

Help! Where's My Pyrfect Dog?

Pyr can be challenging, but if you have one, you already know that. They are dominant, very intelligent (you think they're "stubborn") and have "selective hearing." Many people are disappointed when their rescue dog doesn't seem to be the "perfect dog"; but maybe a perfect dog needs a perfect owner, and how many of us can claim that title? The well-behaved dog you met during your home visit didn't come that way right out of the box: it took time, patience and following proven training methods to produce that social, loving dog. Like children, dogs crave consistency and a simple set of rules.

While we always advise consulting a trainer on behavioral and temperament issues, here are some of the most common problems we've seen, and possible solutions that have worked for many new pyr owners. **Many of these items are covered in the materials you received with your contract: Your New Rescue Dog booklet, Nothing in Life is Free Training and the article by Dr. Patricia McConnell (who has owned pyrs herself).** Two online resources include Dr. McConnell's website, <http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/>, and <http://www.guidedogs.com/site/DocServer/GDB-training-secrets-how-a-dog-learns.pdf?docID=5141>

My dog had an accident in the house (or lifts his leg indoors to mark); I was told he/she was housebroken!

Many dogs seem to "forget" their housebreaking training when they arrive in a new home and will need a refresher course in their new environment. Any new dog needs to be taken out often upon arrival, and shown the new place in this strange new territory to "do their business." Pyrs are so predator-wary that a few may refuse to use a new outside location until they are certain it is "safe." Reward and praise the dog when he goes where you would prefer. Some people use a verbal cue to associate with the act, as when seeing-eye dogs are commanded to "Park!" (a verbal cue that is usually known primarily to the blind owner or their family).

Be patient with a young dog. A general rule of thumb is that a puppy can hold it the number of hours equal to their age in months plus one, i.e., a two-month old puppy can hold it for three hours. There also are commercial products designed to attract a new dog to the desired bathroom area. A helpful guide may be found at <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/house-training-your-puppy>

Older dogs can be housebroken using basic puppy housebreaking methods. Be consistent, patient, and use positive reinforcement to reward good behavior. Feed meals on a set schedule, and take the dog out an hour afterward or whenever you see she will need to urinate and defecate. Never leave an un-housebroken dog unattended unless she is in a crate. And don't punish your dog when he/she makes a mistake. As you will see on our website, we believe in crate training, which is especially helpful in housebreaking. You can refer to the link on our website to <http://www.inch.com/~dogs/cratetraining.html>

Your new dog may smell your last dog's scent in the house and in an effort to make it his own, try to scent mark those areas. A sharp verbal correction (Eh Eh! Or NO!) and immediately exit outside to the appropriate area is needed.

My new dog growled at my resident dog!

When a dog arrives off transport, they are very stressed and physically tired, as described in Your New Rescue Dog. They usually need a lot of sleep the first few days, and also space from other pets and children and all the friends and family who are eager to meet the new "baby."

Please follow the instructions on introducing your new dog in the YNRD booklet. The time you take to follow these steps will be worth it. Separate them by pressure gates if necessary for the first few days. USE YOUR CRATE as a safe place and "den" for the new dog. Exchange blankets or towels with each other's scent so they can become acquainted with each other's scent. Each dog should be on a leash indoors and out at first, so you can separate them at the first sign of nervous behavior. Watch for a tense, closed mouth that may be moving forward at the corners; if you spot that look, immediately make sure there is more space between them, even if that tense dog is wagging his tail. Many times, the cause of aggressive barking or growling at the other dog is based in fear. Imagine it from the point of view of the dog, who has come a long distance to his new home, not knowing if it is to be his forever home, another temporary stop along the way, or simply a place he will be abandoned or mistreated. He doesn't know the pack order yet, the house rules, and who controls the resources (that should be YOU, by the way).

(NOTE: While growling can make a new owner nervous, remember that it is also your "early warning system" that the dog is upset. If a dog is punished for growling, they may learn not to growl, and go straight to the bite. This is an issue that needs to be addressed with a trainer who can observe your dog in the specific situations that provoke growling, whether they are based in territorial possession or fear or something else.)

As pack animals, dogs usually work out the pecking order between themselves. To ensure a peaceful "negotiation," go back to square one of the new introduction instructions in our Your New Rescue Dog booklet. The time you spend on the initial introductions will pay off tremendously in the long run.

He/She chased the cats!

Your new dog may have been fine with a cat or cats at the foster home, but these are not "his" cats, **they are strange, new and interesting cats. Always keep a dog on leash when introducing it to your cats; again, more specific instructions are included in Your New Rescue Dog.**

My dog is a counter-surfer!

Don't wait until your dog has his mouth on your ham sandwich. If you see him approach the counter, say NO! firmly and move your body toward him with a serious look. If he walks away or stops, praise him. And if he walks past the counter without being

interested, praise him. Other options include putting a “yucky” sandwich (lemon juice on bread or other distasteful item) on the counter and hoping he doesn’t love it, or using clicker training methods. Guide Dogs for the Blind has a helpful booklet you can access at <http://www.guidedogs.com/site/DocServer/GDB-training-secrets-counter-surfing.pdf>

Separation Anxiety

This is a common problem with rescue dogs, and it can range from distress barking to outright destruction. When you get your new dog, you probably have arranged to be at home 24/7, at least for the first couple of days. Eventually, you may be returning to work, and he may be shocked to be left for so long. Start slowly. Take your car keys and walk into the garage and come right back. Try walking out of the house for five minutes and come right back inside, to get the dog used to your coming and going with no fuss, no big deal. Work up the time gradually; get in the car and drive to the end of the block and come back. Drive a little further, but if the dog has been destructive while you’re gone, then scale back the time until he becomes calmer and is reassured that you are coming back and all is well.

Training suggestions may include:

- Leave the dog with a Kong toy stuffed with frozen peanut butter and kibble.
- Devise a different “exit strategy” to differ your routine every time you leave the house.
- Leave “olefactory” comfort items of worn t-shirts with your smell on them in their crate or resting area when you leave.
- Use music; many vets recommend a calming CD such as “Through a Dog’s Ear,” available at <http://throughadogsear.com/>
- The ASPCA has many behavioral help documents available on their website, including one on Separation Anxiety, that can be accessed at <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/separation-anxiety>
- The International Association of Canine Professionals discusses it at <http://canineprofessionals.com/IACPLibrary/SeparationAnxiety>
- Humane Society of the US offers advice at http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/dogs/tips/separation_anxiety.html

Depending on the severity of the problem, it can be dealt with by methods including counter-conditioning, desensitization and in extreme cases, medication.

My Dog is Aggressive/Dominant/Thinks He’s The Boss!!!

Great Pyrenees are a dominant breed that must be independent thinkers in order to do the job of a guardian breed. They are true guardians and you must not underestimate their instinct. If children are roughhousing with friends or family, the dog does not understand that this is not a real threat to his or her “flock.” The dog should be in the other room. Children must ALWAYS be monitored around dogs, especially giant breeds who can easily knock down a small child without meaning to harm them. Giant breeds can also look down on small children as lower members of the pack, which is why we

stress the need for a strong leader and encourage all family members to participate in obedience training with the dog.

Great Pyrenees need an alpha “pack leader” and like all pack animals, they find comfort and reassurance in knowing the rules and who makes them and who controls the resources. We strongly urge adopters to do the following to establish themselves as pack leaders:

- Take your dog to obedience classes.
- Practice “Nothing in Life is Free” training to establish yourself as the “alpha” who controls the resources—The following website will give you a great feel for the basics: <http://k9deb.com/nlif.htm>.
- Access training documents from our website such as <http://www.canismajor.com/dog/kidsdog1.html> and <http://sonic.net/~cdlcruz/GPCC/library/alpha.htm>.
- Get advice from trainers at websites such as <http://canineprofessionals.com/IACPLibrary/FamilyPack>, <http://canineprofessionals.com/IACPLibrary/DogLeadership>,
- Do NOT allow your dog to take over the furniture. If you are someone who wants their dog on the furniture, then the dog should understand that he/she is only allowed on the couch if you invite him up, and when you say “Down!” he has to get off the furniture. Your own bed is the highest status place in the home: when you allow the dog on the bed where you sleep, he is assuming the role of ruler, and will often growl and even lunge at your spouse or the other dog in the household, to keep them off the bed. You have then surrendered the leadership and alpha position to the dog on the bed, and need to take charge again. It’s a matter of starting over; you can do this.
- Don’t let your dog push past or run you down to get out the door. For a pyr, this can mean an escapee who “disapys.” Never open a door to the outdoors unless it is impossible for the dog to get out by that door. That means she should be leashed, crated or in another room. Ideally, you should train the dog to sit before she is allowed to go through the door. If you need to close the door in her face, do so. You can teach the “wait” command by holding up your hand in a STOP position and say “Wait!” (Some trainers use a raised index finger.) Whichever signal you decide to use, be consistent. If he tries to push by you, move forward, physically block him and repeat the verbal command. Practice, practice, practice.

If you have a behavioral (or health) problem with your new rescue dog, please contact the NGPR person who handled your application and helped you choose the dog. We are here to help you for the life of your dog.