

# The 3-3-3 Rule Roadmap

Navigating Your Rescue Dog's First 90 Days



**Your rescue dog isn't broken.**

They're scared. And that's normal.

This guide walks you through the exact psychological milestones your dog will hit at:

**3 days • 3 weeks • 3 months**

And what you need to do at each stage to help them decompress, bond with you,  
and feel truly safe at home.

Created by [MyPetWellnessApp.info](https://www.mypetwellnessapp.info)  
For rescue dog adopters who want to get it right

## What You'll Learn

- The Psychology Behind the 3-3-3 Rule
- Phase 1: Days 1–3 (The Honeymoon/Shutdown Phase)
- Phase 2: Weeks 2–3 (The Decompression Phase)
- Phase 3: Months 2–3 (The Integration Phase)
- Daily Routines & Checklists
- Behavioral Red Flags & Troubleshooting
- Bonus: Quick Reference Card



# The Psychology Behind the 3-3-3 Rule

## What is the 3-3-3 Rule?

The 3-3-3 Rule describes the emotional timeline of a rescue dog's adjustment to their new home. It's not a hard deadline—it's a roadmap. Understanding these phases keeps you from panicking when your dog isn't perfect on day two, and it helps you celebrate real progress at the right times.

## Why This Matters (And Why Your Dog Isn't "Broken")

Your rescue dog has been through **trauma**. Whether they came from a shelter, a neglectful home, or the street, their nervous system is overloaded. Rescue dogs don't "know" they're safe yet. Their brain is running a constant threat assessment. This guide helps you lower that threat level systematically.

### PHASE 1: Days 1–3



## The Honeymoon Phase (aka The Shutdown)

### What's Happening Emotionally:

Your rescue dog is in acute stress mode. Many dogs appear eerily calm during these first days—they're not happy, they're **shut down**. This is called learned helplessness. Your dog has learned that they can't control their environment, so they're temporarily giving up on trying.

### What You'll See:

- Won't eat much (completely normal—anxiety kills appetite)

- Follows you from room to room without exploring
- Doesn't play or show personality
- May hide, shake, or seem "perfect" (eerily quiet)
- Possible bathroom accidents indoors even if housetrained
- No tail wagging, minimal eye contact, low energy

## Your Job at Phase 1:

### 1. Create Predictability

Set a routine immediately. Same feeding times, same potty schedule, same bedtime. Your dog's brain needs to learn, 'This is safe. It's predictable.'

### 2. Don't Force Bonding

Resist the urge to smother your dog with attention. Let them approach you. Every forced interaction = more threat.

### 3. Protect Their Decompression Space

Set up a safe room or crate. This is NOT punishment—it's a refuge. Your dog should be able to retreat without being followed.

### 4. Minimize Stimulation

Skip big introductions, dog parks, and guests for at least 2 weeks. Every new stimulus is a stressor.

## Sample Phase 1 Daily Routine:

Time	Activity
7:00 AM	Wake up, immediate outdoor potty (15 min max)
7:15 AM	Breakfast in crate or quiet area (leave for 20 min, remove uneaten food)
7:45 AM	Outdoor play/walk (20 min, calm)
8:15 AM	Retreat to safe space (crate or quiet room)
12:00 PM	Midday potty break (10 min)
12:15 PM	Light lunch (optional—don't force it)
6:00 PM	Dinner in quiet space
6:30 PM	Final outdoor potty
7:00 PM–Bedtime	Quiet time near you, but no forced interaction

## PHASE 2: Weeks 2–3



### The Decompression Phase (The Real Dog Emerges)

#### What's Happening Emotionally:

Your dog is coming out of shock. The reptilian "freeze" response is fading. Now their real personality, fears, and quirks start to show up. **This is when problems emerge.** Don't panic—this is actually progress. Your dog is becoming confident enough to show you who they are.

#### What You'll See:

- More energy and playfulness
- Starting to eat normally
- Personality quirks (jumping, barking, pulling)
- Possible fear-based behaviors (reactivity to sounds, strangers, other dogs)
- Test behaviors (checking boundaries, ignoring commands)
- Potty training regression (sometimes)
- Selective affection (bonding with one person but not others)

### Your Job at Phase 2:

#### 1. Don't Punish the Emerging Personality

Your dog jumping on the couch isn't dominance—they're testing boundaries. Set rules calmly and consistently.

#### 2. Start Gentle Training

Now that they're present, begin working on basic obedience. Short sessions (5–10 min), high-value rewards, end on a win.

### 3. Begin Strategic Introductions

If you haven't already, start controlled introductions to other pets, people, and environments. One new thing at a time.

### 4. Watch for Fear Triggers

Note what makes your dog nervous. Loud noises? Certain people? Traffic? Document these. This info helps your vet rule out medical issues and informs your training plan.

## Sample Phase 2 Daily Routine:

Time	Activity
7:00 AM	Wake up, immediate potty
7:15 AM	Breakfast + 5-min training (sit, down, stay)
7:30 AM	Walk + controlled socialization (quiet neighborhood)
8:30 AM	Safe space / crate time (2-3 hours)
12:00 PM	Midday potty + playtime
1:00 PM	Nap time / quiet rest
5:00 PM	Dinner + brief training session
5:30 PM	Walk (longer now, 20-30 min)
6:30 PM	Low-key play or puzzle toy
8:00 PM	Final potty
8:30 PM–Bedtime	Settle near you (bonding time, no forced interaction)

## PHASE 3: Months 2–3



### The Integration Phase (New Normal)

#### What's Happening Emotionally:

Your rescue dog's amygdala (fear center) is finally quieting down. They've learned that you're safe, the home is predictable, and they can relax. This is when you see the **true dog**. By month 3, most behavioral patterns are solidifying—the good and the challenging.

#### What You'll See:

- Consistent personality (quirks and all)
- Reliable bonding with you and your family
- Settling into a predictable routine
- Learning commands and responding reliably (with consistency)
- Playing with toys, other dogs (if applicable)
- Still occasional setbacks with reactive behaviors (normal)
- Eyes and ears perking up, tail wagging regularly

### Your Job at Phase 3:

#### 1. Solidify Training & Structure

By now, your dog knows basic commands. Keep training consistent. This is where you address specific behavioral challenges (reactivity, pulling, jumping).

#### 2. Expand Their World Safely

Introduce new places, people, and experiences. Your dog has the foundation now to handle novelty without regressing.

### 3. Build a Sustainable Routine

The Phase 1 routine was temporary. By now, shift to a rhythm that works long-term for your household.

### 4. Address Lingering Issues

If serious behavioral problems persist (aggression, extreme anxiety), consult a certified trainer or behaviorist. Most issues are solvable with the right help.

## Sample Phase 3 Sustainable Routine:

Time	Activity
Morning	Potty + breakfast + 10-15 min walk
Mid-Morning	Training session OR puzzle/enrichment toy
Midday	Lunch (optional) + potty break
Afternoon	Rest / safe space time
Late Afternoon	Walk + socialization (park, other dogs, people)
Evening	Dinner + training or play
Night	Final potty + wind-down (quiet time with family)
Bedtime	Sleep or crate time

# Red Flags & Troubleshooting



Help is available.  
 ♥  
 Problems are solvable.  
 ♥  
 Progress is possible.  
 ♥  
 You don't have to do it alone.  
 ♥  
 The right support changes lives.

## Is This Normal or a Problem?

Behavior	Normal Decompression?	What To Do
Not eating for 1-3 days	YES (Phase 1-2)	Offer food, don't force. Consult vet if persists >5 days
Potty accidents indoors	YES (all phases)	Restart house training basics. Vet check for UTI/health issues
Fearfulness of new people	YES	Slow introductions. Never force interaction
Pulling on leash	YES (Phase 2-3)	Start loose-leash training. Be patient
Jumping/Mouthing	YES (Phase 2)	Set boundaries. Redirect to toys. Train alternative behavior
Reactivity to sounds/triggers	YES	Identify triggers. Use desensitization. Consider trainer
Aggression toward people	NO—See vet & trainer	Rule out pain. Get professional help ASAP
Extreme lethargy (>2 weeks)	NO—See vet	Could indicate depression, illness, or serious trauma
Refusal to bond (>3 months)	MAYBE—Get trainer help	Some dogs take longer. Rule out past abuse

## Critical: When to Call Your Vet

- Loss of appetite for >5 days
- Excessive lethargy or depression
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or other GI issues
- Coughing, sneezing, or respiratory issues

- Lameness or limping
- Excessive drinking/urination (UTI)
- Skin issues or excessive scratching

### Critical: When to Call a Trainer

- Aggression toward people or other animals
- Severe anxiety or panic (can't be left alone, destructive behavior)
- Resource guarding (growling at food/toys)
- Extreme reactivity that isn't improving with time
- Any behavior that feels unsafe or unmanageable

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The first 90 days  
aren't about perfection—  
they're about **patience**.



Your rescue dog is  
learning they're **safe**.



Getting professional support  
isn't failure; it's **wisdom**.



Trust the timeline.  
Trust **yourself**.



Dr. Sarah Chen

CERTIFIED RESCUE BEHAVIORIST

# Quick Reference Checklists

## Phase 1: Days 1–3 Checklist

- Set up a safe room or crate (not as punishment—as refuge)
- Establish feeding schedule (same times daily)
- Establish potty schedule (outside immediately after eating/waking/bedtime)
- Minimize visitors and introductions
- Keep environment calm (quiet music, soft lighting)
- Resist over-petting or forced interaction
- Have high-value treats ready (for positive associations)
- Schedule vet check-up within first week

## Phase 2: Weeks 2–3 Checklist

- Begin 5–10 min training sessions (sit, down, stay)
- Start controlled leash walks in quiet neighborhoods
- Document fear triggers and reactions
- Begin slow introductions to people/environments (one new thing per day max)
- Introduce puzzle toys and enrichment items
- Monitor for behavioral changes and personality emergence
- Ensure regular potty breaks (still may have accidents)

## Phase 3: Months 2–3 Checklist

- Strengthen training foundation (increase session length to 15–20 min)
- Address specific behavioral challenges with trainer if needed
- Safely expand socialization and new environments
- Establish long-term routine (sustainable for your household)
- Celebrate bonding milestones (eye contact, greeting you at door, play-bowing)
- Begin thinking about long-term enrichment (classes, sports, volunteer work)

# The Long Game

The 3-3-3 Rule isn't about fixing your dog by day 90. It's about understanding that **rescue dogs are healing**, and healing isn't linear. Some dogs settle in 3 months. Some take 6. Some take a year. And that's *completely normal*.

Your job is to create safety and predictability. To stay patient when the unexpected behavior shows up. To celebrate small wins. To get professional help when you need it. And to trust that, most of the time, **time + consistency + love = a transformed dog**.

You didn't just adopt a dog. You saved a life. Your rescue dog's journey from shelter to safety is its own kind of miracle. This guide is just the first chapter.

Questions? Resources:

[PetProtectandConnect.com](https://www.petprotectandconnect.com) — Rescue & adoption resources

[MyPetWellness.Etsy.com](https://www.mypetwellness.com) — Pet wellness guides & more

[MyPetWellnessApp.info](https://www.mypetwellnessapp.info) — Track your dog's behavior & milestones

For Certified Adoption info contact: [PetProtectandConnect.com](https://www.petprotectandconnect.com)

## A Collaboration



This guide is created in partnership with **Pet Protect Connect Rescue** and **MyPetWellnessApp**. Together, we're dedicated to supporting rescue dogs and their families every step of the journey.