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CARE GUIDE FOR LABORATORY SURVIVOR DOGS

INTRODUCTION

Having a survivor of animal testing in your life is a truly special experience — not only for you, but also for the animal! At Beagle Freedom Project (BFP), we understand how meaningful it is to help rescued animals discover the life they were once denied — a life free from exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

Rehabilitating a survivor can be hard work, but also a worthwhile, impactful, and selfless act. With patience, dedication, and love, your new companion will overcome obstacles and become the joyous, carefree pup they were always meant to be!

The personalities and behaviors of animal testing survivors often differ significantly from those of other companion animals. These animals are typically bred in commercial breeding facilities known for their traumatic and harmful conditions. As a result, your new companion was deprived of proper socialization during their formative months — a crucial period for developing the skills needed to interact with and adapt to their environment.

Survivors of animal testing can be extremely fearful, especially during their first few weeks outside the laboratory. Their past experiences may have taught them that change, novelty, and unfamiliar environments are unsafe — or even dangerous. Healing an animal cruelty survivor's trauma and helping them feel truly safe can take time, patience, and deep compassion. Please remember to be gentle as your survivor adjusts to an overwhelming world of new sights, sounds, and sensations. They are like newborns in adult bodies — unfamiliar with the typical cues, body language, and vocal tones that other dogs naturally understand. Upon liberation, everything is brand new to survivors of animal testing.

We've found that having another well-adjusted dog in the home to guide and comfort a laboratory survivor can be incredibly beneficial! Laboratory survivors will look to confident dogs as role models; learning how to feel safe and simply be a "dog" for the very first time. **But, more than anything, your companion will be relying on you!**



OVERCOMING ANXIETY

Lab survivors often feel fearful and anxious as they adjust to their new life. It's common for them to hide, shake, avoid eye contact, or show signs of separation and isolation anxiety. These behaviors are a normal response to their past, and with your patience and support, they can learn to build confidence and trust that they're finally safe.

- I. **What is separation anxiety?** Separation anxiety in animals refers to the distress or panic they may feel when separated from their bonded person or companion. It's most commonly seen in dogs and often develops in those who have experienced trauma, instability, or prolonged isolation — like laboratory survivors. Your new companion may initially bond closely with one member of your household, usually their primary caretaker, and feel anxious when separated from this specific individual.
- II. **What is isolation anxiety?** Isolation anxiety in animals refers to the distress or panic they experience when left alone without companionship. This is commonly seen in laboratory survivors, who may rely heavily on human interaction for comfort and security. Since they have only just recently been offered true companionship, they have not yet learned how to cope without it, and being left alone can trigger intense anxiety.
- III. To help animals overcome separation and isolation anxiety, start by gradually desensitizing them to your departures, beginning with short separations and slowly increasing the time. Create a safe, comfortable space where they can feel secure, and use positive reinforcement, rewarding calm behavior with treats and praise. Keep departures and arrivals low-key, avoiding long goodbyes or enthusiastic greetings, and maintain a consistent daily routine to give them a sense of stability. Provide distractions like calming music and a steady routine to ease their time alone. Never punish anxiety-related behavior, as this can make things worse. Be patient, consistent, and remember that overcoming anxiety takes time, but with love and support, your companion can build trust and learn to feel safe when alone.
- IV. Keep in mind that, while anxious dogs may become destructive when left alone, destructiveness is also a common behavior in confident dogs who are experiencing boredom.

FEARFUL DOGS: IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK!

Dogs learn how to perceive, engage, and stay safe in their environment at a very young age. Survivors, in particular, may show heightened sensitivity to a variety of common actions due to their stunted development, including but not limited to:

Raised voices or abrupt changes in volume, tone, or cadence:

- What to do instead: Speak in a calm, soft voice with a gentle tone. Keep your volume steady and even to create a more soothing environment for your dog.

Exaggerated or swift body movements, such as reaching your arms upwards or turning on your heel:

- What to do instead: Move slowly and deliberately. Use gentle, fluid movements to avoid startling your dog. Allow them to see your actions coming so they feel more in control.

Direct eye contact, even if you're smiling:

- What to do instead: Avoid staring directly into your dog's eyes. Instead, use soft, relaxed eye contact, and look away occasionally to signal you're not a threat. You can also blink slowly to help them feel more comfortable.

Being approached head-on, with your body directly facing the dog:

- What to do instead: Approach your dog at an angle, keeping your body slightly turned. This makes you appear less threatening and more approachable, helping them feel safe.

Reaching over a dog's head for any reason, even if the action is in an effort to pet or physically comfort the dog:

- What to do instead: Allow your dog to approach you first. If you need to touch them, reach from the side or under their chin, offering a hand at their level to avoid startling them with a gesture from above.

Please remain mindful of your new companion's traumatic past and approach all interactions with patience, thoughtfulness, and compassion. Every movement, tone, and gesture matters in helping them feel safe and understood.

CREATING A SAFE, COMFORTABLE, AND ENRICHING SPACE

As your laboratory survivor adjusts to their new life of freedom, it's important to provide them with a safe, comfortable, and enriching environment that encourages decompression, stability, and confidence-building.

- I. **Animals who have been rescued from laboratories should never be crated.** Crates are incredibly similar to laboratory cages and can cause extreme distress in lab survivors as well as behavioral regression. If you'd like, you can provide your new companion with a crate that has a removed door (a crate that cannot close), for a cozy retreat.
- II. In addition to exploring their new home, your companion should also be provided with a specific, private space where they can decompress as they acclimate to their environment. This space can be referred to as their "home base". It's important that this space feels comfortable, tranquil, and enriching— a space that your companion will *want* to spend time in! You can equip this space with bedding, toys, food, water, and potty pads.
- III. It's important to allow your new companion to adjust to your home before taking them to other locations. We understand the excitement of bringing a beloved dog on enriching excursions but, as they acclimate to their new life, keeping their world as calm as possible will enhance their sense of stability. We recommend waiting at least 2 weeks before bringing a laboratory survivor to a new environment.
- IV. Ensure that your new companion is monitored as they explore your yard space. Laboratory survivors typically never experienced the outdoors prior to their rescue, so they are unfamiliar with potential dangers.
- V. Practice leashed walks in your yard or a safe and nearby outdoor space prior to taking your new companion on lengthier walks. Laboratory survivors are rarely leashed prior to liberation, so they have no familiarity with accompanied walk-time!
- VI. While laboratory survivors may LOVE cozy bedding and blankets, ensure that you monitor their interactions with these items. It is not uncommon for laboratory surviving dogs to attempt to ingest bedding, as they are unfamiliar with having any comfort items and be may be unsure of their use.
- VII. Enrichment items like toys often become precious to laboratory survivors as they discover what it means to play! Please monitor your new companion as they interact with toys; such items could become choking hazards or become an ingested foreign body.

INTRODUCTIONS

Laboratory survivors were often denied interaction with other animals and may have only encountered a small number of humans, usually in stressful, and even painful, settings. Because of this, it's essential to introduce them to new animals and people slowly and intentionally. Thoughtful, positive introductions help set them up for relationship success and allow them to build trust at their own pace.

Animals experience much of their world in these terms:
what is safe and what is not safe.

- I. Due to your new companion's traumatic experiences, they'll likely feel unsure of new people— and in dogs, uncertainty = not safe. To help your companion understand that they are safe in navigating new relationships, it's important to create positive associations between pup and human! This can be easily accomplished by adding treats, toys, or extra praise to the introduction and initial greetings thereafter.
- II. **For dog-to-dog introductions**, choose a neutral environment for initial greetings, like a fenced outdoor space or enclosed yard. Ensure that this introduction feels as low-pressure as possible by refraining from encouraging or forcing animals to get close to one another. Never introduce dogs inside the home, as this space feels less neutral and may be interpreted as threatening for resident animals.
- III. **For dog-to-cat introductions**, allow greetings to occur within an open area of your home that allows cats to run/climb away should they wish to exit the space. It's common for laboratory surviving dogs to chase cats during initial interactions and, while they typically grow out of this behavior, it's important to keep the safety of all animals in mind.
- IV. Please understand that laboratory survivors may not immediately take to your resident animals or new people. This doesn't mean they'll never form bonds — it simply means they need time, patience, and gentle guidance to adjust and develop trusting, secure relationships.
- V. As your new companion begins meeting new people and animals, be sure to monitor all interactions closely to ensure they feel safe and supported throughout the process.

DOG SAFETY: ESCAPING AND CONFINEMENT

Lab survivors are considered high flight risks. Because of their fear and unfamiliarity with the outside world, even small triggers can cause them to panic and attempt to escape. They may bolt unexpectedly if startled or overwhelmed. It's crucial to take extra safety precautions as they adapt to their new chapter of freedom!

- I. In the home, prevent your new companion's escape by ensuring that all doors, windows, and other entry/exit points are monitored and can be securely shut. Double-check that your yard space has secure fencing with no gaps or holes.
- II. **ALWAYS EQUIP YOUR DOG WITH AN ID TAG.** Should your new companion escape your home, they will be most easily identifiable by an ID tag secured to their collar. Your companion's ID tag should list several contact phone numbers as well as a return address.
- III. At BFP, we provide all of our laboratory survivors with tracking collars or collar attachments (like FI collars, Air Tags, or Tiles) and we highly encourage you to do the same for your companion!
- IV. On walks, if your laboratory surviving companion becomes startled, they may move sharply and escape a traditional collar. Please make sure to equip your companion with a martingale collar for walk-time, **but remove the martingale collar indoors, as it IS a choking hazard!**
- V. As soon as a laboratory survivor enters your care, ensure that they are microchipped and that this chip is registered to you. PLEASE NOTE: A microchip is NOT a tracking device!
- VI. If your laboratory survivor escapes from your house, yard, or on a walk, **stay calm and do not chase them.** Instead, walk slowly behind your companion and try to get their attention. If you are able to lure your companion to you, make sure to pick them up immediately; and then reattach them to a collar & leash (if applicable).
- VII. If your laboratory survivor does become lost, **BEGIN SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORTS IMMEDIATELY!**

HOUSE TRAINING

Dogs learn their *surface preference* for elimination (potty time) at a young age. Because dogs from research laboratories have lived their entire lives in cages, they are accustomed to eliminating on hard surfaces, usually where they eat, sleep and live. This means that you must do the extra work to undo learned behaviors. Help your dog learn how to go potty outside of the house by following these steps:

STEP ONE - CREATE A SCHEDULE: Prior to bringing your new companion home, create a schedule detailing the exact times that you plan to give them an outdoor bathroom break. Laboratory survivors should initially be given frequent bathroom breaks— an hourly schedule is best.

STEP TWO - A SPACE FOR SUCCESS: The safe and private space that you have set up for your new companion can be utilized for potty-training purposes by ensuring it is equipped with potty pads, turf, or sod.

STEP THREE - IGNORE THE RUMORS: *Never* rub your companion's nose in their feces or urine as this only teaches a dog to avoid reliving themselves in your presence, which makes going to the bathroom on leashed walks impossible. This action also causes many dogs to continue to potty when your back is turned, and then consume their excrements to avoid you finding the accident.

STEP FOUR - THE BUDDY SYSTEM: Laboratory survivors greatly benefit from the companionship of a well-adjusted dog. If your laboratory survivor is able to observe another dog's potty behavior, they will likely mimic their habits!

STEP FIVE - STAY PATIENT: When it comes to house training, the most valuable tool is time! Some laboratory survivors pick up on potty-training within weeks, while others take several months to learn the ropes. Either way, your companion's success relies on your support, every step of the way!

FOOD, EATING HABITS, & MEAL TIME

Laboratory surviving dogs, prior to being freed, have only ever been fed low-quality food. These dogs may not recognize treats or even understand the concept of “good” or “high value” food. You’ll likely need to experiment with different feeding methods, food types, and meal-time environments to encourage your new companion to eat, as standard meal times or enjoyable meal experiences are likely totally foreign concepts for a laboratory survivor.

- I. It’s important to note that, especially as they are initially acclimating to your home, laboratory survivors may have little to no appetite for their first 24-48 hours in your care.
- II. Providing your new companion with food and water dishes that have rubber or plastic bottoms is a simple but important way to reduce stress — they help prevent loud scraping sounds that might otherwise frighten them.
- III. Keep a wide variety of wet food, dry food, and high-value treats on hand so you can observe what your companion gravitates toward. Offering their favorites can be a great way to gently encourage eating and build trust.
- IV. We recommend starting your companion on a more bland/plain diet to prevent stomach upset as they adjust. However, be prepared for digestive issues as dietary adjustments and stress may cause GI irritation. Adding canned pumpkin or plain white rice to any dog’s meal might help to firm loose stool and ease their dietary transition.
- V. It’s essential to separate your new companion from other household animals during meal times, as laboratory surviving animals may attempt to either guard their food or eat their food too quickly as a method of protecting their resources from other animals (this is common behavior in animals who have experienced resource scarcity).
- VI. Ensure that all items provided to your new companion are cruelty-free (not developed through animal testing).



FURTHER QUESTIONS

Fostering or adopting a survivor of animal testing—or any form of exploitation, abuse, or neglect—is a deeply rewarding and life-changing experience. At Beagle Freedom Project, we understand the unique challenges and joys that come with caring for these special animals, and we're here to support you every step of the way.

If you ever feel uncertain or overwhelmed about how to best care for your new companion or understand their needs, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. Our experienced team is always available to help guide you through this journey, just as we have for countless other compassionate families and individuals.

And if at any point you feel unable to meet your laboratory survivor's needs, BFP will always welcome these special animals with open arms and work to find them a loving, suitable home.

For more information, please contact BFP to request our full-length [Foster & Adopter Guide](#).

Beagle Freedom Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending the use of animals in experimental research through education, advocacy, and rescue efforts. For more information, visit bfp.org.

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