



Your Dog is Home: Decompression and Vet Check

A VET VISIT IS IMPORTANT POST-REUNION!

The first thing to consider, especially if your pup has been out overnight, is getting your dog examined by your vet. Injuries are not always visible or obvious, and a dog's behavior may not indicate your dog has a health concern. Common injuries are scraped pads, cuts and scratches, fur loss, limping. Less obvious health concerns can include broken bones or fractures, ingested objects and blockages, and in cases where dogs were unable to find food sources for an extended period, a dog may be at risk for refeeding syndrome - the result of chronic malnourishment. Many dogs are healthy after being out on their own, but to avoid hidden medical issues from developing, it's important to at least speak with a veterinarian over the phone, but it's preferable to arrange a visit as soon as possible.

DECOMPRESSION

When dogs have had to fend for themselves for any length of time, it's very stressful, the high level of stress can create a response similar to PTSD. Cortisol (stress hormone) is racing through their system to help keep them alert as they avoid predators and work to stay alive. It's exhausting. Once they are home they need several days or more to fully decompress, longer depending on how long they've been out. Your dog may look and act completely normal, even happy - this is not evidence your dog is relaxed. Like PTSD, you can't tell by looking at your dog. A sudden movement or loud noise can bring your dog right back to flight mode, and cause your dog to bolt in a panic. To help her brain recognize she's safe (and stop producing cortisol), provide favorites....high value food, quiet spot, favorite bed, affection when she asks for it, alone time if she's avoiding activity. High value food also helps increase dopamine to create a positive emotional response. During this time, increase management by using barriers such as baby gates to block access to doors, or another room designated for your dog. Do not take her beyond her own yard to limit stimuli, and keep her leashed at all times for several days or more, even in a fenced yard. While some dogs appear fine, other dogs may show outward signs of stress - hiding prized possessions to retrieve later, pacing, panting, whining, unable to relax, unable to sleep at night....all of this is normal. Again, help your dog recognize she's safe as described above. Allow plenty of rest time and provide favorites, and a quiet area away from commotion and family. Every dog is different, just be aware that it will take several days if not longer.

MOVING FORWARD

We recommend using a properly fitted martingale attached to a harness as a backup, both for decompression as well as for skittish dogs and new adoptions during leashed outings. If a harness comes off, the martingale can tighten enough to stay on your dog's neck without choking, and can prevent escape. (Make sure a weight-bearing carabiner for climbing is used, or a chain quick link heavy duty screw chain link, to attach the martingale to the harness). Martingales should only be used during walks. For regular wear and tags, use a flat, quick-release collar for safety.

Please email with questions: mmoner@tjconnoradoptioncenter.com