

# What to Expect From, and Of, Your New English Shepherd

## *Part I: Introducing Your New Life*

Welcome to the ranks of owners and foster families for the English shepherds (and a few others) who began their journey to a good life as part of Operation New Beginnings in Billings Montana. You are the all-important Next Step in Project Next Steps, the effort to place every dog in a home where he or she can reach his full potential as a companion and good canine citizen. His adoption is only the beginning of a new life; “happily ever after” can only come with plenty of hard work, understanding, and patience on your part.

Your dog has spent the last seven or more months living in a converted horse stall or a kennel run. He has been cared for by volunteers (perhaps you were one of them) who not only saw to it that he was properly fed, housed, and vetted, but who accustomed him to humans for the first time in his life -- teaching him to be touched, to take a treat from a human hand, to walk on a leash, and to respond to a person with affection and respect. Some of the dogs have had a fair amount of obedience training from their handlers, and will know several commands.

If your dog is a puppy born in custody, he has known no other life. If he is one of the adult dogs seized in December 2008, he had a past in which he was deprived of many of the necessities that make a dog whole. Some of our recommendations for the adult dogs may not apply to a puppy, who will have an easier time transitioning to a normal life as a companion. You will have to use your judgement. But don't assume that your 5-7 month-old puppy will be like one who has lived in a home before. The kennel environment has been stressful for and created bad habits in *all* the dogs, puppies included.

It is crucial that you recognize the ways in which your new dog was deprived of normal experiences, so that you are not surprised by his ignorance, and so that you set him up to learn and succeed from the beginning. It is also crucial that you not make excuses for plain old bad behavior, or coddle your dog, or treat him as pitiable -- *because he's better than that*. Your dog is not a victim -- he is a *survivor*, and with your help, he will become a *winner*.

Here are some of the important things that your dog has never done:

- Entered a normal human house -- so he is not housetrained at all
- Met a child
- Seen a human infant
- Lived with a cat or small pet
- Walked on a leash on a city street
- Met a new dog, not one of his relatives
- Been in a crowd of people
- Been around traffic
- Been off a leash outside a fence

Eaten a meal in your kitchen  
Walked up a flight of stairs  
Gone swimming  
Been totally alone, anywhere  
Tolerated a stranger taking liberties with him or entering and leaving his home  
Had to leave some object alone because it wasn't for dogs or is dangerous (lamp cords, chocolate, your eyeglasses)  
Heard household noises such as television, vacuum cleaners, dishwashers  
Ridden in a car  
Seen a mirror  
Required to refrain from barking  
Respected human efforts to maintain a landscape and garden  
Refrained from bursting through windows and screens  
Stayed behind the railing of a porch or deck  
Tolerated a nail trim

These are all things he will have to learn, step-by-step. It is your job to teach him, and to prevent him from getting into trouble while he learns.

The first *minutes* he spends as part of your household are the most important time in your dog's life. If you set the tone for good behavior immediately, and are consistent as he adjusts to life with you, you can prevent the vast majority of behavior problems. Preventing bad habits is much easier than correcting them; second best is nipping habits in the bud with the change of environment to your home.

Give your new dog no freedom to make errors at first. If you bring your dog home and turn him loose in your house without supervision and restraint, you are likely to have your sofa shredded, your door frames watered, your cat chased and mugged, the bread stolen from the countertop, a dogfight, an oral electrocution, and a couple of broken windows. Then, in the *next* five minutes, things will get *really* exciting.

If your dog is very fearful of new things and places -- which is highly likely given his restricted life -- and you allow him to flee and hide behind the sofa right away, he will have set a pattern that can be extremely difficult to break.

The most important thing to remember is that too much freedom leads to big mistakes. Your dog should start his life with you with no freedom; as he learns the rules, you will reward him with greater privileges, but it is always better to go a little too slowly than too fast.

### **Setting up for safety**

Your new dog should come home with a snugly-fitted martingale collar with his tags on his neck, and a sturdy leash (NO "flexi-leads") attached to the collar while he rides in the car (in a crate if at all possible). Hold the leash firmly and do not let go, no matter what.

Make sure you have a spare leash available at all times in case of chewing accidents. Do not use a knotted, tattered, or frayed leash, or a leash with a cheap clip.

Assume that your dog could attempt to flee at top speed at any moment; no one can predict what will startle him.

Set up your dog's crate in a quiet location away from a lot of activity, and have it ready for him to come inside. Designate one or two rooms (such as kitchen and family room) where your dog will be allowed for the first days or weeks. Make those rooms relatively safe by stowing breakables and getting things such as cords, candy bowls, etc. out of reach.

If you have other pets, remove them from the rooms where your dog will be staying at first and secure them elsewhere. While we usually do dog introductions before bringing the new guy into the house, NESR's recommendation with most of these dogs is to delay for a couple days while the new guy gets his feet under him. Time-shift so your dogs are not in the yard at the same time.

Allow your dog to see, and if he wants, approach other family members outside with plenty of space around him before going inside. Have your family members crouch and orient sideways to him, without speaking or making direct eye contact. Remember to give instructions before bringing the dog home. Don't get too loud or happy if he approaches and sniffs them; they can offer a little quiet chest scratch for being friendly, and then move away. Don't startle the guy.

### **The First Thirty Seconds**

It takes less than a minute for your dog to begin either good or bad habits that can persist for a lifetime. The way your dog first enters your home sets the tone for his entire life there. It tells him much of what he needs to know about you, your rules, your leadership, and your expectations of him.

If at all possible, take your dog on a leash walk in a quiet place for twenty to forty minutes before bringing him in the door. Don't approach the door until he is somewhat tired and is walking nicely with you, not lunging, circling, dragging or pacing. Don't let a male dog mark any object that you don't want him marking every day from now on. If your dog eliminates on this walk, praise him for doing so. This is his first lesson in housetraining.

Walk to the door. Open it. If your dog tries to dash inside (unlikely for one of these dogs) block him and require him to back off. Use your body to demand he give you space and respect, and eye contact. Then invite him in and precede him into the house.

If, as is more likely, your dog is hesitant to enter the house, be gentle but firm with him. Coaxing is fine, but don't "whine" at your dog. Maintain a forward impetus and don't be

afraid to use some leash pressure to bring him inside -- but avoid dragging him like an anchor if you can.

Take him straight to his crate (he will probably go inside on his own), remove the leash, close him in, and stay in the room with him *quietly*. If he goes to sleep, you can leave him alone. Don't reinforce whining or escape behavior by soothing. A sharp, but not loud or bullying, verbal correction should usually suffice to settle a nervous dog in his crate.

## **Housetraining and First Adjustments**

When he wakes up, or in about an hour if he has remained awake, take him out of the crate on his leash, and immediately go outside -- requiring manners at the door -- and give him an opportunity to eliminate. If he does not after about ten minutes, bring him inside and return him to his crate for an hour. If he does eliminate, bring him inside and start to show him the one or two rooms of the house where he will be allowed for the first few days or weeks. *On the leash!* Let him investigate all safe things. Gently correct him for interest in things that he is not to touch. Do not allow him on furniture for now (regardless of your general policy about dogs on the furniture.) Correct any attempt to eliminate indoors. Be especially watchful of the boys! Most dogs will respond to a sharp (not loud or angry) *AAAH!!*, with some requiring a light pop on the leash, always at the very beginning of the mistake, or just before it starts. If the dog is marking (lifting his leg to claim something), simply correct. If he needs to eliminate, take him out immediately.

The pattern you should set is:

Crate time (about one hour)

Outside (about ten minutes)

If dog eliminates --> leash time inside --> back to crate in 1/2 hour

If dog doesn't eliminate ---> back to crate (about one hour)

Outside again (about ten minutes)

*Lather. Rinse. Repeat.*

If you have adopted more than one dog, only one dog may be out on leash or in the yard or walked at a time. Adhering to this practice is absolutely necessary to your new dogs' adjustment to you and their new lives as a members of a human household.

Of course, he needs regular longer walks. If you have a fenced yard, you can let him explore while dragging a long line (about 15 feet), too.

Feed him twice a day, in his crate for now. Leave the food in the crate with him for 15 minutes with his leash attached to his collar and the end outside the crate door. After 15 minutes, open the crate, remove the dog (not the food bowl, whether empty or still full), and take him for a walk. Remove the food bowl before he goes back into the crate.

Don't be surprised if he is off his food for several days, and don't go overboard tempting him with goodies. A healthy dog has never starved to death with a food bowl down twice a day for ten or fifteen minutes.

After a few days of this, and when he is comfortable in his first room or two, you can bring him to visit other parts of the house, *on his leash*.

When your dog no longer indicates any intention to eliminate in the house, you can relax vigilance a little by going about your household routine with his leash tied to your belt. Shorten it up enough that you aren't tripping over it, and just let him hang out with you as you do your normal stuff. Don't use the waist tether when things are hectic and noisy, or when cooking or working with anything that could be dangerous to a dog that is underfoot or to you if he pulls you unexpectedly. He should be in his crate at those times.

Keep in mind that your dog's first experience in your house sets the pattern for the rest of his life with you. Prepare your home and your family before bringing your dog to his new home. Prepare your dog to enter his new home by taking him for a walk so he can eliminate. Help your dog be successful by only allowing him freedom as he shows he can handle it. He must be at your side on leash, in his crate, or exploring the backyard at all times. Most everything your dog is experiencing new. By controlling his freedom you will make it easier for him to understand his new world.

In Part 2, we will discuss introducing your new dog to your current pets, learning self control through the exercises of yielding and "sitting on the dog," and the start of real obedience and safety training.

## Resources

NESR has established a Yahoo online Group specifically for the owners and foster families of Operation New Beginnings dogs. If you have not received an invitation via email yet, you can apply for membership at

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/montanaes>

Or by emailing: [montanaes-owner@yahoogroups.com](mailto:montanaes-owner@yahoogroups.com)

This is **your source** for articles, web links, and direct advice from English shepherd veterans and professional trainers. It is open only to you, the owner or fosterer of an ONB dog, and our team and consulting experts.

National English Shepherd Rescue volunteers are available to help you for the life of your adopted dog.