child, foster dogs come into your heart only for a short time. While we’re together, we share a “now” that is our life together. When they go, the story of their lives goes on, and in it, I’m barely a paragraph. A year or two later, I’m nothing but a comma. And that’s okay. In fact, it’s marvelous that life stories are that rich.

**I’m not special.** Some people have trouble letting go because it feels as if no one else will love this animal as much or as well as they do. When I feel that way, I remind myself that the world is full of love. It was full before I was born, and love will go on without me in abundance. Dogs are innately lovable, and lots of people love dogs. (I’m certain there’s a dog-person gene.) Maybe it’s because I’m a teacher, but I know if I can take good care of this dog, so can someone else. I hold tight to this faith. With the help of

the rescue network, I try to make solid, longterm matches for the dogs in my care. That way I get to do my small part to bring the right dog and the right family together. This other family gets to be heroes, and I share in their joy from the sidelines. Most fosters I know say that making this gift possible for others is the most rewarding thing about this work. One said to me, “Sometimes I wonder when I agree to take 10 more puppies if I have rocks in my head. Then when I see the families so excited and know those puppies didn’t have a chance without us. In those moments, I know exactly why I do it.”

**I have to make room for the next dog.** Think Schindler’s List: “I could have gotten more out . . . I didn’t do enough!” Every year, [7.6 million dogs and cats](#) enter shelters, and 2.7 million are euthanized. I can’t adopt them all, and if I could, how would those accommodations look? Acres of kennels? My home would become a shelter. A puppy mill. A factory farm. A fellow foster mom told me, “Sometimes I’m tempted to ‘foster fail’ and keep a foster, but the more dogs come and go, the more I think I should stick to the three I have and continue fostering. The right one for me will come along, and I don’t want to rush it, just because they have blue eyes!”

An especially inspiring line also comes from Schindler’s List, from the Talmud: “Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.” When you let your foster dog go to a new home, you create an opening in your life for the next dog in need, and, believe me, that dog is out there. That dog needs you. Whenever you welcome a foster dog into your home and then let her go to a new home, you do your small part to save the world.

So, whenever people tell me, “I could never foster, I’d get too attached,” I want to say, “You might be surprised!” You won’t love them all. Some aren’t right for you—but they are right for someone else. Bonds take time to develop, and often the dog isn’t with you long enough for that to happen. Sometimes you do get attached, but so what? Yes, love hurts. Life hurts. Dogs are out there hurting right now. I want to say to those people, “You can do it! At least give it one try!”

You’d be saving the world entire!  
We need more fosters like you!

**Lisa Lanser Rose** is the author of the memoir *For the Love of a Dog* (Harmony Books) and the novel, *Body Sharers* (Rutgers University Press), which was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Foundation Award for Best First Novel.