

The First Night at Home



FOREVER HOUNDS TRUST

Matching greyhounds and lurchers to happy homes

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The majority of our dogs are ex-racers, or have come from working backgrounds. As such, they are not used to spending time in a home environment, and often are not used to spending any time alone (since they have probably always been in the company of other dogs overnight). Most people struggle to sleep soundly during their first night in a hotel, due to the unfamiliar environment – the same applies to your new dog! Following the advice below when you first bring your new family member home should set you up for successful nights in the long term.

Where should your dog sleep?

This is entirely up to you, but you may have more success if you allow your dog to choose his own sleeping area. Dogs are social animals, and will often prefer to sleep in your bedroom, especially if you don't have any other resident dogs to keep them company at night. This is absolutely fine, and will not cause your dog to feel that he is "dominant" or develop separation issues. You may even choose to let your dog sleep in bed with you (if there's enough space for those long legs!) but we would not advise doing this until you know your dog better, and are sure that he will not react defensively if startled awake.



You may prefer your dog to sleep elsewhere in the house, which is not a problem – however you should be prepared to build up to this gradually. Wherever you choose, it is important to provide a suitable bed. Many sighthounds prefer a large duvet or cushion bed on the floor which allows them to stretch out, whilst others may prefer a bucket bed or the sofa.

Since sighthounds don't have much padding of their own, make sure any bed you provide is suitably thick and cushioned enough to keep him comfortable. They are also more susceptible to the cold than other breeds, so it is vital that they are kept warm. During the winter your dog may need to wear a fleece coat overnight. As a general rule, if it's too cold for you not to wear a jumper, it's too cold for your hound to sleep without a fleece!

Getting ready for bedtime

Try to keep everything calm and relaxed during the couple of hours before bedtime. Avoid exciting activities such as going for a walk, or playing high energy games. Chewing and licking are both soothing behaviours,

which can help put your dog in a calm state of mind – try providing a long lasting chew, or a toy stuffed with soft food for your dog to lick.

Always make sure that your dog has been out to toilet directly before bedtime. Rather than just putting your dog outside and assuming he's toileted, it is best to go out with him and make sure he has, especially if he is not yet house trained. Walk them round the garden on a lead to encourage him to urinate, and ideally defecate as well. Remember to praise and reward him for toileting outside!

Make sure your dog has access to a suitable bed, and is wearing a fleece coat if needed. Provide fresh water. Many dogs are not used to sleeping in total darkness, and may prefer to have a nightlight or lamp left on for them. Playing soft music or white noise at a low volume can help to cover any noises from outside which may disturb your dog during the night.

If you already have a resident dog, you may want to use a dog gate to separate them from your new dog at bedtime to start with. This will allow them to keep each other company, but prevent any disagreements from happening overnight.



Setting up for success

In the past, adopters were commonly advised to start as they meant to go on in regards to overnight arrangements. This meant leaving the dog to "cry it out" in another room, in the hope that they would simply get used to sleeping on their own. We now know that leaving a distressed dog to howl and bark overnight is much more likely to cause ongoing issues with separation and time alone (not to mention disagreements with your neighbours!).

Think about it from your dog's point of view – he's in a totally unfamiliar place, and is already feeling somewhat stressed and anxious. On top of all that, he's now been left totally alone for possibly the first time in his life! He has no idea whether he's safe, and whether you're ever going to come back. It is completely understandable that he would be upset in this situation, and is likely to howl, cry and bark in order to make contact with you. By ignoring your dog's distress and leaving him alone all night, you will simply confirm his fear that being left alone is a bad thing, to be avoided at all costs!

What we want to do is help your dog to feel safe and secure overnight from the start. This means either allowing him to sleep in your bedroom initially (or on the landing with a dog gate on the bedroom door, so that he can still see you), or sleeping with him in whichever room you have chosen for their bed. This immediately establishes bedtime as a safe, positive time for your dog.

You should expect a few disturbed nights at first – your dog may want more reassurance, be more alert to noises, or need to use the toilet more than usual.

Ideally you should stick to this arrangement for at least the first few days to a week, so that your dog is feeling as settled as possible before you start changing things. At this point, you can start gradually moving your dog's bed away from the bedroom (or moving your bed out of the dog's room). Dog gates on doorways can be very helpful during this process! If your dog becomes distressed at any point, go back to the previous stage and change things more gradually. Remember that there is no problem with allowing your dog to sleep in your bedroom permanently, and many dogs will be most comfortable with this arrangement.

If you are having any issues getting your dog to settle overnight, please don't hesitate to contact us for help and advice.

The information provided in this document provides general guidance on the matters outlined and is not intended to replace the need for you to take qualified and appropriate behaviour/training advice on these matters.

Please remember, that as an owner of a Forever Hounds Trust dog you have access to our team of qualified behaviourists and FREE behaviour and training advice. No matter what your behaviour or training question is, we are here to help. You can contact the team by emailing: behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org

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