



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A MILL OR HOARDING ANIMAL

Animals who come from a hoarding or mill situation typically lack the socialization and life skills other pets have. They can still be great pets and family members, but need more patience and understanding than your typical pet. It will be very important for you to begin building trust from the first day home. Here's what you might experience when adding one of these pets to your family.

Home Introduction & Hiding

- 🐾 Due to a lack of socialization, these pets can be fearful of people, noises and sudden movements. When afraid, they may place themselves in a corner, hide under something, or try to move to a space as far away from people as they can get. Pulling them out of a hiding spot may cause them to panic, thus slowing down the essential process of building a bond with you. Instead, work to strengthen the bond by gaining their trust:
 - 🐾 With dogs, get down to their level and, using high value treats and a gentle voice, encourage them to approach. It helps to turn your body sideways and avert your gaze. A frontal body position and direct eye contact can be seen as scary to dogs.
 - 🐾 For cats, sit down near them and do something that does not directly engage them: Use your phone, watch TV, read a book. Give them the time and space to come to you on their own and at their own pace. This can take days or weeks, and that's okay.
- 🐾 Introduce them to your home slowly, one room at a time.
 - 🐾 For dogs, pick a room to be their primary space to start. Set up a bed, a den (covered crate), food and water, and let them get comfortable with you and the smells of your house. Let them explore the home with supervision so they don't end up hiding, or getting stuck, in a place where you cannot find them.
 - 🐾 For cats, build their confidence by getting them used to one room at a time. A small room, like a bathroom, with a soft bed, a litter box and food and water, will work well. Also, make sure there are no holes in walls, inside cabinets, or ceilings. Cats will enter those spaces and could become stuck or lost in the walls or ceilings of your home
 - 🐾 For small pets such as rabbits and Guinea pigs, do not let them roam freely in your home. They can put themselves in dangerous places and positions trying to hide. They should be housed in a proper enclosure that can also prevent them from bolting out when opened.
- 🐾 Most of these pets have never experienced stairs. Use treats to encourage them to learn to climb up and down; never force them up or down.

Leash Training and Walking

- 🐾 Mill/hoarding dogs have likely never had a collar on or been on a leash. The feeling of restraint on the end of a leash may be terrifying. Leash training should be gradual and should ALWAYS be done in a securely fenced area. It will also require both patience and positive reinforcement.
- 🐾 It's recommended that these dogs wear a properly fitted collar with ID at all times, and that this collar is not used to attach a leash. The ID should include the dog's name and your phone number. Consider a collar embroidered in a large, bright font so it's easy to read from afar.
- 🐾 Use treats when putting a leash on to help your dog associate the leash with something positive (the treat).
 - 🐾 Once the leash is on, allow your dog to drag it around in the house for a bit. ALWAYS supervise when the leash is dragging to prevent them from getting caught on something.

- ❗ As they start to get more comfortable with the leash, you can start to carry the leash as they walk around the house. Make sure to keep the leash loose as you walk with them.
- ❗ Once walking on leash, use treats to encourage them to follow you. You can also use clicker training to reinforce confident behaviors when on leash, such as “checking in” with you.
- ❗ These dogs may be an increased flight-risk (see our Flight Risk Dogs document for more info).
 - ❗ When walking, use a slip leash, or a nylon or leather clip leash, not a retractable one.
 - ❗ A slip leash will also be easier to put on and less intimidating because you will not have to hover over your dog to clip the leash on to a collar. If used properly, it also minimize the chance that they can back out of it if scared while walking.
 - ❗ If you’re using a clip leash, leave their regular ID collar on and clip the leash to two separate, properly fitted pieces of walking equipment. We suggest a martingale collar and/or harness.
 - ❗ By using a separate collar or harness from their ID collar you maximize the chance that, even if the worst happens and they do get loose, their identification is still on.

Housetraining / Litterbox Training

- ❗ Pets from hoarding or mill situations are usually not housebroken or litterbox trained. It’s likely they were allowed to eliminate anywhere and everywhere and are probably used to living in dirty conditions. This can make house/litter training a challenge, so expect accidents.
 - ❗ Never yell at or hit your pet when they make a mistake.
 - ❗ When accidents occur, clean up the soiled areas with a proper pet stain remover
 - ❗ House/litter training your new pet is much like house training a puppy or kitten. Consistency, positive reinforcement, and constant observation (with a focus on prevention) are key.
 - ❗ For more information, please see our Housetraining handout.

Once settled in:

- ❗ Bringing home one of these pets is a challenge and a gift. While your pet will slowly bond with you, they may always have fearful tendencies. You can help them learn how to work through their fear to recover more quickly by using positive counter-conditioning training techniques and patience. By pairing treats with people, noises and novel items, like the vacuum cleaner or a car, you can create positive associations for them. There are also several stress-reducing products that can help your new pet adjust in fearful situations.

Hoarding pets at a glance:

- ❗ Allow them the choice to approach and provide positive reinforcement for interacting with people. Never pull them out of hiding or force them to spend time with the family or other people.
- ❗ Do not chase them if you need to medicate your pet or take them outside. Instead, wait until they have settled somewhere and then slowly approach them, getting down to their level, using treats and a soft voice. Once you have handled or medicated, give them more treats or food.
- ❗ Never punish your new pet for house-soiling, showing fearful behavior like growling, or exhibiting any other inappropriate behavior. Punishment will only make your new pet fearful of you and can lead to aggression.
- ❗ Remember that these pets haven’t had a chance to experience the world, so you will need to create as many positive associations as possible with you, other humans, and the world around them. With some patience and dedication, your new pet will be able to enjoy life alongside you and your family.