

# Behaviour and Training Plan



## HOMING AN EX-RACING GREYHOUND

As an ex-racing greyhound, your new dog will have spent their entire life in a very specific and quite limited environment. Racing greyhounds are rarely kept in a home or indoor environment, and have generally spent almost all of their time either inside a kennel or at the racetrack. This means they have usually missed out on a lot of the early life experiences and socialisation that we might expect pet dogs to have had. When welcoming an ex-racing greyhound into your home, it is important to be aware of the ways in which they are likely to behave differently than a dog from a pet background, as well as the things they may find more challenging due to their previous experiences.

### Living in a home environment

As mentioned above, ex-racers generally have had no experience of living indoors. This means that it is usually safe to assume they will not be housetrained straight away! In addition to this, male dogs will often scent mark initially in a new environment.

Most ex-racers seem to pick up on housetraining fairly quickly, as long as they are given plenty of opportunities to toilet outside and are rewarded every time they do so. Make sure to minimise the chances of any accidents inside by letting your dog outside to toilet often (probably every hour or so at first, as you would with a new puppy). **If your dog does toilet inside, do not tell them off; this will only make them reluctant to toilet in your presence.** If you do notice that your dog is about to toilet inside, you can interrupt them using a positive tone of voice and give them a chance to go outside instead. Using a special enzymatic pet urine cleaner (available in most pet shops) on any accidents will remove any residual pheromones which may encourage your dog to keep toileting in the same spot.

Your dog may also be unsure of normal household sights and sounds such as the TV, microwave, kettle, Hoover etc. If you notice that your dog is worried by any of these things, try to make them less intense at first, whilst starting to pair them with something your dog enjoys – for example, you could give your dog a food-filled toy whilst the television is on (at a low volume initially, then increasing the volume as your dog starts to feel more comfortable).

Greyhounds are notorious for stealing food from kitchen sides, tables and the bin (probably because they are tall enough to reach!). The best option here is management – make sure not to leave food within reach, and move the bin into a different room if needed. They can also take and possibly chew non-food items, not realising they aren't dog toys! Again, management is best here – before your dog comes home, move any potentially tempting items (such as shoes, ornaments and children's toys) out of reach. Provide a selection of different dog toys (different dogs have different preferences) and be sure to reward your dog with play or simply attention/praise when they choose to interact with one of their own toys.

If your dog does take something they shouldn't have, try not to avoid chasing them round the house to get it back – this will seem like a fun game to your dog! Instead, calmly swap for a treat or more appropriate play item. This will also teach your dog that being approached by a person whilst they have something they value is a good thing (because they will get something better in exchange) rather than feeling that they need to become defensive in this situation.

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## Time alone

Most rescue dogs struggle with spending any time alone when they first arrive in their new home, ex-racer or otherwise! They are in an unfamiliar environment with people they don't know well, so are understandably feeling insecure – they will often rely on human contact for support during this time and seek it out more than usual. Your new dog may follow you around everywhere, and become upset when separated from you even for a short time. They may even get upset when somebody leaves the house, even if the rest of the family are still there! **This is totally normal and does not mean your dog is going to have separation issues in the longer term.**

Trying to make your dog spend time alone whilst they are still feeling very insecure can cause separation issues in the long-term, so allow them to be with you as much as they need to be whilst they settle in, before building time alone up gradually. This may mean taking some time off work when you first bring your new dog home (we would advise at least a week, depending on how much time alone your dog needs to get used to) letting your dog sleep in the bedroom to start with, or sleeping downstairs with them initially. Leaving a dog to “cry it out” overnight can be a recipe for disaster! Many dogs aren't used to sleeping in complete darkness, so try leaving a light on for your dog overnight if they seem worried.

As your dog starts to settle in, you should start to notice that they are less intent on following you everywhere – for example they may happily stay on the sofa whilst you pop to the kitchen, rather than going with you. At this point you can start a gradual introduction to spending time alone, starting with just a few minutes initially. Giving your dog something like a food-filled toy or safe chew as you leave will not only prevent them from getting bored whilst you're out, but will also help them to build a positive association with being left alone. Some dogs feel happier with classical music or talk radio left on for them whilst alone.

## Other dog breeds

The majority of ex-racers have no experience of different dog breeds prior to arriving in rescue. This can make dogs who don't resemble greyhounds very confusing to them at first, especially small breeds! Many ex-racers will respond fearfully or with over-excitement when encountering other breeds, and some will even view smaller breed dogs as potential prey. We specifically assess all our dogs with small dogs before homing and will have advised you on how your dog responded during this assessment, as well as any safety measures you will need to take around other dog breeds.

Even if your ex-racer responded well towards smaller dogs during assessment, you should use caution around small dogs until you know for sure how your dog is going to respond to smaller dogs as a whole. Ex-racers have been selectively bred for a high prey drive, and have been encouraged to chase small, fast moving objects during their racing career. Even ex-racers who are generally social with smaller breeds can revert back to these behaviours under certain circumstances (for example meeting a very tiny dog, or a small dog making a high pitched noise/running around can trigger a predatory response). We would always advise using a muzzle and keeping your ex-racer on-lead in public for **at least** the first 6 weeks, or until you feel confident about their behaviour around other dog breeds. Some ex-racers will always need to wear a muzzle in public in order to keep them and other dogs safe.

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## Walking

Ex-racers often have very little or no experience of going for walks in public, having only been used to a very limited range of environments. They may have had little experience of things like traffic, new people, unfamiliar dogs and other animals. Some ex-racing greyhounds can find walks rather overwhelming at first! Greyhounds are well known for “planting” – stopping dead on a walk and refusing to move! They do this because they are feeling worried, overwhelmed or just need a moment to take it all in.

Some dogs may plant because they are in pain or uncomfortable, due to physical issues caused by their racing career. **We would always advise not taking your new dog out for a walk right away, since moving into a new home is already plenty for them to deal with.** Give them at least a few days to get used to their new home and build a bond with you first – this will make walking issues much less likely.

If your dog plants, give them the option to turn back and go home – they may have had enough of the outside world for today! If they don't want to turn back, the best option is simply to be patient. Give your dog time to process their emotions, waiting them out until they choose to start walking again. This can take anywhere from a few seconds to ten minutes! Once they start walking, you can reward this decision with a treat. Try to avoid using a treat to lure them into moving, since you may inadvertently teach them that stopping earns them a reward!

If your dog seems keen to go in a certain direction (but you know that route isn't an option) try starting to walk in that direction, then circling back round once they're moving – they will often be happy to keep going once they have some momentum! Greyhounds often seem to plant when you try to turn and head back in the direction you came, so try to find a looped route walk if you can.

Avoid dragging your dog at all costs, as this will simply add to their feelings of worry and stress. If you find your dog is planting a lot, you may need to try a shorter walk, a quieter walking area or even give them a break from walks entirely and more time to settle at home before trying again.

Using the techniques above will help to reassure your dog that they will not be forced into walking when they're not comfortable. This will build their confidence on walks and trust in you as their handler, making them plant less over time.

## Giving your new ex racer a safe space

It is good practice for all dogs to have a safe space or “den” - somewhere they can go when they feel overwhelmed, and where they know they won't ever be disturbed. A large crate with a soft bed, covered with a blanket and with the door always left open is ideal. Other options could be a bed underneath a table or tucked away in a corner. The safe space should always be positioned in an area of the house without much foot traffic and away from busy areas. Make sure everyone in the household understands that when your dog is in their safe space, they are to be left alone and not touched, stroked or bothered. If you really need your dog to come out of their safe space, you can call or entice them out with food.

It is always good practice not to disturb dogs when they are resting, whether their eyes are open or closed (some dogs sleep with their eyes open!). Many ex-racers are not used to humans being around them when they are resting, and may not feel totally comfortable with this initially. This is because they are used to sleeping alone in a kennel, where they would always be woken up by the noise of someone entering before ever getting close to them. Due to this, some ex-racers can show

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a “sleep startle” response – they may instinctively react by barking and snapping, or even biting if woken unexpectedly. This behaviour is almost impossible to assess in a kennel environment, so often only becomes apparent once a dog has been rehomed.

For this reason, we would always advise taking extra care around your new ex-racing greyhound whilst they are resting. This is particularly important when there are children in the home; they should always be taught not to approach your new dog when they are lying down.

### Human interaction

Although it can be tempting to shower your new dog with love and affection, we would advise avoiding too much hands-on attention to begin with. The jump from how greyhounds are treated as racing dogs to how they are treated as companions can be huge, with many dogs never having experienced fuss and affection before. Although we start the process of treating them as companions whilst in our care, it is important that your new dog is allowed time to adjust.

Thought your dog hasn't necessarily been treated intentionally cruelly by racing owners, they are seen as working animals and so physical affection/connection with humans is often limited. Your ex-racer will need time and space to adjust to the new levels of affection they will receive as a companion. They might not understand it at first and might even feel quite anxious at all the new attention. Sometimes the best thing we can do for our new dogs is just ignore them, letting them come to you and ask for attention when they're ready. This takes the pressure off them, and allows them space and time to start to settle.

Remember that some dogs will want to be near you, but not actually want to be touched. Get into the habit of fussing your new dog for around three seconds, then stopping and taking your hands away from them. If your dog was enjoying the attention, they will ask for more by nudging you, moving closer or pawing at you. If your dog moves away or simply doesn't ask for further contact, give them some space. This will help your new dog to build trust in you and feel more comfortable about being handled as they settle in.

Very few dogs are comfortable about being hugged or kissed, other than by people they know very well and trust completely (many dogs don't like being hugged or kissed even then!). Hugging and kissing are very human-specific ways of showing affection – this type of interaction is actually seen as rude or even threatening in dog language! Try to avoid hugging or kissing your dog until you know them well enough to be sure that they actually like it.

### Toys, food and furniture

During their time in the racing industry, it is likely that your dog has never had access to exciting things like treats, chews, toys, comfy beds or sofas! Now that they do have these things, they will value them very highly and may feel worried about having them taken away. For this reason, we always advise giving your new dog plenty of space when eating, resting or playing with toys.

When playing with your dog, use two toys - throw one whilst your dog has the other (rather than trying to take toys away from them directly). If you do need to get an item away from your dog because it is not safe for them to have, always swap for a high value treat. Throw the treat away from your dog and wait until they go after it before retrieving the item.

Repeatedly taking food, chews or toys from your dog will not teach them to accept this – it will only teach them that they need to defend high value items from people, potentially causing a resource guarding issue.

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## Reading your ex-racer

Greyhounds will often cope with things they find overwhelming by shutting down, or seeming to look very quiet and still. People often mistake this for calmness or gentleness, but it is important to differentiate between when your greyhound is feeling relaxed and when they are feeling scared and anxious.

In the first few weeks, observe your new ex racer and their behaviours. Try to notice their mannerisms and body language. What do they do when you stroke them? What do they do when they are outside? How do they behave first thing in the morning? And when their food is being prepared? Once you've learned the types of behaviour and body language your dog shows when feeling relaxed, comfortable or excited, you will be able to look for signs that they are actively enjoying new situations, rather than just quietly tolerating something they find worrying.

If your dog growls or snaps at you, they are trying to communicate with you. This is their way of letting you know that they're very worried and asking you to stop whatever you are doing, so that they don't need to physically defend themselves. **Never punish a dog for growling – this is like taking the batteries out of a smoke alarm!** Your dog may stop communicating their feelings due to fear of being punished, which can create a dog who seemingly bites without warning. If your dog growls or snaps at you, immediately stop whatever you are doing and give your dog space.

If you have a Forever Hounds Trust adoptee, you can always contact us for advice on your dog's behaviour. Otherwise, you should seek the help of a qualified dog behaviourist who uses force-free, reward-based training methods.

**For more detailed information on all of the above topics and more, please visit the help and advice section on our website for access to a wide range of hound-related fact sheets.**

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](mailto:behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org)