



REHABILITATING A PUPPY MILL SURVIVOR

Things you should know if you adopted a puppy mill beagle

As society grows more conscious of animal abuse and neglect, we read nearly every day about a puppy mill being closed down and the animals confiscated. Many times these animals are in deplorable physical condition: parasite-ridden, underweight, bred nearly to death. Most have rarely been out of their small, cramped cages. They may have eye infections, missing orbs or vision impairment caused by ammonia from urine-soaked quarters. Some have torn, deformed ears and missing limbs from cage aggression. Females may have hernias from painful, extended labor. Their toes may be splayed from walking on wire floors. Many have tattooed ears and sometimes the tattooed portion has been cut off to hide their identity if the dogs are going to be confiscated. Some have numbers hung around their necks on chains that have grown into their flesh. Their dental state is invariably horrible; most will have painful, infected teeth and gums, some resulting in systemic infections.

These are animals who've endured years of torture to make money for uncaring humans.

When CBR gets takes in a puppy mill survivor, providing medical attention is just the beginning. The physical damage can be staggering. The psychological damage is much worse.



It takes a very special adopter to accept and love a puppy mill survivor. Rehabilitation of the puppy mill survivor begins with rescue, but can only be completed by a committed, loving family. The purpose of this article is to help demystify some of the acquired behaviors of the puppy mill dog, and to let the adopter know what to expect.

Every mill survivor is different. What works on one or many, will completely fail on others; the only thing that is consistent is that they will need lots of patience, understanding, love, and probably most importantly, unconditional acceptance of what they are and what their limitations may be.

At first glance a mill survivor may look like many of your friends' dogs; maybe not a perfect example of the breed, but close. What you won't see is the condition they were in when they came into rescue. Many have fur so matted that it all had to be shaved off and even the short haired breeds suffer from thin dull coats. Many times removing the filth and matting have only revealed open sores, usually from flea allergies or sarcoptic

mange. Their ears are often full of filth and usually mites and some survivors suffer from permanent hearing loss because of untreated ear infections. Most survivors require the removal of rotten teeth, even young dogs. The gums are usually very infected and the teeth have excessive buildup on them. Many vets who are not familiar with puppy mill rescued dogs will miscalculate the age of the dog if using only the teeth as their guide. Many survivors also suffer from swollen, splayed and sore feet from so much time walking on wire. While finally getting some good nutrition and extensive medical care after arriving in rescue, all too often there remains the psychological damage that can't be fixed with a bath, medicine, or surgery.

We would love to say that every puppy mill survivor only needs love to turn it into a wonderful family pet, but that would be a lie. Love is definitely needed in large amounts, but so is patience. The damage done during the years in the mill usually can be overcome, but it takes time and dedication. It takes a very special adopter for one of these dogs. Not being "up to it" is no crime, but you need to be honest with yourself, and us, about your expectations. These dogs have already been through more than their share of heartache and if your entire family is not willing to make the commitment, the dog is better off staying in our care until the perfect home for them is found.

Handling:

Many mill survivors have spent their entire life in the mill with only a elevated wire cage to call home. Puppies who grow up in a mill miss out on many crucial socialization periods with humans and they never learn to trust, to love, or to play. They have had very minimum physical contact with people and have virtually no concept of what to expect (or what is expected of them) when they are placed in a family situation. Their life in the mill may have been what we would consider unpleasant, but it is the only life they have ever known. In the mill, they were probably fed and watered using automatic dispensers, and their feces and urine was only cleaned after it fell through the wire that they lived on....and most of the time it is not cleaned often. Actual human contact normally came when they were being vaccinated, dewormed (if they were lucky), or moved to a new cage to breed or to whelp puppies.

Many of the quirks that mill dogs might have will be discovered while the dog is still in our rescue, but there are things that may develop after the dog feels a little more comfortable in your home. Most of the dogs we encounter have had their spirit broken many years before and aggression is not normally something we encounter; however, there are memory triggers that the dog may experience after it is settled in your home, so we will talk briefly about these.

The physical contact that they have received probably has not been pleasant. For one thing, because they are not handled enough, they are scared. Many mills handle their "stock" by the scruff of the neck. They have work to do, and don't really want to stand around holding some stinky little dog any longer than necessary. It is not uncommon for these survivors to be sensitive to the backs of their necks, after all, it brings the unexpected. Many mill dogs will try to always face you, not trusting you enough to give

you easy access to them from behind. NEVER startle a mill survivor from behind, you will lose any trust that you may have gained. Always make sure that they are anticipating you picking them up and consistently verbally tell them what you are going to do with the same word, like "up". It is not uncommon for a mill dog to drop their bellies to the floor when they know you are going to pick them up, some will even roll on their backs, often urinating in the process. This is a submissive move on the dog's part, and while it may be frustrating trying to pick up a dog in this position, these dogs will seldom show aggression in their lives. It is okay to go ahead and pick up a dog while they are in this position, but if time is not of the essence, encourage the dog to come to you by sitting a few feet away and calling him. The most common posture we see in mill dogs is the "freeze;" the dog will initially try to escape you, but when they realize there is no escape, they simply freeze up--rigid, like a statue--and accept their "fate." This is a good time to really praise the dog--scratch his back or ears and speak gently to him--it goes a long way towards teaching him that human contact can be a good thing.

Always be gentle and try to avoid picking them up until you see that they are receptive to it. It's almost a 'hostage' type situation to these dogs. Imagine how you would feel if taken hostage at gunpoint. The gunman may never harm you in any way, but you are aware of the danger the entire time and you don't have the ability to leave when you want. No matter how nice the gunman is to you, you will never enjoy the experience and will always watch for an escape route; however, you can turn the tables around and see a ray of hope. Imagine the gunman has been captured and you decide to visit him in jail. Now you are in control. You call all the shots, you have the ability to leave at any time. The bottom line is that these dogs have to progress at their own pace. Anything you force them to do will not be pleasant to them; let them visit with you on their terms, whenever possible. Having said that, sometimes it bridges the gap between them being on the verge of trusting you or not...and it can be beneficial to gently pick them up and hold them for short periods of time each day, speaking softly and kindly to them.

Learning about the House:

Many times when you bring a mill survivor into your home, it is their instinct to hide in a quiet corner. Any new dog that you bring into your home should be kept separated from other family pets for up to 7 days, depending on the dog. During this time it is fine to crate or confine them to a quiet area. After that though, they need to have exposure to the household. If crating, the crate should be in a central location. The ideal spot is one where there is frequent walking and activity. This allows the dog to feel safe in the crate, yet observe everyday activity and become accustomed to it; they need to hear the table being set, the dishwasher running, phones ringing, and people talking.

Very few mill dogs know what a leash is. After the quarantine, when the dog is out of the crate and supervised, it is not a bad idea to let them drag a leash around with them. Let them get used to the feel. It is easy to fall into the mindset that they must be pampered and carried everywhere, but leash training is important. It will make your life easier to have a leash trained dog, but it will also offer your dog confidence in the future.

Gaining Trust:

A mill dog has no reason to trust you. Your trust needs to be earned, little by little. Patience is a very important part of rehabbing a mill survivor. We have seen a lot of mill dogs that don't want to eat whenever people are around. It is important that your mill dog be fed on a schedule, with you near by. You don't have to stand and watch over them but should be in the same room with them. They need to know that their yummy meal is coming from you. For the majority of mill dogs, accepting a treat right out of your hand is a huge show of trust. Offer treats on a regular basis especially as a reward. Don't concern yourself too much if your dog does not eat for a few days. Because most of our mill rescues have been fed with self-feeders and confined to small places, it is not uncommon for them to be a little overweight. If there is no vomiting or diarrhea and your dog is otherwise acting healthy, a few days of nibbling at their food while they learn to live by your schedule, is not going to hurt them. It is important to teach them that food is fed on a schedule and you should not be leaving food down at all times. Again, this is a basic rule of thumb, but each dog is different. Your adoption counselor will give you ideas on what's best for the dog you're interested in.

While you shouldn't overly force yourself upon your dog, it does need to get used to you. Sit and talk quietly while gently petting or massaging your dog. It is best to do this in an area where *they*, not necessarily *you*, are the most comfortable. They probably won't like it at first, but given them time to adjust. Some dogs sadly, never will adjust, and we'll talk more about them later.

Never allow friends to force attention on a mill survivor. Ask them not to look your dog directly in the eyes. It is not uncommon for mill dogs to simply never accept outsiders. Let your dog set the pace. If the dog approaches, ask them to talk quietly and hold out a hand. No quick movements. Ask that any barking be ignored. Remember that these dogs bark to warn and scare off intruders. If you acknowledge the barking you may be reinforcing it with attention. If you bring your guest outside you have just reinforced to your dog that barking will make the intruder go away.

Housebreaking:

No puppy mill survivor comes housetrained. Some never grasp the finer points. Most males will mark, and many females, too. Crates are useful in housetraining. Belly bands (a cloth band which wraps around male dogs covering the ureter) will help prevent marking. Nicely fitted doggie diapers are available from Foster and Smith. Human diapers can also be used - just cut a hole for the tail. Put your dog on a schedule. Take him outside first thing in the morning, at lunchtime whenever possible, after dinner, before bedtime. If you see him lift his leg in the house, a shaker can (jar filled with small pebbles) or clicker can distract him long enough for you to get him outside. **Never raise your voice. Never hit a dog.** Take him outside and reinforce by saying, "Potty outside", or something similar. Use positive reinforcement when the dog does his business outside..."Good boy! Potty outside! Good, good boy!" Lots of petting must follow. :)

A puppy mill dog spends its entire life soiling its living area. In housebreaking a puppy mill dog you are UN-teaching them something that they have already learned to be acceptable. A regular schedule, constant reinforcement, praise, and commitment on your part are a must! Would you ever scream at your child, march them to the bathroom and make them sit on the toilet AFTER you discovered they soiled their diaper? A dog is no different in this sense; scolding them after the deed is done is of no benefit to anyone.

The two most important things you can do are to get your new dog on a regular feeding schedule (which will put them on a regular potty schedule) and to observe them closely after feeding time.

Getting them on a premium, low residue food is very important. This will produce a stool that normally is firm (very easy to clean up) and only one or two bowel movements a day are normal. Low cost, or over the counter foods have a lot of fillers and it is very hard to get a dog on a regular cycle using these foods. Your adoption counselor will advise you on what your dog has been eating.

Before you even begin to housebreak them, you must learn their schedule. Most dogs will need to 'go' right after eating. As soon as they are finished eating, command "*outside*". Always use the exact same word in the exact same tone. Watch them closely outside and observe their pattern as they prepare to defecate. Some will turn circles, some will scratch at the ground, some may find a corner, some may sniff every inch of the ground, some will get a strange look on their face...every dog is different and you have to learn to recognize how the dog will behave right before he goes; this way you will recognize it when he gets ready to go in the house.

We could give you a million tips that our adopters have found to work best for them, but as we have said, every dog is different. As long as you always keep in mind that housebreaking and potty training are one in the same, you should eventually see results. Never do to a dog what you would not do to a child. It may take a week, it may take a month, it may take a year. Never give up and never accept 'accidents' as a way of life. In most cases, **the success of housebreaking depends on your commitment.**

While we have focus mainly on bowel movements, urinating in the house is just as hard to correct as defecating in the house (if not worse). Below we will discuss "marking," which many people associate only with male dogs. We will go into that in more detail, below, but if urinating in the house remains a problem for your dog, we highly recommend crate training. This can be researched online in more detail, but if crate training is not working because your dog is soiling in the crate, you should discontinue the training immediately--as you are only reinforcing that it is okay to soil their area.

In general, if you can understand your dog's bowel patterns, you will usually find that they urinate before or after a bowel movement. Reinforce the positive and work on the negative, as most dogs will start to understand "*outside*" and associate it with both urinating and defecating. Of course, in the meantime, you will want to protect your

carpets by either removing any that can be rolled up, or confining the dog to a tiled floor when you aren't holding it on your lap. This should only be done during the training process, as socialization is just as important as house training so the beagle should not be isolated to a room by itself.

Marking:

Puppy mill survivors all have one thing in common...they were all used for breeding. A dog that marks its territory is 'warning' other dogs that this is its area...stay away! However, in a puppy mill situation, the dog's area is normally a 2X4 cage or smaller, with other dogs in and around their 'territory'. It becomes a constant battle of establishing territory and it is not uncommon to see male and female survivors with marking problems.

Normally, marking is seen in dogs with a dominant nature. This is good in the sense that these dogs can normally withstand verbal correction better than submissive dogs. The word 'NO' will become your favorite word as you try to deal with the problem of dogs that mark. Always use the exact same word and don't follow 'NO' with "now what has mommy told you about that, you are a bad dog" type of language..they won't understand that.

Dogs that are marking do not have to potty...taking them outside will not help. You have to teach them that it is not acceptable to do this in the house. The only way to do this is to constantly show your disappointment and stimulate their need to 'dominate' by allowing them more time outside, and even to areas where you know other dogs have been...like the park, or the nearest fire hydrant.

While you and your survivor learn about each other, and your survivor develops a sense of respect towards you, you will have to protect your home from the damage caused by marking. Here are a few tips that you will find helpful.

1. White vinegar is your best friend. Keep a spray bottle handy at all times. Use the vinegar anytime you see your dog mark. The vinegar will neutralize the smell that your dog just left behind. Using other cleaning products may actually cause your dog to mark over the same area again. Most cleaning products contain ammonia...the very scent found in urine. Your dog will feel the need to mark over normal cleaning products, but normally has no interest in areas neutralized by vinegar. Nature's Miracle is a good product for this as well.

2. Potty Pads....your next best friend. These can be found in any pet store, but most 'housebreaking pads' are treated with ammonia to encourage a puppy to go on the pad instead of the carpet; since we are trying to discourage your dog from marking, these aren't always the best choice. You might check at a home medical supply store. The blue and white pads used to protect beds usually work best. Staple, tape or pin these pads (white side facing outward) to any area that your dog is prone to mark (walls, furniture, etc.). Do not replace the pads when your dog soils them...simply spray them

down with vinegar. These are not a solution to the problem, but will help protect your home while you deal with the problem.

3. Scotch Guard. Scotch Guard is really nothing more than a paraffin based protector. It puts a waxy substance down which repels water and spills (and in our case, urine). Shake and spray this onto the fabric areas you want to protect, such as the base of the sofa and the carpet below doorways or areas your dog is apt to mark. It may make the area stiff feeling at first but it will normally 'blend' in with normal household temperatures and humidity. (note: This is also great for high traffic areas of your home or along the carpet in front of the couch)

With the use of vinegar and/or Scotch Guard, you should test a small area of the fabric/fiber that you will be using the product on and make sure it does not discolor, stain, or bleed. I have never had any problems, but it is always best to check beforehand.

4. Belly Bands. Sometimes these can be a (male) mill dog owners best friend. Belly bands can be easily made at home out of things you probably already have. Depending on the size of your dog you can use the elastic end of your husbands tube socks, the sleeve of sweatshirt, etc. Simply fit the material to your dog and then place a female sanitary napkin under the penis. Another easy way is to measure your dog, cut the fabric and sew on Velcro to hold it in place. There are also many sites on the internet to order these if making them yourself is just not up your alley. Just remember to take the belly band off every time you bring your dog out to potty. Again, this is not a solution, but a protective measure.

Common behaviors of puppy mill survivors:

Terror of humans hands: The only time most mill dogs are removed from their cages, it's a painful experience. The dog may be grabbed by the first reachable part of it's body: tail, leg, scruff, ears. This takes lots of patience and non-threatening touches to overcome.

You may have to lie on the floor face down with your eyes averted to get the dog to approach you at all. Let him come near you and sniff. It may take an hour, or days for this to happen. You can sometimes begin by holding the dog, petting him gently for a few seconds, speaking softly, then place him carefully down. Let him know you do not wish to restrain him. Lengthen the time for this ritual each day. Never raise your voice, clap your hands, or allow loud noises in the home during this adjustment period. You must strive to create a totally non-threatening environment. Behave as submissively as possible. Build trust slowly.

Aversion To Eye Contact: Many puppy mill survivors refuse to make eye contact with humans. This indicates fearful submission which decreases as the dog comes to realize he will not be harmed by you and begins to trust. Talking to your dog in a soft, calm

voice helps speed the process. A dog may not speak English, but the gentle tone of your voice and the fact that he is the focus of your concern will be understood.

The "I'm Afraid Of My Food" Routine: Anytime the cage door is opened on a mill dog, fear is the response, because an evil human is behind it. Of course, the cage door must be opened to insert a bowl of food, which may also be used to entice the dog within reach. It's not unusual to see your puppy mill survivor run in the opposite direction when you sit dinner on the floor. Turn your back and walk away until the dog feels "safe" enough to eat. Let him eat undisturbed.

In some puppy mills, feeding is automated by electronics so they literally get no daily contact with humans.

Flight Risk:

All puppy mill survivors are high flight risks. Let me repeat that....**ALL PUPPY MILL SURVIVORS ARE FLIGHT RISKS!** Never take your dog outside a securely fenced yard until you are thoroughly bonded. Then if you take your dog outside the fence, double-check to be sure harness is secure enough. I sometimes use a collar and harness, then run the lead from the collar through the harness for extra safety. If a mill dog gets loose outside a secured area, he will likely run until he drops; catching him will be quite a feat. They do not understand, especially in the first few months, that their environment and humans love them and they are safe with you. Their first response if given even half a chance is to bolt out of fear. They have NO recall at this point, so calling them would be useless. Prevention is by far the best policy.

Fear of Water:

Many puppy mill survivors are frightened of water hoses. Puppy millers generally don't bother removing the dogs before hosing down their cages. I have known adopters whose puppy mill survivors have become well-acclimated to homes, families and leashed walks only to have the dog bolt when they chanced by a neighbor watering his lawn.

Fear Biting:

Fear biting is more common in abuse cases than in puppy mill survivors, but we do see it occasionally. 90% of all dogs who bite do so out of fear. Puppy mill survivors, like feral dogs, usually cower in the presence of humans. Fear biting can frequently be overcome with proper training and commitment, but it generally requires a professional animal behaviorist, not to mention a strong commitment from the adoptive family. CBR does not knowingly take in biters of any kind.

Coprophagy: Stool-eating is common in puppy mill survivors. There is much contention as to the cause. However, most rescuers feel it is a learned behavior. Again, prevention is the best policy. Pick up the yard frequently. Some mill dogs stop this behavior over time. Nothing is more gross than owning a dog who eats poop! Dogs of all breeds, ages and sizes have the affliction but in puppy mill rescues, it is not uncommon at all to find

dogs afflicted with this horrible habit. As in any bad habit, the cure lies in understanding the unacceptable behavior, however, according to our veterinarians, it does not generally cause any health issues.

There are three primary reasons that a puppy mill survivor is afflicted. We'll start with the most common, and easiest to remedy.

1. It tastes good and they are hungry! Rescues that have come from a mill where dogs were not fed properly often resort to eating their own or other dog's feces as a source of food. These types of situations will usually remedy themselves when the dog realizes that he is always going to get fed. It is also easy to discourage this behavior by adding over-the-counter products to their food which are manufactured for this purpose. Ask your vet which products are available and you will normally see results in 2-4 weeks.

2. Learned behavior. This is usually the cause of puppy mill dogs that have the affliction. There are several reasons why a dog learned to behave like this, but the most common cause is being housed with dominant dogs who fight over food. These dominant dogs will often guard the food dish and prevent the more submissive dogs from eating even if the dominant dog is not hungry. Food aggression in caged dogs is usually fast and furious and often results in severe injury to the submissive dogs. Because the dominant dog is often eating much more than is needed, the stool is virtually undigested and contains many of the nutrients and 'flavors' of the original meal; therefore almost as tasty to the submissive dog as if he'd ate the real thing. Puppies that were raised with a dominant mother or dominant litter mates also pick up this habit very early--in this case, it is a little harder to treat, but it can usually be done.

This eating pattern is usually maintained throughout the dog's life, so the age of your dog will play a big role in how hard it is to correct the behavior. It's become habit...and as the saying goes, "Old habits are hard to break".

Dogs with the affliction will actually go hunting for a fresh stool when you take them outside. The key is to give your dog something better to hunt for. Pop some unbuttered/unsalted microwave popcorn and sprinkle it on the lawn before taking your dog out in the morning. You may find something that he likes better and is as readily available and affordable. The good thing about popcorn is what your dog doesn't eat, the birds will. We can almost guarantee that once your dog has learned to search out the popcorn, he'll pass those fresh turds right up, LOL! It may take weeks or months before your dog 'unlearns' to seek out stools but most dogs are receptive to this training. You may have to sprinkle the lawn with popcorn the rest of your dog's life...but the trouble is well worth just one 'popcorn kiss' as opposed to a lick on the face right after he eats a tasty turd.

3. As mentioned above, Coprophagia means 'eating poop'. Coprophagia is a form of a much more serious problem called Pica. Pica is the unnatural 'need' to eat foreign objects. Dogs suffering from Pica will eat not only stools, but rocks, dirt, sticks, etc. Remember the kid in school who ate paste and chalk and 'other unspeakables'? Pica is

a psychological disorder which is much more in depth and serious than anything we can discuss in this guide. Ok, we're dealing with BEAGLES...they eat things...lots of things. However, Pica is over and above the norm.

A good rescuer will observe dogs prior to placement and will recognize the seriousness of this problem. A dog suffering from Pica should never be placed in an inexperienced home or any home that is not aware of the problem and the dangers. Dogs suffering from Pica will often end up having surgery--often several times--for objects they have eaten that can not be digested. If you are the owner of a dog which you believe suffers from Pica, I suggest you consult your vet; these dogs often require medication for their disorder and only your vet can guide you on the best way to proceed.

Before we close this section on Pica, we want to say that true Pica is rare. Most dogs will chew on sticks or rocks--or sofas and table legs. However a dog suffering from Pica will not just chew on these items...they will eat these items any chance they get. Just because your dog is eating his own stool...and also the bar stool at the kitchen counter...does not mean that he is suffering from Pica. If in doubt, consult your vet.

The "special" ones:

Occasionally, we see the survivor who has survived the mill, but at such a great cost that they can never be "brought around". These are the dogs that have endured so much suffering that they remind us of children who are abused, and survive by separating their mind from the body. These damaged dogs will never fully trust anyone. So where does that leave these poor souls? Most are still capable of living out a wonderful life. They need a scheduled environment but most importantly, a home where they are accepted for who and what they are. They may never jump up on a couch and cuddle with you, or bring you a ball to play catch, but you will see the joy that they take in living each day knowing that they will have clean bedding, fresh food and water, and unconditional love. To them, those small comforts alone are pure bliss.

These "broken ones" are the ones that normally never leave their foster homes. Ironically, these types of dogs normally do very well in a group-dog setting. They seem to have shunned the world, and most certainly mankind, and have created their own little world without humans. Whenever we suspect that a mill rescue may be "too far gone" for a fast paced family, we try to place them in experienced homes; quiet homes; or homes with other dogs. These are by far the hardest ones for our hearts to accept, but they are also a constant reminder of why we do what we do.

The educators:

Finding forever homes for mill rescues is not all we do; we are constantly reminded of the horrors of puppy mills and the commercialization/farming of dogs when we see the neglect and abuse these dogs have suffered. We work not only to adopt dogs, but to educate their new owners about the truth behind that puppy in the pet store window. We hope that you will keep a journal or blog on the reform of your puppy mill dog, and we

hope that you will join us in our campaign to educate the public--through the eyes of the survivors--by always taking the opportunity to further educate others. Together we have made a difference in the life of just one dog, but together we can also make a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of dogs still caged in puppy mills. It is only when the public realizes the connection between pet stores and puppy mills that we will end the demand; end the supply; and end the abuse!