

The Honeymoon is Over

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Modar Dog Training

Is the perfect dog you adopted 3 months ago suddenly turning into a monster? There is a definite "honeymoon" period for most dogs in new homes, where they may appear very reserved or on their best behavior. The "honeymoon" simply refers to a period of time the dog needs to adjust to his new environment, pack, leaders, rules, etc. Many people are caught off guard thinking they found a dog that fits easily and naturally into their home with little to no adjustment. They mistakenly allow too much freedom. They may be surprised, even shocked as the true dog emerges.

I observed this phenomenon with Flash, a Border Collie mix I found. She'd obviously had no training, didn't appear to have been in a house (TVs and mirrors seemed new) and unlike my dogs she had no "off switch." That was easily remedied by teaching her how to relax in a crate. However in other regards she seemed pretty sweet and easy, getting along with my two dogs. Thank goodness I provided moderate structure, such as feeding her in a pen near my dogs, crating her at night, when left alone and when she couldn't "settle." I'm sure I prevented a multitude of problems from rearing their ugly heads!

As it was, I did notice a difference as we neared the 3 month marker. I began to realize why no one ever came looking for this attractive, spayed, fat, shiny-coated, young stray. She was not the easiest dog to live with. She was highly reactive, predisposed to being mouthy, pushy, demanding, in-your-face, very triggered by movement and sound, a barker, an escape artist and runaway. We immediately set out to fix the latter two problems in order to save her life. The rest we attacked from a variety of directions, including obedience training, desensitization, behavior modification and management.

People often grant the new dog the same privileges as their existing pets and problems don't arise for weeks, even months. Sometimes they are overly permissive and the dog takes advantage of his status. He may be allowed to sleep on the bed and growls when anyone enters the room, tries to sit on the bed or asks the dog to move. It can be little, subtle things to great big huge things... perhaps a dog that didn't appear to be at all destructive is now chewing up your belongings, getting into the garbage and urinating and defecating in the house.

Many problems can be avoided simply by adding structure from the start. Structure builds confidence and security. Too much freedom or the need for decision-making has the opposite effect. It's much better to prevent undesired behaviors from developing in the first place through management. As time goes on the dog can earn privileges as his behavior warrants.

What if you've already let the dog rule the roost and now need to regain control? You can still start over and accomplish the same goal. It may just be a little harder and take a little longer. If your dog is growling and challenging you, please consult a professional to work privately with you to teach non-confrontational ways of working with your dog safely and effectively!

No matter what your new dog's skills, you should enroll in an obedience class to help establish a bond between you and your pet. Through the class and help of a knowledgeable trainer, you can make sure the honeymoon turns into a long and happy union between you and your dog.