



Best Friends

Help for Specific Issues with Adopted Puppy Mill Dogs

By Franklin D. McMillan
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About Best Friends Animal Society

Best Friends Animal Society is a leading animal welfare organization working to end the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters by 2025. Founded in 1984, Best Friends is a pioneer in the no-kill movement and has helped reduce the number of animals killed in shelters from an estimated 17 million per year to under 350,000. Best Friends runs lifesaving programs across the country, as well as the nation's largest no-kill animal sanctuary. In collaboration with a network of thousands of animal welfare and shelter partners, and community members nationwide, Best Friends is working to Save Them All.

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Introduction

A very special dog is now becoming part of your life. This brave little survivor has endured unpleasantries we can only imagine, and has emerged a very unique individual who is now counting on you for help in overcoming that horrible experience. It takes a very special person to do this — and if you're ready and willing to take on this challenge, it will be life-changing for both you and your new companion. So many of the people who have undertaken this journey before you have reported that it was the most rewarding thing they have ever done — and the odds are that it will be for you, too.

Over the next year or two, you will watch a dog who has been deprived of virtually every known pleasure begin to first explore, then enjoy, a life that offers her these pleasures. The words that adopters before you have used most often to describe their dog's change include “blossom,” “bloom” and “coming out of her shell.” You're almost certain to be seeing your dog's changes in the same light.

But it may not be an easy road for you and for your new canine companion. Puppy mill dogs have had their world turned upside down. Everything is different and new. This is often overwhelming for the dog, and helping your dog adjust to this new world can be challenging and may test your patience as it has never been tested before. But nothing good in life comes without some effort, and helping a psychologically beaten dog heal is one of life's greatest goods.

This guide provides you with some specific methods for helping your puppy mill survivor. It is meant to supplement our larger report entitled *Understanding and Caring for Rescued Puppy Mill Dogs*, which is a comprehensive summary of the findings of our study of over 1,100 breeding dogs who were rescued from lives in puppy mills and adopted into human households. In obtaining full psychological and behavioral profiles of them, we were able to gain a wealth of information about these incredible dogs.

Some basic facts:

Puppy mills. Puppy mills are puppy-making factories. They are large-scale commercial dog-breed-

ing operations where the happiness of the dogs is all but ignored in order to make a monetary profit from selling the puppies. To maximize profits, the dogs are housed in very small enclosures, live in unsanitary living quarters, are fed inferior-quality food, are denied decent medical care, and, most important, are severely deprived of positive human social contact.

Psychological functioning. Because puppy mill dogs are born and raised in an impoverished environment and endure severe stress throughout life, their psychological functioning is not like that of normally raised pet dogs. This shows itself in how they interact with people, their desire to make eye contact, their social skills with other dogs, their desire to play, their ability to focus attention and learn — in short, their ability to function like a typical dog.

Fortunately, the dogs have a remarkable capacity to recover from their psychological impairments. Many recover to the point where they appear to be completely rid of their psychological difficulties, others recover partially but not completely, and others are so severely troubled that they continue to struggle emotionally. Every puppy mill dog has a different capacity to adapt and recover, and we almost never know at the outset what this limit will be or when the dog will reach it. What this means is that adopters must accept up-front that the dog they are taking into their home may retain some psychological impairment throughout his or her life and may always be a special-needs companion. It is imperative that puppy mill dog adopters commit themselves to unconditional acceptance of what their dog is, what he becomes, and what his limitations may be.

Rehabilitation. Rehabilitation of puppy mill dogs is often difficult and fraught with frustration. It may take weeks, months, or even years for the dogs to be free of their fears and other emotional struggles. For some, rehabilitation continues for the dog's remaining lifetime. Just like the terminology used for alcoholism in people (i.e., those who overcome their troubles are referred to as “recovering alcoholics” rather than “former alcoholics”), some puppy mill dogs will always be “recovering puppy mill dogs.” And even with the finest human efforts, some of the dogs coming out of puppy mills are just too emotionally scarred to completely

overcome the harm that befell them. But, as our studies have shown, the adopters who open their arms and hearts to these little survivors are all but assured an immensely rewarding experience.

Course of recovery. No two puppy mill dogs' course of recovery is exactly the same. For some it is fast, but for most it is slow. It can be fast, and then slow, and then fast again. Steps forward are often interspersed with steps backward. Improvement can stop at some point, stay unchanged for a time, then start showing progress again.

All puppy mill dogs are affected by their puppy mill experience in their own way, and their needs for healing are very unique when they escape that life. Methods of rehabilitation will also vary in their effectiveness from dog to dog. Methods that are beneficial for one dog may be ineffective and even counterproductive in another. Rehabilitation can involve some trial and error until you see what works best for your dog.

Normal dog behavior. We know that there are many aspects of normal dog behavior that dogs who have spent their entire lives in puppy mills cannot be expected to show at first, among them:

- Showing any control or discrimination over when and where they urinate and defecate
- Trusting humans
- Desiring petting or being picked up, held or hugged
- Playing with humans, other dogs or toys
- Understanding any cues
- Walking on a leash

Eight words to live by. These eight words will characterize your life with your puppy mill dog: patience, love, understanding, compassion, forgiveness, calmness, empathy and perseverance. Write them on a piece of paper and post it on your refrigerator so you will see it every day.

Because each dog is affected differently, and to different degrees of severity, by his or her experience in the puppy mill, your dog may not require all of the recommendations below. In addition, much of the following advice may differ significantly depending upon whether you have adopted a rescued puppy mill dog soon after he/she left the

puppy mill or if the dog has spent time in a foster home before joining your household.

For example, while almost no dog straight out of the puppy mill has any concept of or experience with a collar and leash, if a dog has been given enough time to learn about these things in a foster home, it may mean that, upon coming home with you, the dog is very familiar with wearing a collar and being on a leash. The advice below is intended for the first time a rescued puppy mill dog enters a human household, so if your dog is coming from a foster home, much of the “work” for the situations below may already have been done or at least begun.

How to prepare for bringing home your rescued puppy mill dog

There are some things you will need to do before your new adopted puppy mill dog arrives in your home.

Do:

- **Dog-proof your house.** In particular, remove or place out of reach small objects that might be ingested and anything you do not want chewed, and secure any cabinets, especially those containing cleaning products and other potentially toxic materials.
- **Buy a dog crate that is the right size for the new dog (tall enough for the dog to stand, long enough to accommodate the dog lying down from nose to base of the tail).** If possible, get both a wire cage-style crate and a plastic airline-approved crate, as dogs show preferences for one or the other. Wire crates provide more ventilation, but the dogs feel more exposed (correctable by draping blankets over the top and sides). They also most resemble puppy mill cages, which we think can be a comfort for some puppy mill dogs but an elicitor of fearful memories in others. The plastic crates are more den-like, thus providing a greater sense of security.

The tops also can come off, allowing a fearful dog to be removed without pulling her through a crate door. Finally, be sure that the bottom of the crate is very comfortable to walk on, as many of these dogs have walked on nothing but wire cage flooring and their feet may be injured and painful. A soft blanket or pad works well for this.

- **Have these additional items already at home before the arrival of the dog:**

- Nylon leash, 6 feet in length
- Sturdy nylon collar of the correct size (You should be able to fit two fingers comfortably under the collar when it is on the dog.)
- Harness (Again, you may have to wait until the dog arrives for proper sizing.)
- An engraved identification tag to attach to the collar, containing your current contact information
- High-quality dog food: canned and dry
- A variety of delicious treats: sliced hot dogs, cheese, spray cheese, small pieces of chicken, tuna, beef strips, beef jerky, turkey jerky, liverwurst, freeze-dried liver, commercial dog treats
- Puppy pee pads (piddle pads)
- Exercise pen (tall, collapsible wire enclosure)
- Baby gate(s)

Don't:

- **Fail to hide or protect any object, material, surface or floor covering that can be urinated or pooped on, and not cleaned up easily.**



How to introduce your dog to your home

You will almost certainly adjust to your new dog well before he adjusts to you, your family, and your household. By far the strongest emotion ruling the puppy mill dog's life is fear. Because of this, one of the strongest inclinations for newly adopted puppy mill dogs is to hide — behind, under, farther away — in any way that lessens the fear. The hiding can be for days or weeks, with the dog coming out only at night to get some food and water. When a puppy mill dog enters your home, your most important job is to protect him from things that frighten him.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Bring your puppy mill dog into your house in the crate you've obtained for her.** (Important note: Many puppy mill dogs are terrified of crates and cages, which is understandable because they've spent virtually their entire lives — and unpleasant lives at that — in such enclosures. For these dogs, use of a crate will likely have to be omitted from any steps during the adjustment phase to the new home.)
- **Provide a safe haven for your dog as she adjusts to her new home.** Ideally, give her a quiet room to herself, where she can adjust without threats and disruptions for the first few days. This could be a bathroom, utility room, basement, or guest bedroom. After “dog-proofing” the room (as you would “child-proof” for a child), set the dog in her crate in the room and open the door of the crate. Place a bowl of water and a little dry and canned food in the room not far from the crate. Put newspapers or piddle pads (available at pet stores) on the other side of the room. Then leave her alone and just peek in on her occasionally for the next few hours. Fully expect to find that your dog has urinated or had a bowel movement in the room.
- **After a few days in his own room, bring the dog in his crate to an area of the house that has some human activity, but not a lot.** The crate should either sit backed up into a corner or

be shielded with towels or blankets draped over its top, sides and back end to give the dog a sense of safety behind him. The door to the crate should be left partially open. Here, the dog can feel some security in his crate but begin to be exposed to the all-new experiences of a human household. Things we take for granted, such as telephones ringing, someone knocking on a door, sounds from the TV, clinking of dishes being set on the table or washed, the noise of a vacuum cleaner, and humans talking, are all very foreign to rescued puppy mill dogs and take some getting used to.

- **Next, set up the exercise pen in a room so that your dog can safely venture out of her crate but still feel somewhat protected.** The pen also prevents the dog from going into parts of the house that you or she are not quite ready for.
- **Always try to move slowly when around your puppy mill dog.** Sudden and fast movements can be very frightening.
- **Minimize loud and sudden noises, since they also can be very frightening.**
- **It's now well known among rescue groups that puppy mill dogs often trust new dogs before they trust new people.** In fact, having another friendly and compatible dog in the house is what adopters tell us is the single most effective thing you can do to rehabilitate the adopted puppy mill dog. (See “How to introduce your new dog to your other dogs.”) If you do not have another dog, try to have your friends, relatives, or neighbors bring their dogs over (if they are friendly and well-socialized) and allow your dog to spend as much time as possible with them.
- At night, having your dog sleep next to your bed can help him adjust to you in a non-threatening way. This may not be suitable for all adopters or the dogs themselves, so each adopter must decide which nighttime sleeping arrangement is best.

Don't:

- **Allow anything to threaten or frighten your dog when he is in his safe place.** You want him to learn that, in his safe place, nothing bad

happens, which then allows him to feel more relaxed at all times because he knows he can always go to his safe place. (With that said, the dog shouldn't remain in his crate all the time. See “How to help your dog progress without causing harm.”)

How to introduce your new dog to your other dogs

The vast majority of puppy mill dogs are benefited by the companionship of one or more friendly dogs to guide them. Introducing puppy mill dogs to other friendly dogs in the house usually goes smoothly, but here are some tips to encourage a successful meeting.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **If possible, carry out the first contact between your newly adopted puppy mill dog and your current dog(s) in a neutral location — that is, someplace that none of the dogs have been before.** Because puppy mill dogs are often very frightened, it should be an indoor location, such as a friend's house. If a neutral indoor meeting place isn't available, you can conduct the first introduction in your own home.
- **First, allow the puppy mill dog and your current dog to see and smell each other through a screen door or fence-like barrier, such as a baby gate.** With you supervising, allow them to watch and smell each other for a few hours. Then, if possible, switch the dogs' places so that each is now on the other side of the barrier. This strategy allows a more thorough sharing of one another's smells. Let the dogs stay there for another hour or two.
- **Next comes face-to-face introductions.** If you have several dogs, do the following introduction with just one dog at a time. Put a collar and leash on your dog and also on the puppy mill dog (if she

accepts it). Have someone else bring the other dog into the room where you and your puppy mill dog are waiting. Be ready to use the leashes to separate them promptly if either shows any signs of aggression (growling, snarling, baring of teeth, attempting to bite). If there are no signs of aggression, allow the dogs to sniff each other. Speak in a friendly but soft voice using encouraging words (“That’s the way, good girl”), remembering that some puppy mill dogs will be frightened by anything spoken by a human.

- **When they start to show interest in other things in the environment rather than fully focusing on each other, it will tell you that they are generally accepting of each other.**
- **You’ll now be able to allow them to interact together in your house, but during the first week or two, supervise them carefully at all times when they are together.** If you have to leave the house, confine the dogs separately so that your puppy mill dog and your other dog(s) cannot physically interact. You can keep them in separate rooms, or use a dependably strong baby gate to separate them, so that they can still see, smell and hear one another. The puppy mill dog’s confinement area should always have a crate or other safe haven so she can retreat if she feels the need to hide from the view of your other dogs.
- **Feed the puppy mill dog in an area at least 10 feet away from where the other dogs are fed, preferably where they cannot see each other while eating.** Pick up the food bowls after the dogs have eaten or after 20-30 minutes, whichever occurs first.
- **Give your puppy mill dog her own bed, separate and some distance from your other dogs’ beds.** If your puppy mill dog appreciates toys, she should have her own. Sharing things like toys, beds, food, and treats will come later, once your dogs become friends.
- **As a precaution against conflicts in the first few days of actual togetherness between your other dogs and your puppy mill dog, don’t leave desired items around that they may compete over.** These “high-value” items include food bowls, chew treats, and even toys, if the puppy mill dog shows an interest in them.

- **Praise all the dogs for friendly behavior toward one another.** Maintain a soft and soothing (that is, not excited) tone of voice so as not to startle or worry a noise-sensitive puppy mill dog.

Don’t:

- **Allow the dogs to become overexcited or aroused during interactions and play time.** If you notice this happening, keep interactive sessions short until the dogs appear more calm during play.

How to gain your dog’s trust

For a dog to fully trust humans, two things must happen: (1) The dog must receive significant pleasant interaction with humans during his puppyhood, and (2) the dog must not have highly unpleasant interaction with humans during his growth and adulthood. Puppy mill dogs suffer on both counts. And because of this, puppy mill dogs arrive in the human home with very little willingness or ability to trust you or any other human.

Many people mistakenly believe that trust and fear are opposites — that trust comes when fear recedes. This isn’t quite true. Just because you don’t fear someone doesn’t mean that you trust the person. Getting a dog to trust you starts, but doesn’t necessarily end, with the dog no longer fearing you. More importantly, the trust you want to help your dog develop is a trust in the world, of which you are one (very valuable) part. You want your dog to develop a sense of security that things in her world are dependable and relatively predictable, something she can grow comfortable with.

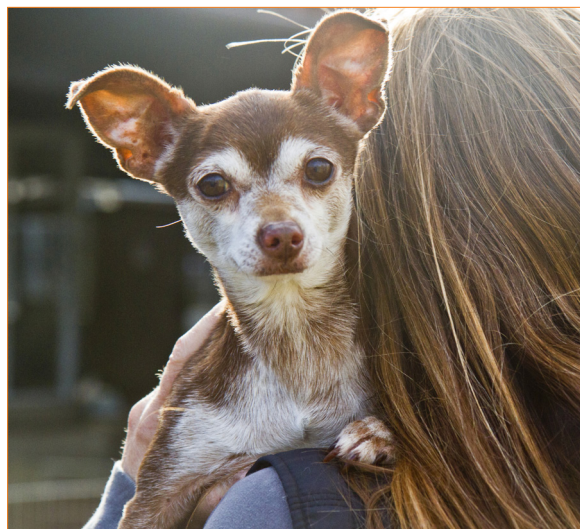
For puppy mill dogs, fear diminishes and trust grows in small increments over time. Our studies show that the vast majority of puppy mill dogs come to trust humans, but we have also learned that, for some of the dogs, this trust is extended to only one or two people. And that’s OK. As long as the dog has at least one person he can trust, the opportunity exists for him to fully enjoy his life.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Establish a consistent schedule that the dog will learn she can depend on.** This is a critical part of building trust. Make a schedule for feeding times, going outside, play, rest and sleep — and stick to it. You want to teach your puppy mill dog that he can trust the world, that he can depend on the world to function in a reliable and nonthreatening way.
- **Teach your dog that you are the source of good things in life, starting with food.** Most puppy mill dogs will not eat from your hand at first, but with patience you can almost always teach this degree of trust. If and when your puppy mill dog is willing to eat from your hand, make hand-feeding the routine at mealtimes as much as you can.
- **You can also build trust using treats.** Sit on the floor with delicious treats placed at varying distances on the floor around you. It could take minutes or it could take months, but over time almost all puppy mill dogs will eventually start coming closer and closer to you to get the treats. When the dog is within arm's distance, gradually move your hand closer and closer to the treat so that he learns it is safe to eat a treat near your hand. Then, gradually shorten the distances between the treats and your body and between the treats and your hand, until you can place a treat in your upturned palm and have the dog take it out of your hand. When this happens, it is a huge sign of acceptance and trust.
- **You will also want to simply teach your dog that you mean her no harm whatsoever — that you are not something to fear.** So, sit (on the floor, preferably) and talk very softly to your dog. Many people read aloud in a soothing tone, which benefits both your dog and you, since you can get some reading done. If your dog is very frightened, you can read to her as she lies in her crate.

Don't:

- **Force yourself on your dog.**
- **Try to hurry any aspect of your dog's development of trust in the world or in you.**



- **Avoid anything that the dog will find threatening: yelling at, rushing toward, hitting, grabbing or “alpha-rolling” him.** These actions will completely derail all of your efforts to gain your dog's trust.

How to touch and handle your dog

It is human nature to want to comfort frightened creatures by holding and embracing them. Giving hugs, cuddling, and showering them with love seems to be just what rescued puppy mill dogs need. But it isn't. Most puppy mill dogs are uncomfortable with physical contact by humans, and some are outright terrified. And, in light of their life experience, they have every reason to be. They have received very little or no positive human touch their whole lives. As a result, their brains are not “wired” to perceive physical touch — even the most gentle and loving touch — as something positive.

Change takes time, so be patient. Even the most compassionate person with the most heartfelt empathy can't make a puppy mill dog love human touch overnight.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Occasionally and gradually edge your arm, hand, leg, or body closer to your dog to show that nearness is no cause for alarm.** Ultimately, though, let your dog be the one who decides when it's time for human contact. Given enough time, almost all puppy mill dogs will eventually get close enough to sniff you — a huge step for them. Sometime after that, the dog will usually touch you with her nose or a paw. This is as monumental as a baby's first step or first word. Let your dog have several weeks of developing confidence in her touching you before you try to touch her.
- **If your puppy mill dog accepts your touch, you may try to pick her up, but do it in gradual steps.** First, make sure she allows you to touch her sides, then allows you to place a hand under her body. Next, try gentle upward pressure with your hand under her, then a very brief lift that doesn't fully lift her off the ground, then a longer lift in which she is still in contact with the ground, then a very brief lift fully off the ground but staying very close to the ground.
- **Don't be discouraged if your dog isn't accepting of your touch at some point.** Just back up to the point at which she did accept it and move through the steps more slowly. If at any point she seems distressed, stop and give her a few days before trying again. Keep in mind that not all puppy mill dogs will allow even this type of lifting until they've been with you for a long time (and some won't ever allow it).
- **Work at an even slower pace if your dog "flattens" himself on the floor whenever you attempt to lift him.** Dogs who do this also may roll onto their backs and even pass some urine. All of this is a show of submission. It doesn't mean the dog will never accept being picked up, but it does mean that he will take more time getting to that point than those who don't display these submissive behaviors.

Don't:

- **Force yourself on the dog in any way, insist that he accept contact, or try to make him feel better by hugging and "loving on" him.**
- **Celebrate your dog making her first physical contact with you.** Remain absolutely calm and silent. Any sound or movement could erase the big step the dog has just made.
- **Place your face next to the dog's face, as this may frighten her, and she could bite to defend herself.**
- **Make direct eye contact at first.** Point your head a bit off to the side and keep visual contact out of the corner of your eye. Direct eye contact is often very threatening to puppy mill dogs, since they've never learned to associate it with anything positive.
- **Ever startle a puppy mill dog by touching her from behind.** These dogs' heightened sensitivity to touch is sometimes more pronounced when the touch is coming from behind them, especially without warning or notice.

How to socialize your dog

It is rare to see your puppy mill dog's true personality when she arrives in your home. It is buried — sometimes very deeply — under a mass of emotions that the under-socialized dog needs to protect herself from this overwhelming change in her life. Watching your adopted dog's true personality emerge is one of the most amazing, gratifying, and rewarding things you will ever experience.

The largest contributing factor to the squelching of these dogs' personalities is the extreme deprivations of life in a puppy mill, where the dogs receive very inadequate socialization. Early exposure to and interaction with humans during puppyhood is essential for the developing canine brain to form the connections that make for positive social relationships with humans

throughout life. Conversely, without such early socialization, the dog's brain is not properly equipped to form close bonds with people, and the dog will fear humans.

When we speak of socialization, we often use it in the very broad sense of becoming familiarized to anything — not just “social” activities (such as interaction with people, dogs and other animals) but also comfort around everyday objects and events. So, if a puppy is exposed to stairs in a positive way, for example, his comfort level with stairs will be natural throughout life. By contrast, if a puppy grows to adulthood without ever encountering stairs, he may have a persistent fear of stairs.

As you can imagine, puppy mill dogs are routinely deprived of exposure to so many things that dogs living in homes experience every day. So, our overall goal in socializing puppy mill dogs is to lessen their fears of the basic, normal things that pet dogs encounter. We are striving to have them feel comfortable with being around humans and other dogs, being outdoors in wide open spaces, walking on solid ground, going through a doorway, playing with toys, riding in a car, hearing a vacuum cleaner, going up and down stairs, getting bathed, and so much more. Our greatest efforts, of course, are directed at helping puppy mill dogs to become comfortable around and bonded with people so they can enjoy living in human society.

Because of the uniqueness of each and every rescued puppy mill dog, socialization plans must be tailored to the individual. No two puppy mill dogs' socialization plans are the same. Every aspect of the plan — what they are socialized to, where they are socialized, what specific steps and pace are required, what supplemental help (e.g., anti-anxiety wraps, nutritional supplements, medication) is needed — is quite different from dog to dog.

There is one thing, however, that mill dog rescue groups and our studies have found is a valuable benefit to virtually every puppy mill dog's socialization plan: having at least one friendly, well-socialized dog already in the household. Other dogs serve as a valuable role model for everything from how to play to where to go to the bathroom. Many people have described it to us by saying, “My other dog showed her how to be a dog.”

In our studies, considering puppy mill dogs' socialization on an individual basis has been shown to be so critical that it even includes whether socialization is helpful or harmful for each dog. Based on extensive reports from adopters, socialization efforts are very beneficial for many puppy mill dogs, but for others it can actually create distress. The two factors determining which of these two groups your dog will fall into are (1) your puppy mill dog's mental makeup (genetics, past experiences, and capacity for change) and (2) the way the socialization is done.

The point made earlier about each puppy mill dog's different capacity to adapt and recover is especially important in socialization. First, it is crucial for the puppy mill dog adopter to accept that every dog will maximally socialize to a different level. For example, some puppy mill dogs may be initially unwilling to walk on stairs, but over time will become completely comfortable running up and down stairs. Others may become better on stairs but never comfortable, and still others may become comfortable going up stairs but not down, or vice versa. The same is true with regard to socialization to humans. Some dogs may never achieve a comfort level with certain people in their lives. Only time will tell. All but a few of rescued puppy mill dogs will bond to their primary person, however.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Have another dog around to help socialize your puppy mill dog.** If you do not have one already, consider adopting another dog in need of a home. Since this other dog will serve as a role model, he/she should not be from a puppy mill. (Misery may love company, but misery also compounds misery when two fearful dogs live together.) Your “role model” dog should not be fearful of humans and should have demonstrated — perhaps through time spent in another home or a foster home — that he/she is absolutely friendly with other dogs. If you don't have another dog in your home, try to have your relatives and friends bring their friendly, well-socialized dogs over to spend as much time with your puppy mill dog as possible, keeping in mind your dog's comfort level.

- **Have willing friends and visitors to your home try the technique mentioned above for gaining your dog's trust: sitting on the floor and reading, with treats scattered around at various distances.**
- **Use desensitization and counter-conditioning to help socialize your dog.** Desensitization and counter-conditioning* are proven behavioral therapy techniques that can help puppy mill dogs overcome their fears. These techniques make the fearful stimulus (e.g., humans) less fearful by exposing the dog to the stimulus bit by bit over time (desensitization) or by changing the perception of the fearful stimulus in the dog's mind from something unpleasant to something pleasant (counter-conditioning). A classic example of counter-conditioning is when the staff at the veterinarian's office give your dog yummy treats whenever she goes to the vet. The goal is to get your dog to associate good things with going to the vet. The same technique can be used to get a dog to enjoy the presence of people, other dogs, or a new baby in the house. When using desensitization and counter-conditioning, everything is done in small, gradual increments. Progress may occur rapidly or very slowly, and different dogs have different limits.
- **Have all interactions between your dog and people she is shy around or fearful of (e.g., all people, men only, people wearing hats) occur only after she approaches them.** Don't allow people to approach your dog until she shows that she is ready by remaining relaxed, not trying to escape or hide behind you, or trying to scare the person off with barking or aggression. They should stand sideways to the dog, crouch down if possible, not make direct eye contact, make no sudden movements, and talk to your dog in a calm, quiet tone of voice. If it is safe to do so (i.e., your dog has never shown any sign of aggression, especially biting), have the person slowly extend a palm upward toward the dog. If this goes well and your dog remains comfortable, give some treats to the person to place in the palm of the hand that she extends to your dog.
- **Avoid the avoidable, when possible.** Many things that we'd like our dogs to be comfortable with are not essential aspects of life, such as going to a dog park. If certain things cause your dog fear, anxiety,

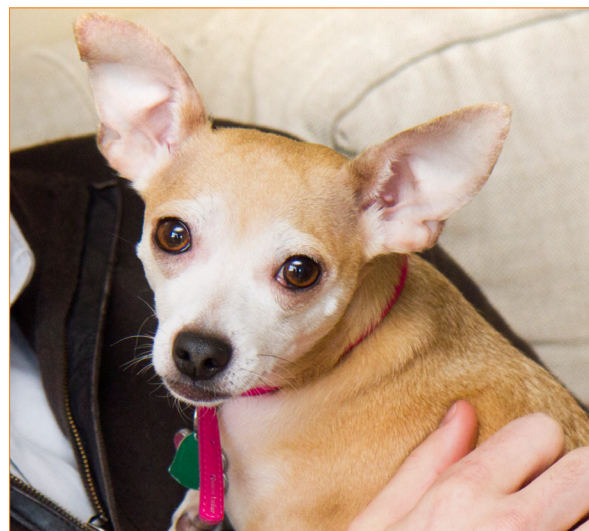
or distress and do not seem to be accepted by your dog in spite of your efforts, minimize or eliminate your dog's exposure to these things.

- **Try pheromone therapy, which can ease anxiety and fear in many dogs.** Dog-appeasing pheromone (DAP) comes in a spray bottle, a plug-in wall diffuser, and a collar. It is available through many online websites and at pet supply stores.
- **Try prescription anti-anxiety medication if other methods of easing fears are not successful.** Consult your veterinarian to see if this option is appropriate for your dog.
- **Provide whatever comforting words and gestures seem to help your dog cope with his emotional challenges.** When working to socialize your puppy mill dog, ignore completely the common but mistaken advice to avoid comforting a fearful dog under the rationale that doing so will reinforce the fear. How this absurd notion ever got started is a mystery, but it is scientific nonsense.

 * For more details, go to the ASPCA website at www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist.

Don't:

- **Rush any type of socialization — to people, things, places, or events.** Trying to push socialization before the dog is ready is one of the best



ways to impede progress, since you run a high risk of actually increasing the dog's fear.

- **Use “flooding” techniques: sudden, extreme, and prolonged exposure to something that the dog is fearful of, in the belief that by being forced to “face his fears,” your dog will no longer fear those things.** Use common sense here. If you had a snake phobia and were placed in a box where 100 snakes were poured on top of you, would you come out of the box less or more fearful of snakes?
- **Make socialization anything other than a very calm and nonthreatening experience: no excited introductions, no loud and boisterous displays of how fun this is to try, no socialization parties.**
- **Respond to a fearful dog's barking by backing away from the dog, and instruct other people to do the same.** Ignoring the barking is the best response, because it prevents the dog from being rewarded for trying to get people to go away, and hence reinforcing the behavior. This doesn't mean simply standing there and causing distress to the dog, but any backing away shouldn't occur right away and it should be done very slowly.

How to house-train your dog

After puppy mill dogs are adopted into human households, almost all these dogs have urination and bowel movement “accidents” in the home. But we must realize that bodily eliminations inside the house are not accidents at all to the puppy mill dog; in fact, to these dogs, this is perfectly normal behavior.

Dogs in puppy mills are neither taught nor expected to eliminate in any special area. They go wherever they want to, whenever they want to. The concept of “holding it” is completely unknown to them. To make matters worse, most of these dogs are very fearful, so training them to do anything — even with strictly positive techniques — can make them even more fearful.

Your puppy mill dog is not the “normal” dog that all the dog-training books have been written for. All of the usual instructions — what to do if you catch them in the act, how to use crate confinement as a tool, even the strategy of praising the dog profusely when he does his business outside — may be different when it comes to house-training a puppy mill dog. The ASPCA has a good article about it:

“House Training Your Puppy Mill Dog”
www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/house-training-your-puppy-mill-dog

For puppy mill dogs, the basic rule is this: Reward the good, distract from the bad. “Distract” means directing the dog's mind away from the undesirable behavior that he's involved in. Punishment is never a good idea when house-training a dog, but it can be even more harmful for the fragile and sensitive emotional make-up of rescued puppy mill dogs, impeding and even reversing any progress they are gaining in trusting people.

Do:

- **Be patient.** House-training may take a week, it may take a month, it may take a year. Try not to get discouraged. As our studies clearly show, some dogs will achieve full mastery of eliminating in the right place.
- **Be very careful when using even the gentlest-sounding house-training methods with puppy mill dogs.** Because of the fear these dogs can have, even the most benign things, such as rewarding the dog for urinating in the right place, can scare them. Your tone of voice when praising the dog may be scary, she may fear your reaching toward her to hand her a treat, or she may feel like you're throwing something at her if you toss her a treat. The usual recommendation for what to do when you catch your dog eliminating indoors can also create problems in fearful puppy mill dogs. The simple act of interrupting this behavior, no matter how carefully it's done, may frighten the dog. And the standard advice to “quickly take the dog to the appropriate area to eliminate” is difficult to do without rushing toward the dog, which, again, can be frightening.

- **Keep in mind that many puppy mill dogs are very frightened of being outdoors, which is, of course, a major hindrance to training a dog to do her business outside.** For these dogs, use piddle pads or newspaper to train the dog to eliminate indoors initially. As the dog's fear of the outdoors lessens, the training can be transferred to a spot outside. When training the dog to go outside, take the thing you used inside (such as piddle pads or newspaper) and place it in the outdoors spot to help the dog learn the new "right" place to go. As an aside, not everyone wants or needs to train their dogs to do their business outside. For them, having the dog eliminate indoors on piddle pads or paper is just fine.

Don't:

- **Expect perfection — ever.** It may happen, but do not allow it to be your expectation.
- **Scold or discipline your puppy mill dog for any "accident" he has, even if you catch him in the act.** Instead, gentle interruption is the correct response.

How to deal with marking

Marking is when a dog (most often a male, but occasionally a female) urinates on specific objects or locations because of the influence of sex hormones or some source of stress. Male dogs in puppy mills, all of whom are not neutered (obviously), mark in their cages and enclosures as a territorial signal to the other nearby males. The longer they do this before they leave the puppy mill, the more habitual it becomes and the lower the likelihood that it will fully stop even when they are neutered.

In addition to the influence of sex hormones, marking can also be triggered by stress, anxiety and fear. And because we know that these emotional states are prominent in rescued puppy mill dogs, it is not surprising to find that marking is common in their new adoptive homes.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Get any male dog neutered (if he wasn't already neutered when you adopted him).**
- **Examine your home situation for any correctable causes of fear, anxiety and stress for the dog, and resolve all that can be corrected.** Causes can include conflicts with other dogs, fear of certain people or disruptions (furniture being rearranged, not having a reliable schedule for the dog's activities, etc.).
- **Examine your home situation for any potential conflict or rivalry between your puppy mill dog and other dogs.** Competition over human attention, sleeping places, access to certain locations (e.g., a corner of the living room or a second bedroom), toys and food can all cause a dog to mark. Seeing other dogs outside, such as neighbors' dogs as they are walked in front of your house, can also elicit marking behavior.
- **Try dog-appeasing pheromone (DAP), which comes in a spray bottle, plug-in wall diffuser and a collar, and is available for purchase via many websites.**
- **Use belly bands (available at pet stores and online) if needed.** They do not solve the problem, but they do protect your household items while the dog's need for marking diminishes.
- **Clean all urine markings very thoroughly with white vinegar and an enzymatic product, which neutralizes urine odors (available at pet stores and online).**

Don't:

- **Punish, scold, yell at, or otherwise try to deliver unpleasant consequences to your dog for marking.**



How to leash-train your dog

It is extremely rare for dogs in puppy mills to have ever been on a leash. While we take for granted that for a dog (or a human), using your neck to pull against something is no big deal, if you have never done that in your life, it would be a very unusual and possibly even scary sensation. This is likely why, in our study of puppy mill dogs, they pull against a leash much less often than typical pet dogs. Similarly, any pulling of the puppy mill dog with a leash is likely very frightening to him because he has never had something pull against this part of his body. For some reason, the actual wearing of a collar is usually well-tolerated; it's the pulling that the dog finds strange and troubling.

Why leash-train? An attached leash early in your new dog's time in your home allows you to gain a quick hold if you need to (e.g., the dog dashing for an open door). It allows you to gently get your dog out of a tight hiding place, such as out from under furniture, if need be. And it allows you to gently lead the dog to the chosen potty area if the dog is frightened of being picked up and carried.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Purchase a sturdy nylon collar and a harness of proper size and fit.**
- **Attach the leash to the dog's collar and let her simply drag it around when she's not in her crate.** This will provide a mild pulling sensation on the collar that should not be upsetting. Be sure to always supervise the dog very closely to prevent the leash from catching on something and endangering your dog.
- **Use the same leash-dragging strategy with the leash attached to the harness.** You can alternate this with the sessions of collar attachment. Use only the harness if the collar is upsetting to your dog.
- **Use delicious food treats as enticements and rewards when you first attach the collar, harness or leash, if your dog seems resistant but not distressed.** Feed the treats while another person is placing the collar or harness on, or attaching the leash. Doing this in short trials over several hours or days should lead the dog to associate the apparatus with the treats and then be accepting of having them put on and wearing them.
- **When it appears that leash-dragging is well tolerated, pick up the leash and follow your dog as she walks around, occasionally giving a very slight pull on the leash.** Slowly increase the amount of resistance so she can feel what a little tension against the collar or harness feels like. You'll want to do it slowly so it doesn't scare her. Using this method, most dogs become quite comfortable with walking on leash.
- **If your puppy mill dog is frightened of the outdoors, take your "walks" in the house for several days or weeks.** When she seems relatively confident with the outdoors, you can take her outside on the leash. The best assurance that your dog won't slip out of her collar and escape is to use the harness on your outdoor walks. But since even harnesses aren't foolproof, if you have any reason to believe that your dog might get spooked and panic, you should use both a collar and a harness, each with a leash attached.

Don't:

- **Force your puppy mill dog to accept anything that seems distressing to him, whether it's wearing a collar or harness, or going outside.** Almost all of these things are eventually achievable, but you must go very slowly and be guided by what your dog shows he is ready for.

How to crate-train your dog

The first thing to know about crate-training a puppy mill dog is this: Not all puppy mill dogs can be — or should be — crate-trained. Many puppy mill dogs are terrified of crates and cages, which is understandable because they've spent virtually their entire lives (and unpleasant lives at that) in such enclosures. Seeing, and especially being in, a cage-like enclosure may arouse memories of the puppy mill. It's similar to a soldier with post-traumatic stress disorder who experiences intense fear when he hears a car backfiring, because it reminds him of combat.

Why crate-train? For the dogs who aren't extremely frightened of them, crates serve two functions. First, the crate is the dog's den or cave, a true safe haven to which your dog can reliably retreat when events in life cause fear or stress. It's a place the dog can go to seek peace and calm, to de-stress. For this function, the crate door is left open. The second function is for the dog's confinement. There are times when you need your dog to be in her crate, such as during the night or when workers are in the house and your door may be inadvertently left open. For this function, the crate door is kept closed.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Make being in the crate a positive experience for the dog.** Try feeding the dog in

her crate and offer treats in the crate. In fact, anytime you lead your dog into the crate for the purpose of confinement, include a favorite treat (e.g., hot dog slices, a rawhide chew, a Kong toy with peanut butter or cheese inside) to continually reinforce the association of the crate with a positive experience.

- **Leave the door open whenever it isn't absolutely necessary to close it.**
- **Make sure your dog has first had the opportunity to go to the bathroom anytime she is put in the crate with the door closed.**
- **Start with short periods of time in the closed-door crate and slowly work up to longer periods of time.** This means first observing how long your dog is comfortable in the crate before showing any indications of anxiety, such as pacing, pawing at the crate door, digging into the corners of the crate, crying, whimpering or barking. Knowing this, you will want to place the dog in the crate for periods of time that don't reach the onset of anxiety. If possible, do several of these sessions each day. Then, over the next few weeks, very gradually increase the time she is spending in the crate during each session. In most cases, you will be able to extend the length of time that she can comfortably spend in the crate by several hours.

Don't:

- **Force a puppy mill dog who acts very fearful of crates to live in a crate.** He will very quickly form a mental association between crate and fear, and that may simply escalate the fear level.
- **Use the crate in any way as punishment.**
- **Allow anything to make the crate an unpleasant experience.** For example, if the dog is in the crate while rambunctious children are visiting your home, do not allow the children to go near the crate without you being there to assure that the children don't intentionally (or unintentionally) frighten the dog.

How to teach your dog to respond to basic cues

Teaching your dog to respond to basic cues (e.g., “sit” or “come”) is extremely beneficial in many ways. It allows you to protect your dog from danger; for example, “come” can be a lifesaving cue if your dog is in a risky situation. It allows your dog to co-exist better with humans; if your dog knows “sit” or “down,” he can be taught to greet people politely, rather than jumping up on them. Basic training also establishes a leader and follower relationship, which is the most basic foundation for correcting any problem behaviors that may arise later. Finally, training your dog in a positive, gentle way strengthens the bond between you and the dog.

However, our studies have shown that, for puppy mill dogs, basic training is beneficial for some, in that it helps them recover from their emotional struggles, but for others, such training creates distress and can hamper their emotional healing. For the dogs who are negatively affected by training, there are two main factors at work: fear and an impaired ability to focus and concentrate.

I am not going to describe the actual training methods to use, as the details can be found in many books and online videos, including the Best Friends online pet care library (bestfriends.org/Resources/Pet-Care). What you need to know here is how standard methods of basic training must be modified for the special needs of puppy mill dogs.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Use positive training techniques only — absolutely no punishment should be employed.** Positive training methods tend to help build a puppy mill dog’s confidence and trust in you, whereas punishment can damage the dog’s already fragile levels of confidence and trust.
- **Take your dog to training classes if you prefer having the structure of a class, but only if the**

other dogs, people and commotion do not cause your dog distress.

- **Have the training conducted in your home if you prefer the more private setting or if training classes are too distressing for your dog.**
- **Make certain that the professional trainer (if you use one) is knowledgeable about rescued puppy mill dogs and has had experience with them.**
- **Always keep in mind that some rescued puppy mill dogs have an impaired ability to learn.** Learning requires the mind to concentrate and maintain focus, and our studies show that, when compared to typical pet dogs, puppy mill dogs are less able to do this. In addition, puppy mill dogs aren’t familiar with the concept of responding to cues and being rewarded for doing so. None of this means that puppy mill dogs cannot learn, but they will have different capacities for how fast and how much they can learn.
- **Try desensitization and counter-conditioning techniques if your dog seems very fearful or distressed by attempts at training.** (For more information, see “How to socialize your dog.”)

Don’t:

- **Use any techniques that employ punishment or allow any trainer to do so.**
- **Force training on your dog if he’s distressed by any attempts at training.**
- **Use “flooding” techniques: sudden, extreme, and prolonged exposure to something that the dog is fearful of, in the belief that by being forced to “face his fears,” your dog will no longer fear those things.**

How to deal with poop-eating

Dogs coming out of puppy mills do some strange things, but eating poop (known as coprophagia)

is certainly one of the most unappealing to us humans. And yet as repulsive as we consider this behavior to be, it's not so distasteful (literally and figuratively) from the dog's point of view. Puppy mill dogs eat poop for many reasons — ranging from hunger to relief of boredom. Interestingly, while this behavior is reported frequently by adopters of puppy mill dogs, our study of these dogs showed that the incidence of coprophagia was no higher in puppy mill dogs than is reported in typical pet dogs. No doubt it's the disgust factor that makes it stand out in adopters' minds.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Use products available from your veterinarian if you need them.** There are food additives that can make poop distasteful to a dog. (The additives must be added to the food of any dog whose poop your dog is eating.)
- **Try giving your dog something more desirable to go after when he's outside.** For example, keep a supply of popped popcorn (unbuttered and unsalted) on hand and sprinkle it on the lawn before taking your dog out to do his business. Other things that your dog may prefer over poop include crumbled dog treats or small bits of bread.

Don't:

- **Panic.** It's not as horrible a problem as your instinctive disgust tells you it is.
- **Punish your dog for eating poop.**

How to deal with separation anxiety

Many dogs who come from troubled backgrounds, including puppy mill dogs, show differences in their social attachments and emotional bonds with their adopters. In scientific terminology, they often display insecure attachment



behavior, which means that they appear as if they constantly fear being left alone or abandoned. These dogs are extra clingy, becoming their adopters' "shadows," following them from room to room in the house. Many of these dogs are very distressed when left alone at home, a condition called separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is one situation in which the standard treatment is exactly the same for puppy mill dogs and for dogs who aren't from puppy mills.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Use well-established techniques for treating separation anxiety.** The following articles offer good information:

Best Friends pet care library: www.bestfriends.org/resources/pet-care/dogs
(Look for the article called "Relieving Separation Anxiety")

Houston SPCA: www.houstonspca.org/site/DocServer/separation_anxiety.pdf
(Article called "Treating Canine Separation Anxiety")

- **Provide your dog with something mentally and/or physically engaging when you leave home. Interactive toys, food puzzles and treat-filled Kong toys are all excellent choices.**

- **Try dog-appeasing pheromone (DAP), which has been helpful for many dogs with separation anxiety.**
- **Try a Thundershirt, a body wrap that helps relieve anxiety in some dogs.**

Don't:

- **Use any form of punishment, since it will only increase the dog's anxiety.**
- **Use crate confinement unless you know for a fact that your dog's separation anxiety is not worsened by him being in the crate.** If you're unsure, take a video of your dog in the crate during a few short periods (15 to 30 minutes) after you've left the house.

How to help your dog progress without causing harm

One of the biggest challenges in rehabilitating a rescued puppy mill dog is finding a good balance between letting the dog advance at his own pace and encouraging him to advance. Letting any animal (or human) choose for himself what to do results in choices that create the greatest comfort or pleasure, which includes opting for whatever causes the least displeasure.

Sometimes, though, there can be no emotional healing or advancement without some discomfort. This is a well-known to us humans. For example, a shy person cannot overcome her shyness if she always stays in her comfort zone and avoids contact with other people. Likewise, if a puppy mill dog is given a safe haven and is allowed to choose whether to be in it or to leave it, he will stay in it all the time — and never learn to overcome his fears. The dog has to exit his comfort zone to “get over the hump” and go on to heal. If the dog is allowed to remain perpetually in his comfort zone, he will never do the less pleasant thing that can help him to feel better.

So, how do we follow advice that seems contra-

dictory (“Don’t push, but push”)? A good guide for working through this dilemma is the treatment method for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The main component of therapy for those with PTSD is to expose the person to that which he fears, but to do it in gradually increasing increments and, most important, in an atmosphere of emotional support and assured safety. In this way, the person can encounter the fearful stimulus but with a sense of safety, so that the fear is within his ability to cope with it. The goal of this method is for the person to ultimately overcome his fears.

For puppy mill dogs, then, the key is to have the dog encounter what she is frightened of in a way that keeps the fear level within her coping capacity — where she may be a little uncomfortable, but not in distress from fear. There is no perfect way to determine where this level lies, since it not only varies from dog to dog, but also varies within the same dog, depending on which fearful stimulus it is. For example, the dog’s ability to cope with an encounter with a woman may be much higher than that dog’s coping ability when encountering a man.

The dog’s level of fear may also depend on other external factors. For example, the dog’s ability to cope with an encounter with an unfamiliar person may be much higher when the dog is inside his own house rather than on a walk around the neighborhood. It’s up to us to make the best determination based on how the dog is reacting. If the dog is showing a low degree of anxiety, such as making frequent looks at his caregiver as a stranger approaches, then it is usually appropriate to proceed. But if that same dog indicates that he wants to flee by pulling forcefully on his leash, that encounter is clearly not within that dog’s ability to successfully cope with the emotional discomfort.

The objective is controlled exposure, where exposure to fearful stimuli is not permanently avoided, but rather is done in a very controlled way that assures the dog isn’t made to suffer distress. The two ways that the fear is kept within the dog’s ability to cope are (1) keeping the exposure to the fearful stimulus at a very low intensity and (2) easing the dog’s fearful response by providing emotional support.

Here is an example: We don't want the dog who is fearful of humans to spend all of her time in her crate (her safe haven), since that would cause her emotional healing to proceed very slowly, if at all. We want to nudge her just outside her comfort zone. We can do that by closing the door of her crate when she's outside the crate, so she can't hide in there. To keep the fear at a low intensity, we can make the outside-of-crate episodes very brief and, also, not force her into a room of 30 partying humans. We can also nudge her outside of her comfort zone by allowing her to remain in her crate, but placing the crate in a location where there is more exposure to humans. Again, the intensity of the fear is kept low by putting the crate in a place where some, but not much, human exposure occurs (e.g., not in the middle of a dozen loud and rowdy children).

Secondly, in addition to the low-intensity exposure to the fearful stimulus, we want to provide emotional support for the dog using whatever that particular dog regards as comforting. It could be speaking in a soothing voice, petting the dog, holding the dog, or simply being a human shield that the dog can hide behind.

It is important to reiterate here what I mentioned earlier about the mistaken belief that it's bad to comfort a fearful animal because it will reinforce the fear. It is simply tragic that so many dogs have been, and continue to be, left entirely on their own to cope with their fear because the person caring for them didn't want to reinforce the fear. What parent in her right mind would fail to comfort her terrified youngster for that same reason? Consider this: Simple learning theory dictates that if it were possible to reinforce fear by rewarding it, it would be equally easy to lessen fear by punishing it. Ever heard of making a dog fear something less by punishing her for being afraid? Sound crazy? Yes, because it is.

Do:

- **Be patient.**
- **Keep doing what you're doing if your dog is making great progress in her emotional recovery with you following the advice of letting her go entirely at her own pace.**

- **Try very gently nudging her out of her comfort zone if she seems to be stuck in her progress, especially with such clear-cut indications such as still hiding 24 hours a day after several weeks in your house.** Do the nudging slowly, in tiny baby steps, and only to the degree that isn't causing her distress.

- **Offer comfort to the dog when she is fearful.**

Don't:

- **Ever push your puppy mill dog out of his comfort zone so far that you cause him distress.** This could erase his progress thus far, and may even reverse it.
- **Expect it to always be easy to distinguish a nudge out of your dog's comfort zone from a push that's a little too much.** Sometimes it's very easy to tell, such as when the dog trembles with fear or tries very forcefully to escape. Other times, it won't be so easy. Follow this basic rule: Err on the side of caution. If you think your dog may be having difficulty coping with the emotional challenge, stop. In a day or two, restart at a less intense level.

How to know when your dog has reached his/her maximum potential

It's crucial to understand that every puppy mill dog has a different potential for improvement. Some will become perfectly well-adjusted, "normal" dogs, while most will still retain some degree of emotional disability.

Improvement can be quick or slow, or happen in bursts, and can span months, years or a lifetime. Just as with people undergoing psychotherapy, the maximum level of healing varies significantly from one individual puppy mill dog to another. Recognizing when the dog has reached his fullest potential can be difficult, since puppy mill dogs can have some challenges — such as being fearful of men — that can go unchanged

for years, but then suddenly and dramatically improve. Because of this, the logical conclusion that the dog has reached his maximum potential when he stops improving is somewhat true, but not absolutely true.

And here's another issue: A dog who seems to have improved as far as she can but still shows some problems may simply have not been treated with a rehabilitation method that worked. There is no current system for disseminating information about the successes and failures of the many things that people have tried to help their puppy mill dogs. (Our study, as reported in *Understanding and Caring for Rescued Puppy Mill Dogs*, will provide you with the results of what methods were most and least effective for almost 700 dogs.)

Finally, the puppy mill dog's improvement may be in such small steps or so gradual as to go unnoticed, and thus the adopter could wrongly conclude that this dog has stopped improving. Why does it matter that we know when each puppy mill dog has reached his maximum potential for improvement? The reason is simple: Once the dog has reached his maximum potential, any additional efforts to encourage further improvement will be unsuccessful and will cause the dog unnecessary emotional stress.

However, because of the vast amount of variation in the emotional recovery among puppy mill dogs, we do not yet have a reliable way to tell when they've reached their potential. The best indicator we currently have is the admittedly limited one mentioned above: They're at their maximum potential when they've stopped improving for a period of time. Right now, our studies indicate that that time period may be around six months, but additional studies of these dogs could increase or decrease that estimated time frame.

Do:

- **Understand that, for some puppy mill dogs, the nature of their recovery may prevent us from being sure of any end point of improvement.**

- **Stay with any rehabilitative technique that's working, as long as improvement is continuing.** Since improvement can span years for many emotional issues in many puppy mill dogs, this may mean long-term rehabilitative treatment.
- **Recognize that if no progress on a particular emotional issue has been made for six months, the odds of further improvement go down — but as far as we currently know, the odds never go down to zero.** Therefore, if the rehabilitative techniques are not a burden for you or your dog, continue them.

Don't:

- **Have an expectation that your dog will become a "normal" dog.** It is possible, but do not expect it.
- **Be eager to quit as soon as the dog has stopped improving, since the improvement may start again.**