

The Foreign Exchange Student

By Sandra Kruczek

Have you ever considered hosting a foreign exchange student in your home for a year? If so, you kindly thought about what he or she would need to feel welcome and at ease the moment they walked through your door. I believe that bringing a dog into our home is very much the same situation. Here are some things I think are essential to help your new companion get a great start.

Consider your language barrier. How can you help him understand what you mean? It's your responsibility to help the new dog understand your language, one word/gesture at a time. He's not being stubborn or rebellious if he doesn't respond. Would you think that of a foreign student?

Basic physical necessities are probably foremost in his mind. He needs to know where the bathroom is. Take him to the location that is designated as the relief area. Stay with him until he goes potty. Immediately give him a treat as soon as he goes, right there in the potty area for the first few days. This will help him understand that this is the right spot.

Set up a comfy kennel or crate that will be his sleeping area. Putting the crate next to your bed will be comforting to him. You might want to put a stuffed chew bone inside his "bedroom". Think of it as a gift basket for your new long term resident.

He might be wondering when the next meal is. Also, what kind of food is served in your home? You've probably chosen a high quality food that's right for his age, activity level and weight. Keep his meals on a pretty steady schedule. Predictability will help his potty training as well.

Social skills and respect of family need to be "explained". Introduce him to your family. Everyone is part of his life, not just one dedicated person. Encourage all family members to come together with a plan to help him be successful in your home.

What do you do for fun and exercise as a family? Are there toys that are designated for him to play with or chew on? What areas are available for taking walks in your neighborhood? Do you play Frisbee, fetch or hide and seek? These are all good games to encourage fun and friendly relationships.

I think every foreign exchange student wants to learn about our customs and manners and what behavior is considered polite or rude. You might want to help him learn to say "please" by sitting to be petted or before going out a door. "Come here" means you might be serving cookies and it might just save his life.

What kind of attire is appropriate in this house? I recommend a nice fabric "martingale" collar. He can't slip out of it in a panic and you can attach all of his identifying tags and licenses to it. A six or seven foot fabric leash is a good choice and perhaps in a matching color for fashion sense. Help him understand that the leash is used to keep him safe and with you. Give him a treat when you snap it onto his collar.

Have you thought of everything? What else would make your "foreign exchange student" want to stay with you forever?

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