Coping with Post-Adoption Remorse

Pet remorse, or post-adoption remorse, can include feelings of dread, panic, regret, anxiety, or depression revolving around bringing home a new pet. This can happen when bringing home any new animal including cats, kittens, dogs, and puppies. This is NORMAL. Even if you felt fully prepared, pet-proofed your home, spent time with adoption counselors to find the best fit, and had several meet and greets before bringing home your new family member, you still may have anxious feelings after you have brought him or her home.

There is a natural transition period for pets and humans to adjust to their new schedule and the new dynamics/relationships within the household. While there is not one quick fix for this feeling, there are ways for you and your new pet to adjust to living together.

- **Know the Rule of Three:** This is a guideline for how pets may feel when entering a new home. Within the first three days, the pet will likely feel overwhelmed and need time to decompress. They may not eat much during this time period and they may spend their time hiding. Within three weeks, the pet will likely begin to settle into a routine, but they may still have a hard time letting their guard down. Within three months the pet may be fully acclimated to his or her new home and this is when you will see their personality shine! Please understand that this is just an estimated timeframe. Your new pet may warm up more quickly, or they may take more time to adjust, but adjustments do take time and this is completely normal.
- **Be realistic:** This is a life change for everyone involved and will require an adjustment period before it feels normal.
- **Manage expectations:** This applies to you and your pet. New pets will often feel anxiety in a new environment with new humans and other animals in the home. They need time to settle in and you both will need to get used to the new schedule and living arrangement.
- **Share the responsibility:** If possible, divide new pet chores amongst family members. This gives everyone a chance to begin bonding with the new pet and helps alleviate some of the stress off of the primary caregiver. If you live alone, try to find a friend that can come over to take your new dog for a walk or play with your new cat while you take a break and rest.
- **Utilize resources:** The Roanoke Valley SPCA has options for those needing assistance, but it can also be advantageous to seek out other resources from friends, family members, veterinarians, and animal trainers.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. My current pet is not getting along with the new pet.

Remember that you are bringing a new pet into the existing pet's territory. Rushing introductions of pets could lead to issues later down the road so it is important to introduce properly from the start. Properly supervise introductions and do them slowly, conducting the initial interaction in a neutral environment away from the home if possible. The pets will need to establish their own hierarchy and relationship, but these interactions should be supervised to keep all pets safe. Utilize closed doors, baby gates, etc. to gradually introduce new pets.

2. I thought I was ready for a new pet but I'm feeling overwhelmed.

New pets, dogs especially, need lots of attention and training, which can feel overwhelming and time consuming. Utilize frozen Kong treats or long-lasting chews with dogs in crates to give yourself time to rest away from the pet while knowing they are safe. This also helps the dog learn that is okay to be alone, which can help ward off symptoms of separation anxiety.

3. My new pet isn't acting the way they did in the shelter. I am feeling inexperienced and don't know how to handle this.

Rescue animals often come from unknown pasts. This makes it challenging to fully know what you're taking on when you adopt them. As a new pet decompresses in the home, their true personality starts to come out. This may be different than the one expressed in the shelter. If you're feeling too inexperienced to handle these new personality traits, and potentially behavioral problems, always reach out for support before the problem gets worse.

4. I've felt an immediate bond with pets in the past, but I don't think my new pet is bonding with me. Doesn't (s)he like me?

Shelter pets have often been through a LOT of experiences prior to adoption. This may mean they will take more time to bond with their new families, especially as adult pets. Give them time, show them that they are safe, and they will learn to trust you. It may be helpful to read your pet's records from the shelter, or contact the shelter to find some of the things that your new pet really enjoyed prior to adoption. Maybe they had a favorite toy, a favorite treat, or even a favorite spot to be pet.

5. Did I choose to adopt the wrong pet?

A general feeling of regret and remorse is normal when bringing home a new pet. But try to remember that the pet you adopted was chosen for a reason. If you were torn between two pets and thinking about the pet you left behind, tell your friends, share on social media, help the shelter get that pet adopted which will help save more pets.

6. My new pet has an unexpected medical condition. What do I do?

We do our best to medically evaluate all pets before they are available for adoption and any known medical conditions will be made available in a medical disclosure. However, we cannot guarantee their health. This is why we offer the Healthy Start Certificate. This certificate offers a complimentary health exam and 14-day (limited) follow-up care. If something arises later and you need assistance, please give us a call and we will help guide you as best we can or initiate a return if your pet has a condition that you are unable to care for.

7. It's been some time since I adopted and we have tried many things, but it still doesn't seem right. What if the pet we chose just isn't a good fit?

Generally, post-adoption remorse will pass. But on some occasions adopted pets and their adopters are simply not a good fit. It happens. Please do not blame yourself! Let us know it is not a fit. We may be able to provide resources that you have not tried yet or assist in the return/relinquishment of the pet. The adoption process is not perfect, but even poor fits are learning experiences. While it may not work out for you, your learned experience can help provide the next adopter with more information so adoption staff can work on finding a better fit for that pet.

ROANOKE VALLEY SPCA

1340 Baldwin Ave., N.E. Roanoke, VA 24012
540-339-9247 | www.rvspca.org

For additional post adoption resources, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit:
https://rvspca.org/resources-education/post-adoption-services/