



Dog-to-Dog Introductions

When you already have a dog and you're bringing a new dog home, you want to make sure the introduction goes well and avoid setting up future conflict. Making some preparations before you get home and setting your dogs up for positive interactions during their first few weeks together will go a long way toward a harmonious long-term relationship.

If you are adopting a new dog from the shelter, we recommend bringing your dog with you to the shelter and introducing the dogs to see how they get along, before you finalize the adoption.

Before You Bring the New Dog Home

- ◆ Pick up all toys, chews, bones, food dishes, and your resident dog's favorite things. These things could cause squabbles between the dogs at first; you can bring them out again later.
- ◆ Make sure you're prepared with food dishes, water bowls, beds, and so on for both dogs. Don't assume they'll share.

Planning the Introduction Process

There are a number of factors to keep in mind that can increase the likelihood of a positive outcome when introducing a new dog into your home. A peaceful introduction will set the tone, increasing the chances of lifelong peace in your household.

Exercise the dogs before introducing them to one another. A dog that is exercised first is more likely to interact well than one that is bursting with energy. Remove toys and other high value chew objects from the introduction area.

Be particularly careful when introducing a puppy to an adult dog. We want to avoid physical injury or psychological trauma to the puppy. Many adult dogs understand the importance of being gentle with puppies, but some do not. Play that is too rough, or aggressive can have a significant negative impact on a puppy's future social behavior. Also, it is important to be careful when introducing a new dog to senior dogs in your household, particularly if the new dog is an adolescent or puppy. Protect your senior dog from being physically harmed (bumped, bruised, body slammed or knocked over). Put the younger dog on a leash or separate the dogs with a baby gate. Your senior dog should not have to defend themselves from the overly exuberant behavior of a younger dog. Size should also be a consideration. Jean Donaldson, director of the San Francisco SPCA's Academy for Dog Trainers, recommends no more than a 25-pound difference in size between dogs in a household or playgroup. More than that, she warns, there are more risks to the smaller dog's safety, and you also risk *predatory drift*, where a larger dog suddenly perceives a small running dog as a prey object (like a rabbit or squirrel).

It is important to consider timing, location, number of skilled handlers available, and the personalities and histories of all the dogs involved (to the greatest extent possible).

Timing – Ideally, it's best to add a new dog to your home when things are generally calm and reasonably stress free. Allow ample time for the introduction process, and a low-key adjustment period with supervision. In general, holidays are not an ideal time for introductions, unless it is quiet and you are home most of the time.

Location – It's best to introduce dogs in neutral territory. Ideally, you want to be outdoors, in a large, open, safely fenced space. The more trapped a dog feels, the more stressed a dog can become, which may result in aggressive behavior. If you do introductions in one of the dog's territory, you risk displays of territorial aggression. Your best options are a fenced yard other than your own, an off-leash dog park when nobody else is there, a tennis court (as long as you know they do not prohibit dogs from being there), or a large, open, uncluttered indoor area such as someone's basement.

Handlers – You should have one handler per dog, plus an additional person. It is preferable to have at least one skilled handler (someone who is confident and calm handling the dog), and all other handler(s) to be good at following instructions. Someone who panics and intervenes unnecessarily can undermine things and add stress to dogs that are still getting to know one another.

Personalities and Histories – You should have a pretty good sense of your own dogs' canine social skills, even if you may not know much about the newcomer. How does your own dog behave at the dog park or during play at a neighbor's/friend's house? How do they play with dogs they already live with? How do they respond to dog's visiting your home? What about when your dog meets other dogs while out on a walk? If you have reason to believe that your dog(s) are anything less than appropriate and gregarious with other dogs. If your dog has displayed concerning behaviors toward other dogs, or if you just aren't confident about refereeing the introductions yourself, it might be a good idea to hire/ask a qualified behavior professional to oversee the introduction. This person can help you to read and understand the dogs' body language, and to ensure the best possible success. It's important to give great consideration to good personality matches when you select your new dog. If you have a dog that is assertive with other dogs, it would be best to choose a new dog that is happy to maintain a low profile with your current dog(s). In my 25 years of working with dogs, I have found that the majority of conflicts/issues between dogs living in the same household are two females. This is not always the case, but it is more prevalent than any other combination.

The Introduction Process – This introductory process should be used for new dogs coming into a household, as well as when two dogs meet one another on the streets. The main difference will be whether or not you have an enclosed space to work with, which would be necessary when introducing dogs that may be living together. If you have multiple dogs meeting one another, I prefer to introduce a new dog to the easier dogs first, one at a time. If things go well with the one-on-one introduction, add one dog at a time (starting with the easiest/most amenable dog, and working up from there).

With dogs on leashes on opposite sides of an enclosed area (or if out walking, dogs should be 25-30 feet away from one another to start, if possible). It's very important to do your best to keep the leash loose. Observe the behavior of each dog when at a distance from one another. They should appear interested in each other, alert, but not overly excited. Ideally, tails are wagging at half-mast; soft, loose body movements; play bows; ears back; squinty eyes; no direct eye contact. These are expressions of non-aggressive social behavior. Warning signs include stiffness in the body or legs, standing tall, growling, teeth barring, hard, direct or prolonged eye contact, deep growls, lunging on the leash, and aggressive barking.

Start by having the dogs 15-20 feet apart, and have them walking in the same direction across from one another. If they are behaving appropriately, you can move them closer, to about 10-12 feet from one another, still walking in the same direction. Then, you can have one dog follow the other, keeping them about 10-12 feet apart. Switch direction, and have the other dog be the follower. This allows them to safely sniff the other dog's scent, getting to know him prior to them ever being physically close

to one another. If everything still looks okay, have them about 10-12 feet apart, and then let them approach each other. Keep the leashes loose. A tight leash can cause frustration, and limits the dog's ability to greet in the natural "arc" fashion (starting at the nose and working toward the rear). You can follow Norwegian dog trainer Turid Rugaas' suggestions to have dogs approach each other in a curving line rather than directly, allowing them to sniff the ground and do other displacement and appeasement behaviors such as looking away, if they choose to do so (book: *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals*, or her DVD "Calming Signals"). For some dogs, they may feel trapped or frustrated because of the leash and act aggressively because they can't move away or get to the other dog. It is also extremely important not to yank/pop/jerk on the leash. This too can frustrate the dog, escalating stress and anxiety levels. If the introduction doesn't go smoothly, contact an animal behavior specialist immediately.

Initially, leave the leashes on, dragging freely on the ground, so you can grab them and separate the dogs easily if needed. As soon as you can tell they are getting along, remove the leashes and let them play unencumbered. Sometimes play can be going well, but if they play for too long things could get out of hand, so it's important to keep play sessions short with breaks in between (a few minutes of play, then a minute or so of rest, and back to play again). This will reduce the possibility of the dogs getting overstimulated, which can lead to spats.

Remember, it is normal and acceptable for dogs to growl and bite each other in play. As long as both dogs are enjoying themselves, it is a good thing. When the dogs are interacting well, let them know with praise and happy talk. Keep the whole introduction light and positive. At the sign of any concerning behavior/body language, divert the dog's attention with staccato/or kissing sounds or bits of tasty treats (it is important the dogs are kept at least 8 feet from one another when treats are being used, as one or both dogs may have food guarding tendencies). Then when they've calmed down, resume play. It is important for you to stay calm and relaxed before, during and after introductions and play. It's important to reinforce both/all dogs (i.e., praise, treats, massaging and calm happy talk) for appropriate behavior in each other's presence.

If you see NO interaction between two dogs you are introducing, this could be a concern. What appears to be calm acceptance of each other may actually be avoidance. The problem is, sooner or later the dogs will interact if they're both living in your home, and the discomfort may lead to aggression. It is important to see some type of interaction between dogs prior to making a decision about adoption.

If dogs are going to be living together, how the introduction is handled could affect the future of the dogs' relationship with one another. If your dog is meeting another dog on the street, an appropriate meet and greet will affect not only that meeting, but possibly future meetings as well.

Remember, your dog will never get a second chance to make a first impression!

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