



Decompression Checklist for Dog Fosters

When a dog suffers from kennel stress, it can take from **several minutes** to **72 hours** or more for that pet's anxiety to return to near-normal levels. It takes time to build trust, and trust is the basis for obedience. The more a dog trusts its foster, the more likely it will follow the rules.

In some cases, the buildup of shelter stress can make a dog difficult to tire out. This will improve with time, but there are several things a foster should do to make this process go smoothly.

___ Prepare needed supplies in order to engage your foster dog mentally. You may want to use food-filled frozen Kongs, puzzle toys, etc.

___ If this is your first time outside of the shelter with your foster dog, take a walk around the shelter grounds for 10-15 minutes before leaving to get comfortable with the dog.

___ Tire your foster dog by playing fetch in the comfort and safety of your backyard. Sometimes walking can be stressful for shelter pets, so playing with them in your yard would be best.

___ When you arrive home, ensure that any family members who are meeting the dog for the first time are seated. They should let the dog come to them for attention, as opposed to soliciting attention from the dog.

___ Keep your foster dog separated from your own dogs until your foster is visibly relaxed.

___ If your foster is unable to settle down (panting, whining, constantly in motion, etc.) channel their energy into a task such as fetch, puzzle toys or any game that engages their brain until they are able to relax.

___ **Do not** introduce your resident pets to foster pets (meet-and-greets) for the first 48 hours to a week, depending on the dog's comfort level.



Other Suggestions for Decompression:

- We know you want to spoil your new foster pet, but for the first couple weeks, keep all high-value items away from your foster pet and your resident pets. (you are a resource as well, and your foster/resident pets might not want to share you!)
- Only feed separately until your pet is decompressed/relaxed. You can give treats and toys if your foster pet is separate from your resident pet.
- If it's not possible to take the dog into foster right away, it will help if the foster comes to the shelter to bring the dog treats or take it outside several times. Consider leaving something with your scent on it, such as a towel, with the dog while it's there. This may help the dog to feel more comfortable and associate the foster with good things.
- If the dog is anxious, use a pheromone diffuser or collar, or diffuse some essential oil of lavender into the air.
- Consider only using essential (safety-related) commands during the first 24-48 hours. Don't want the dog to jump onto your couch while jumping around the house? Think about saving that lesson for another day when they are more calm and available for learning, and engage your foster in another task that's incompatible with jumping on the couch, like a game of Box Hide and Seek.
- Make sure your activities don't overstimulate the dog.
- Play with your foster in the safety of your confined yard. Many shelter pets are not used to walks so walking can be stressful for them. Tire them out by playing fetch in your yard.
- Consider playing soft music. Classical, reggae and ambient electronic work well for helping pets decompress.
- Try to stick it out for the first 72 hours. It will get better, we promise!