

Important Things to Know Before Adopting a Puppy Mill Dog



Dogs that spend years of their lives in puppy mills are denied most forms of socialization, enrichment, and positive interaction with people. They spend their days inside small enclosures with little or no opportunity for normal social contact with other dogs, exercise, or play. They typically have no positive experiences with humans, and their interactions with people are limited to brief, often rough handling to move them from one cage to another, or to push them out of the way to take away their puppies. This has a deep, lasting, negative impact on the dog's personality and emotional well-being.

There is substantial evidence suggesting that, after being rescued, former puppy mill dogs continue to display ongoing problems in their behavior, reflecting a damaged psychological and emotional state. Former puppy mill dogs are found to demonstrate significantly higher rates of fear, reduced trainability, compulsive repetitive behaviors, amplified reactivity to being touched, and difficulty in coping with normal existence, especially in the first few months after rescue.

Because puppy mill dogs live most of their lives in cages where they are isolated from normal day to day life, they have a hard time adjusting to unfamiliar stimuli. The sound of a coffee maker or vacuum cleaner can elicit anxiety and panic. Some mill dogs may have never seen or touched grass, so going out on the lawn may be terrifying to them. These dogs will display distrust and fear of humans, even the well-meaning ones that have never harmed them. Puppy mill dogs often have a fear of sudden movements, unfamiliar objects, loud noises, and may be fearful of going outside, or wearing a collar and leash. They may be slow to catch on to obedience training, house training, leash walking, etc. This is primarily because these normal expectations of behavior simply did not exist for the dog prior to being rescued. It is also extremely difficult for a fearful, anxious dog to learn new things or to unlearn any negative behaviors, as they are too focused on their fear to think of anything else.

Dogs kept in these large-scale breeding facilities don't just suffer while they're confined there, but continue to carry psychological scars with them for years, even after they're placed in loving homes. Please be sure to educate yourself and make an informed decision prior to adopting a puppy mill dog. They require a significantly higher level of specialized care and carefully tailored training and socialization over a much longer period of time than the average shelter dog would need. This can be psychologically and physically taxing for the adopter, so a high level of patience, understanding, and long-term persistence is vital to helping a puppy mill dog adapt to his new life.

Plan Ahead Checklist:

1. A securely fenced yard - Many puppy mill dogs are so frightened in their unfamiliar new surroundings that they will bolt and run away. A sturdy, secure fence can prevent escapes and keep your new dog safe. But don't turn your new mill dog loose in your yard right away – you may have serious trouble catching him again! Use a "long line" leash (15-20 feet long) to give your dog some space to explore the area safely, while allowing you to stay connected so that you can more easily bring the dog back inside when he is done outdoors. Only once your dog is comfortable returning to you should you discontinue using the leash inside your fenced yard. If you have another dog that your new mill dog feels comfortable with, you may find that your mill dog will follow your other dog around, which may make bringing him outside and back inside much easier on everyone involved!
2. A safe, quiet, den-like area inside your home where your new dog can go to feel secure – a crate covered with a blanket and a cozy bed inside, placed in a quiet, dimly lit area of your home will help your new dog feel safer so that they can relax a little bit.

3. Baby gates – Closing off areas of your home where you do not want him to be (carpeted areas, close to the front door where he could easily dart out unexpectedly, etc.) will help prevent accidents and mishaps. Plan ahead to keep your dog, and your home, safe from avoidable unpleasant situations. Dog-proofing your house before bringing home your new family member will help to keep him, and your home, safe.
4. A Secure and properly fitted harness and a slip-lead – Puppy Mill dogs are the last dogs you would want to escape and get lost, but they are often the most likely to do so! Before taking your new dog outdoors, be sure to get a harness that is hard to wriggle out of and be sure it is adjusted to fit correctly. For back-up, have your new dog wear a slip-lead on his neck (one that loops around the neck and snugs up if they pull on it, not a regular leash that just clips to the collar) for back up, just in case the harness fails. Spend time getting your dog acclimated to wearing the harness and leash so that it is a familiar feeling that he is comfortable with. Don't put it on him for the first time and expect him to be ok with it right away! It can take weeks or even months for a mill dog to become adjusted to new sensations like wearing collars, leashes, harnesses, jackets, etc. Don't forget to attach ID tags with your contact information just in case your dog does get lost!
5. Resources – Puppy Mill dogs often have behavioral problems based in fear and insecurity that may need some extra help from a pro to handle appropriately and overcome successfully. Do some investigating and locate a trainer or behaviorist skilled in dealing with mill dogs before bringing your new dog home. Get in touch with them to ensure that they will be a good match and that they will have the availability to take on a new client. Then, if you need extra help, you will know just who to contact. Finding the right trainer or behaviorist, one with experience in handling and rehabilitating Puppy Mill dogs, will help to ensure that you and your new dog will have the best chance at successfully navigating through difficulties and living a harmonious life together.

MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES CAN BE FOUND HERE:

<https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/puppy-mill-rescue-dogs-transition-home-life>

<https://nmdr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NMDR-From-Puppy-Mill-to-Pet.pdf>

VIDEOS AND MORE INFORMATION ON MILL DOG SURVIVOR BEHAVIOR:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5FTgBdlD84>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEnA7aIVT_g

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGHyB3DhsjM>