



Merle 315412: What to Expect

Merle is a graduate of our Behavior Modification Program and is looking for a special home. Merle is your typical herding breed dog; adventurous, eager to learn, loves fetch, and adores his humans. Merle's history previous to coming into the shelter is a mystery, but we've spent some time getting to know him since arriving at OHS. He was briefly adopted from OHS into a home with another dog and upon initial meetings, the dogs coexisted together harmoniously. But after a few days in the home there were some altercations between the dogs and in one instance the owner went to pull Merle away and ended up getting bit when Merle turned and snapped at his hand. We have since dog tested Merle with other dogs here at the shelter and he coexists neutrally with other dogs. He is neither eagerly interested nor does he detest it, he is indifferent. He is not reactive to other dogs, nor does he want to chase him, he views them as one would view flowers on a walk; nice to look at, but no need to interact other than a brief sniff. We think he would do best in a home without other pets at first so he can get to know his owners and new home, and his new family can get to know him best.

Like most herding breeds, Merle has a prey drive towards smaller animals like squirrels, cats, and bunnies. When he sees them, he will want to chase and while he hasn't been successful at catching any small critters, we want to ensure he's kept on a leash, so he doesn't have the opportunity to do so. He would love to get up and go on adventures with his new family on hikes, urban walks, and/or to the river or beach, on leash of course. Merle is a sensitive boy who at times when overwhelmed with new environments or places will become stressed and avoidant of strange new people. His new family should take it slow with Merle when introducing him to new spaces, places, and people. Forcing him into interactions before he's ready could have him attempting to run away, destroy trust, and even have Merle urinating in fear. When comfortable Merle loves to curl up next to you for belly rubs, play fetch with his favorite toy (tennis balls), and follow you around the house. Those interested in herding breeds or who have experience will enjoy Merle's companionship and love. Due to his sensitive nature, we feel he would do best in a low traffic quiet home without small children or other pets.

Here's how to help Merle settle in during your first months together:

Designate a "safe spot" in your home. You can use a crate or taller baby gates to confine them to a smaller area where they have access to water, bed, and toys. When you are unable to supervise the dog, leave them in their safe spot. Slowly work toward leaving them alone, unsecured, once they've had the chance to settle into your home and you know with certainty, they will be comfortable.

Be your dog's advocate. It's okay to ask someone to stop or prevent a person from letting their dog come up to say hi to your dog. Watch their body language and help your dog out of situations if they appear stressed. Explain that Merle is not comfortable with people and doesn't enjoy meeting strangers while on their walk. Tossing a treat on the ground is more effective for your dog to make positive associations with new people. Distance is calming.

Allow for time to build trust. Always let Merle decide if they want to come closer to you. Don't force interactions. As they grow more comfortable, you will see Merle decide that they enjoy spending time with you by coming closer for pets, jumping next to you on the couch, and following your resident dog around.

Limit introductions to new people. Take your time to get to know Merle before introducing them to someone new. They may need to meet a new person multiple times before feeling comfortable with strangers. Treats and allowing Merle to approach as they feel comfortable will be best. New people should just completely ignore Merle at first – playing hard to get is the way to their heart.

Use routine to get Merle comfortable in their new home. It will take a couple weeks for Merle to feel comfortable in their new home and with you. Having a predictable schedule will help them adjust to their new home.

Use treats and toys to build trust. Maintaining and continuing Merle's training will create a bond and a form of communication between two species who don't understand each other. The more positive experiences Merle has with their owners, the more valuable you will become in high distracting situations.

Merle needs daily exercise to reduce stress. Merle loves to go for runs, walks, play fetch, and chase a flirt pole. Giving your dog a healthy outlet for some of their energy will help them settle during calm hours at home.

"Puppy proof" your home and practice tether training to prevent them from getting into puppy/adolescent trouble. When home have Merle on leash, attached to you or tethered to a large piece of furniture as you go about your daily routine. This will help with potty training, bonding, and creating boundaries within the home. Let Merle drag the leash around the house or yard from time to time to simulate "freedom", but do not let them off leash until they can 100% be trusted not to get into things they shouldn't. This could take up to a few weeks. Crate Merle when you cannot watch them. This will ensure their puppy curiosity doesn't get them into any trouble. You will have long lasting success if you follow this method.

Don't take Merle to busy places where they will have lots of uncontrolled interactions with people/dogs (such as Saturday Market, off-leash dog parks, coffee shops, walks down Hawthorne St., Home Depot, etc.).

Visiting the Vet: Unless it is an emergency, give your dog plenty of time to bond to you before taking them to your vet. Merle does very well at the vet, they handle meeting new people well. The vet can still be a scary place. Bringing tasty treats like cheese and/or hot dogs can help make the experience more pleasant.

Try using **Adaptil (Dog Appeasing Pheromone)** or **Rescue Remedy by Bach Flower Essences**. These products may help dogs settle in new environments by easing the stress associated with change.

We're here to help!

We want Merle to be successful in your home. We're available to answer questions via phone and email. During your first two months with Merle, we can also set up a free one-on-one consultation. For questions or to schedule an appointment, contact us at **(503) 285-1145** or BMODTrainers@oregonhumane.org.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you now and in the future. Reach out if you have questions or concerns, or just to give an update. We love to see photos and hear how our friends are doing! Thank you for adopting from the Oregon Humane Society. Congratulations on your new dog!