

Companion Dog Take-Home Guide

Congratulations!

Whether you've been waiting for your new companion for weeks or for months, today marks the beginning of a remarkable journey.

Your dog has spent his whole life preparing for this day.

From the day he was born, every experience has been thoughtfully designed to prepare him for becoming your companion. He has learned routines, communication skills, confidence, and how to live successfully alongside others.

Today begins the next chapter.

Over the coming days, we'll help you understand what your dog already knows, how he learns, and how to continue building on the foundation we've started together.

The first fifteen days are an important part of that journey. Together, we'll help your dog become comfortable in his new home, establish routines, and build the partnership you'll share for years to come.

This guide is designed to walk you through those first days together. If you have questions along the way, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're always happy to help.

— Sheryl Sundean

Before Your Dog Comes Home:

Everyday Essentials

- ☐ Training collar (22–24") or Martingale collar (17–19")
- ☐ Identification collar with current ID tags
- ☐ Six-foot leash or slip lead

Home Essentials

- ☐ Appropriately sized crate
- ☐ Food and water bowls
- ☐ Dog bed

For Learning Together

- ☐ Clicker
- ☐ High-value training treats
- ☐ Durable toys
- ☐ Tennis balls

Feeding

- ☐ Your dog's current food

Cues & Vocabulary:

Here

Purpose: To have your dog return promptly and willingly to you.

Definition: "Here" means come directly to the handler.

How to Use It: Use after airing, training, or whenever you need your dog back at your side. Praise immediately.

Remember: Avoid repeating the cue. Make coming to you a positive experience.

Whistle Cue: Three short tweets.

Sit

Purpose: To have your dog stop, remain in one place, and focus on you.

Definition: Your dog automatically sits when you stop moving or when given the cue.

How to Use It: Use before doorways, meals, vehicles, greetings, or whenever you need calm attention.

Remember: Praise the decision to sit. Sitting creates calm before the next

conversation.

Whistle Cue: One short tweet.

Heel

Purpose: To walk together as partners while maintaining calm communication.

Definition: Your dog walks on your left side with his shoulder near your leg.

How to Use It: Use whenever you are walking together.

Remember: Consistency is more important than perfection.

Whistle Cue: None

Look

Purpose: To establish communication through eye contact.

Definition: Your dog briefly checks in with you.

How to Use It: Use before another cue or through distractions.

Remember: Connection, not control.

Whistle Cue: None

Sit / Stay

Purpose: To teach steadiness and patience.

Definition: Remain where you are until released.

How to Use It: Return to your dog to end the exercise whenever possible.

Remember: Focus on steadiness, not anticipation.

Whistle Cue: short one tweet with a sit hand cue

Place

Purpose: To settle calmly in a designated location.

Definition: Go to a bed, cot, mat, or platform and relax.

How to Use It: Use during everyday life whenever you want your dog to settle nearby.

Remember: The goal is a calm state of mind.

Whistle Cue: None

Okay

Purpose: To release your dog from work.

Definition: The exercise has ended.

How to Use It: Use only when intentionally releasing your dog.

Remember: Use consistently.

Whistle Cue: None

Make a Friend

Purpose: To invite a calm greeting.

Definition: Approach and interact politely.

How to Use It: Allow your dog to greet at his own pace.

Remember: Calm greetings build confidence.

Whistle Cue: None

Inadvertent Praise

Definition: Dogs are always learning. Inadvertent praise occurs when we unintentionally reward behaviors we do not want.

How to Use This Information: Reward calm, quiet, and collected behavior.

Before praising, ask yourself, 'What am I teaching right now?'

Remember: The behaviors that receive your attention are the ones most likely to be repeated.

Soft Language & Loud Language

Purpose: To help you recognize how your dog communicates through body language, posture, and behavior.

Definition: Dogs spend very little time communicating through vocalization.

Instead, they rely on body language to express how they feel, what they need, and how they intend to interact with the world around them..

How to Use This Information: Pay attention to your dog's body language before he ever makes a sound. Dogs almost always begin with quiet communication.

Remember: Dogs rarely skip directly to loud language. Most begin with soft language and gradually become louder if they feel they are not being heard

Your Dog Has Just Arrived Home

Whether you made the trip to pick up your new companion or he just arrived with a trusted transport, your dog has finally arrived home.

This is the moment you've been waiting for.

It's also the beginning of a brand-new journey for both of you.

Although everything around him has changed, the things that matter most haven't. Your dog already understands communication, routine, and how to live successfully alongside people. Over the next several days, he'll be learning your home, your schedule, and the rhythm of everyday life with you.

Don't be concerned if he seems quiet or spends time simply observing. Dogs naturally gather information about a new environment before fully engaging with it. He's learning the sights, sounds, smells, and routines that will soon become familiar.

There is no need to rush. The hiking trails, family gatherings, vacations, coffee shops, and every adventure you've imagined will still be there a few weeks from now.

Today has one purpose: helping your dog feel safe, confident, and comfortable in his new home.

Remember: The first day isn't about keeping your dog busy. It's about building a foundation. Every calm interaction, every consistent routine, and every successful conversation helps your dog understand that he's exactly where he belongs.

 **Quick Tip:** If your dog is out of the crate, he is learning—or unlearning. Whether you're walking through the house, going outside, or relaxing in the living room, your dog is paying attention and learning from every interaction.

For the sake of our story, let's call your new dog Charlie.

Before Charlie ever steps foot inside your home, you'll want to give him an opportunity to stretch his legs and go to the bathroom. If you've made a long trip, he has likely been holding it for quite some time.

If you have a fenced-in yard, take Charlie to the area where you'd like him to relieve himself. Remove his training collar or martingale collar and either remove the leash or allow him to drag it, whichever you're most comfortable with. Give the cue, "Do your business," then simply allow him time to sniff, explore, and relieve himself.

If you don't have a fenced-in yard but do have yard space, you may want to use a tie-out. This gives Charlie a little more room to move around, sniff, and go to the bathroom without feeling confined to a six-foot leash.

If you need to air Charlie on leash, remove the training collar or martingale collar and clip your six-foot leash to his identification collar. This signals to Charlie that he is no longer working and is free to sniff, explore, and relieve himself.

Once Charlie has finished and it's time to return to the house, put his training collar or martingale collar back on before going inside. This signals that it's time to begin working together again.

💡 Quick Tip: Training collar (or martingale collar) + leash = We're working together. Identification collar + leash = It's time to sniff, explore, and go to the bathroom.

Entering the House

Now that Charlie has finished his bathroom break, it's time to head inside.

When you reach the door, ask Charlie to sit.

Remember, sitting before entering the house isn't about making Charlie perform a command. It's reminding him that calm behavior literally opens doors and creates opportunities.

Once Charlie is sitting quietly, open the door and invite him inside.

As Charlie enters the house, ask him to sit once more before continuing. These first few moments help establish the expectations that will become part of your everyday routine.

Charlie doesn't need to explore every room, meet every family member, or investigate every new object immediately.

He needs the opportunity to observe, process, and begin learning the rhythm of his new home.

With Charlie on a leash and a working collar, calmly walk him through the areas where he'll spend most of his time.

Remember:

- When you are moving, Charlie is at Heel.
- When you stop moving, Charlie should Sit.

Charlie already understands these expectations. Your role is simply to help him understand how they apply in his new environment.

Keep your voice calm and conversational. You aren't trying to overwhelm him with commands. You're simply continuing the communication system he already

knows.

Your home is new to Charlie. The conversation is not.

Continue using the same cues, expectations, and communication system he already understands, and he'll quickly learn how they fit into his new life with you.

Settling Into the Crate

After walking through the areas where Charlie will spend his time, bring him to his crate.

His crate should be located in a quiet but central area of your home. Charlie should be able to see and hear the household's normal activity while still having a safe place to rest, settle, and relax.

Charlie already understands his crate as a place to rest and relax. Your job is to continue that same understanding in his new environment.

Once Charlie is settled in his crate, allow him time to observe his new surroundings. He may watch you, listen to new sounds, or simply take a nap. These are all normal parts of him becoming familiar with his new home.

While Charlie settles into his crate, let's take a moment to think about what success looks like today. Today isn't about long walks, introducing him to friends, or testing out everything your new partner can do. Today is about giving Charlie the opportunity to observe his new world, establish a routine, and get to know you.

Every calm, thoughtful decision you make today lays another brick in the foundation you'll build together over the coming weeks. There will be plenty of time for adventures. Today, your job is simply to help Charlie feel comfortable and successful in his new home.

Coming Out of the Crate

After Charlie has had time to settle in, you can begin spending some quiet time together.

Before opening the crate, have Charlie's training collar or martingale collar and

leash ready.

While Charlie is still in his crate, ask him to sit. Once he is sitting calmly, open the crate door.

With Charlie remaining seated, put on his training collar or martingale collar and attach the leash.

When you're ready, give the cue "Here," and invite Charlie out of the crate.

As Charlie comes out, ask him to Sit once more before continuing.

From here, you have several options. You may take Charlie outside, work on a Place lesson, continue exploring the house together, or simply spend quiet time with him.

Whatever activity you choose, continue using the cues and communication system Charlie already understands.

While Charlie is out of his crate, keep his working collar and leash on. This allows you to communicate clearly and helps Charlie understand how his training applies to his new home.

As you move through the house, Charlie should be at Heel, with his shoulder near your left leg.

When you stop moving, Charlie should sit or quietly settle beside you.

If you're sitting and relaxing, Charlie may lie quietly near you or choose to return to his crate when he's ready to rest.

💡 Remember: Your goal during these first few days isn't to show Charlie every room, every toy, or every new experience. Your goal is to help him become comfortable with your routine while continuing the conversation he already understands.

Children and Your New Companion

If you have children in the home, bringing Charlie home is an exciting day for everyone. Before introducing them, take a few moments to explain that Charlie

is learning about his new family just as your family is learning about him.

Have your child sit quietly on the couch or beside another adult while Charlie is brought into the room. Allow Charlie the opportunity to approach, investigate, and become comfortable at his own pace.

Children should avoid rushing toward Charlie, hugging him tightly, climbing on him, or following him if he chooses to move away. Dogs communicate through body language, and teaching children to recognize and respect that communication is one of the most valuable lessons they can learn.

When Charlie approaches, you can use the “Make a friend” cue to encourage the children to calmly offer gentle attention and affection. These first interactions should be quiet, positive, and supervised, allowing trust to develop naturally between them.

Children can also become wonderful training partners. Under adult supervision, they can participate in simple activities such as praising Charlie for making good choices, helping with appropriate play, or practicing cues Charlie already understands. An adult should always remain responsible for maintaining the communication system and expectations Charlie has already learned.

 Remember: The goal is for Charlie and your children to learn how to communicate with one another safely, respectfully, and with confidence.

Resident Dogs and Other Pets

Charlie has already been introduced to a variety of animals during his training, including dogs, cats, and other household pets. Bringing him home isn't about teaching him how to meet another animal—it's about helping everyone become comfortable with one another in a new environment.

When Charlie first arrives home, place him in his crate and allow your resident animals to move freely through the room. This gives them the opportunity to see, smell, and investigate Charlie while he remains relaxed and comfortable in his own space.

Observe their interactions and allow everyone time to adjust to the newest member of the family. There is no need to rush the process. Charlie already understands how to communicate with other animals. Your role is to provide

structure, supervision, and clear expectations while everyone becomes familiar with one another.

Once everyone has had the opportunity to observe one another calmly, you can begin allowing supervised, direct interactions. Continue using the same communication system Charlie already understands, and pay close attention to the body language of every animal involved.

 **Quick Tip:** Never turn the dogs loose together and expect them to "work it out." Successful relationships are built through thoughtful introductions, careful supervision, and positive experiences. Your guidance during these first interactions lays the foundation for the relationship they'll build in the weeks and years ahead.

The Rest of Charlie's First Day

Bringing Charlie home is exciting, and it's natural to want to show him everything his new life has to offer. Remember, though, that Charlie has had a long day and has been introduced to an entirely new environment. Like people, dogs need time to process new experiences.

Throughout the remainder of the day, continue using the same communication system Charlie already knows.

Allow Charlie time to:

- Spend quiet time with you.
- Explore his new environment with your guidance.
- Rest in his crate.
- Go outside to relieve himself.
- Experience the normal rhythm of your household.

When Charlie is with you, continue using his working collar and leash. This allows you to communicate clearly while helping him understand how his training applies to everyday life in his new home.

When Charlie is ready for a break, return him to his crate. His crate remains a place where he can rest, observe, and relax while continuing to feel included in the activity around him.

💡 Quick Tip: A new dog doesn't need a busy first day. He needs a consistent first day. Every calm interaction, every predictable routine, and every successful conversation builds confidence. There will be plenty of time for adventures once Charlie understands that your home is a place where he can relax, communicate, and succeed.

Feeding Charlie

One of the easiest ways to help Charlie settle into his new home is by keeping his routine consistent.

Charlie has already been eating on a schedule, and continuing that routine helps him understand what to expect each day. Feed Charlie the same food he has been eating during training, and maintain the feeding schedule you were provided with.

During the first few days, Charlie may not eat or go to the bathroom exactly as he normally would. A new home, a new routine, and a new family are all changes he is learning to understand. As Charlie becomes comfortable with his new life, his normal appetite and routine will return.

Avoid free feeding. Charlie has already learned that meals are offered at specific times, and maintaining that structure supports healthy habits and reinforces the consistency of his daily routine.

When it is time to feed Charlie, ask him to Sit before placing his food down. Charlie already understands this cue. The purpose is not to teach him to sit; it is to help you continue using the same communication system he already knows.

Once Charlie is sitting calmly, place his food down and release him by saying his name:

" Charlie."

Remember, Charlie's name is a cue. His name gains his attention and begins communication.

If you have multiple dogs, continue feeding Charlie separately if needed. Feeding him in his crate allows him to finish his meal comfortably without feeling rushed or pressured by the other dogs in the household.

Fresh water should always be available.

💡 Quick Tip: Consistency builds confidence. By maintaining Charlie's feeding routine, you're helping him understand that although his surroundings have changed, the communication and expectations he already knows remain the same.

First Night Home

After Charlie has spent the day learning the rhythm of his new home, the evening routine should remain calm, quiet, and consistent.

Before bedtime, take Charlie outside to let him go to the bathroom. Follow the same routine he has already learned: use his working collar and leash while walking to the airing area, then switch to his identification collar and leash when it's time to sniff, explore, and relieve himself.

Allow Charlie time to take care of business without turning it into playtime or a training session.

Once Charlie has finished, return to the house and continue with your normal evening routine.

When it is time for bed, guide Charlie to his crate. His crate should remain a familiar place where he can rest, settle, and relax.

Once Charlie is comfortably settled in his crate, offer him a biscuit. This continues the positive bedtime routine he already understands and gives him something familiar as he settles in for the night.

Don't be surprised if Charlie takes a few moments to settle or quietly watches the activity around him before falling asleep. He's still learning the sounds, routines, and rhythm of his new home.

💡 Quick Tip: The first night sets the tone for the days that follow. If you sleep on the couch or next to the crate, he will expect your company every night. The more consistent you are tonight, the more confident he'll become tomorrow.

The Official First Morning

Charlie has now completed his first 24 hours in his new home.

The excitement of arrival day has passed, and now the real routine begins. This is where Charlie starts learning the rhythm of your household, and you continue learning how to communicate with him.

When Charlie wakes up, take him outside and give him the opportunity to go to the bathroom.

Before opening the crate, ask Charlie to Sit. Once he is sitting calmly, open the crate door and put on his working collar and leash while he remains seated.

Give the cue, "Here," and invite Charlie out of the crate.

Once Charlie comes out of the crate, ask him to Sit again before continuing.

Take Charlie outside using his working collar and leash. Once you reach the area where Charlie will be, switch to his identification collar and leash, or use the tie-out or air him in the fenced-in yard, whichever you have available.

Allow Charlie time to sniff, explore, and relieve himself without turning this into a training session or playtime.

When Charlie has finished, switch back to his working collar and leash before continuing with your morning routine.

Breakfast

Breakfast is another opportunity to continue the communication Charlie already understands.

Bring Charlie into the feeding area using his working collar and leash. Ask Charlie to Sit before preparing his meal.

Charlie already knows this cue. The purpose is not to teach him to sit; it is to help you continue using the same communication system he already understands.

Once Charlie is sitting calmly, place his food down and release him by saying his name:

"Charlie."

Remember, Charlie's name is a cue. His name gains his attention and begins communication.

If you have multiple dogs, continue feeding Charlie separately if needed. Feeding him in his crate allows him to finish his meal comfortably without feeling rushed by the other dogs in the household.

After Charlie has finished eating, continue with your morning routine. This may include quiet time together, a Place lesson, exploring the house, or simply allowing him to settle into the rhythm of your day.

Your First Week Together

Over the past several pages, we've walked you through Charlie's first day at home. During the rest of the week, continue building on those same routines. There is no need to rush. Your goal this week is to help Charlie understand the rhythm of your home while continuing the communication system he already knows.

Rather than trying to accomplish everything at once, focus on one day at a time.

Day 1

Focus on helping Charlie become comfortable in his new environment.

- Bathroom routine
- Entering the house
- Settling into the crate
- Meeting immediate family members
- Quiet time together

Day 2

Begin establishing your daily routine.

- Morning and evening routines
- Feeding schedule
- Crate routine
- Bathroom routine
- Heel through the house
- Sit at doorways

Day 3

Continue building confidence.

- Short Place sessions
- Calm introductions to resident pets
- Practice Here, Heel, Sit, and Look throughout the day
- Reward thoughtful decisions

Day 4

- Build consistency.
- Continue following the same routines while allowing Charlie to become more involved in your everyday activities around the house.

Day 5

- Expand Charlie's world.
- If Charlie is settling in well, begin introducing one or two new experiences, such as a short walk around the property, meeting a trusted friend, or riding in the vehicle.

Day 6

- Practice everyday life.
- Continue using Charlie's cues naturally throughout the day. Every trip outside, every doorway, every meal, and every walk becomes another opportunity to communicate.

Day 7

Let's review your first week together.

By now, Charlie should be settling comfortably into your routine. Take a few moments to look back at everything you've accomplished together.

- Established a bathroom routine.
- Built a feeding routine.
- Continued crate training.
- Introduced family members and resident pets.

- Began communicating using Charlie's vocabulary.
- Started building your partnership.

💡 Remember : The first week isn't about accomplishing everything. It's about creating routines you'll continue to build on for years to come.

Week Two: Building Your Partnership

By now, both you and Charlie are becoming comfortable with one another.

The routines that felt new during the first week are beginning to feel familiar. Charlie understands where he sleeps, where he eats, where he goes to the bathroom, and the rhythm of your daily life. You're becoming more comfortable using his cues and recognizing the ways he communicates with you.

This week, you'll begin expanding Charlie's world while continuing to build on the same foundation you've established together.

Day 8

- Continue your daily routines while introducing one new experience.
- This may be a short walk around the neighborhood, a trip around your property, or riding in the vehicle to a familiar location. Keep the experience short, positive, and successful.

Day 9

- Increase communication.
- Rather than thinking about training sessions, begin using Charlie's cues naturally throughout the day.
- Ask for a Sit before opening doors.
- Use Heel as you move through the house.
- Practice Look before giving another cue.

- Call Here throughout the day and reward Charlie for choosing to come to you.
- Training is no longer something you set aside time to do. It becomes part of everyday life.

Day 10

- Introduce new environments.
- Visit a quiet location where Charlie can observe the world without becoming overwhelmed.
- Your goal isn't distance or excitement.
- Your goal is confidence.
- Allow Charlie to watch, investigate, and process the environment while remaining connected to you through the communication system he already understands.

Day 11

- Build confidence through success.
- Choose activities that allow Charlie to make good decisions.
- Practice Place while you work around the house.
- Invite him to Make a Friend with someone he hasn't met before.
- Reward calm, thoughtful behavior.

Day 12

- Continue building routines.
- By now, Charlie should be anticipating many parts of your day.
- Morning routine.

- Bathroom routine.
- Meals.
- Quiet time.
- Evening routine.
- Dogs thrive when life becomes predictable.

Day 13

- Expand the partnership.
- Begin involving Charlie in more of your daily activities.
- Go for a longer walk.
- Work in the yard together.
- Relax on the porch.
- Ride along for errands where appropriate.
- These shared experiences continue building trust while teaching Charlie how to live successfully alongside you.
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Day 14

- Look back before moving forward.
- Take a moment to recognize how much you've accomplished together in just two weeks.
- Charlie has learned your home.
- You've learned his communication.
- Together, you've built routines, confidence, and a common language that will continue to grow throughout the years ahead.

Day 15

Over the past fifteen days, you and your dog have built something far more important than a list of commands—you have begun building a partnership.

The foundation you have built through calm consistency, clear communication, and a daily routine will support everything you choose to do together from this point forward. Whether your adventures lead to hiking trails, quiet evenings at home, family vacations, community outings, or simply sharing a cup of coffee on the porch each morning, the skills you've practiced together will continue to grow.

Training isn't measured by perfection. It is measured by understanding. Every time your dog looks to you for guidance, makes a good decision, or confidently responds to a cue, your partnership becomes a little stronger.

Continue to keep your expectations fair, your communication consistent, and your praise genuine. Celebrate the small victories, laugh at the occasional mistakes, and enjoy the journey. The relationship you build with your dog will always be more valuable than any individual command.

Thank you for trusting Sundance Retrievers to begin this journey with you. It has been our privilege to prepare your companion for this next chapter, and we hope the years ahead are filled with adventures, quiet moments, and memories that will last a lifetime.