



Introducing Your New Dog to Your Other Dogs

From "the leader of the pack" to "the top dog," plenty of simplistic metaphors come from the canine world. But relationships between canines can be pretty complex, beginning with the very first meeting. If you have resident dogs in your home, bringing them to the shelter to meet the prospective new family member is a great idea. There is much that can be learned about how the dogs might or might not be compatible in your home based on a meeting in this neutral location.

Meet & Greets in a Neutral Location

If you choose an area unfamiliar to each, your resident dog is less likely to view the newcomer as a territorial intruder or be possessive over what it feels is theirs. Consider a neighbor's yard or a park, but not one in which you frequently walk your resident dog; she may view that area as her territory. If you are adopting your dog from an animal shelter, you should bring your resident dog to the shelter and introduce the two there. Each dog should be on-leash and handled by a separate person. Additionally, when they first meet, make sure that all potentially valuable items are picked up and not accessible. This includes things like toys, bones, balls, etc. Only introduce objects after good compatibility has been established.

Introduce One Dog at a Time

The preferred method for introducing new dogs to each other is to first go on a walk with both dogs on leash. Don't put pressure on them to greet each other; just let them go for a short walk while walking parallel. You will gain a lot of information this way prior to letting them meet in an off-leash setting. If you have more than one resident dog in your household, it is always best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Introduce the first resident dog, assess the compatibility then put that dog away. Repeat with each resident dog until you have introduced them all. Only put the whole group together if all of the resident dogs have first been compatible with the new dog individually. Group dynamics will change and relationships among the dogs will change in the group vs. one-on-one.

Use Positive Reinforcement

From the first meeting, help both dogs experience "good things" when they're in each other's presence. Let them sniff each other briefly, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do, talk to them in a happy, friendly tone of voice; never use a threatening tone. Don't allow them to investigate and sniff each other for too long, however, as this may escalate to an aggressive response. After a short time, get the attention of both dogs and give each a treat in return for obeying a simple command, such as "sit" or "stay." Make sure to treat each at a safe distance from the other. Take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals.

Watch Body Posturing

One body posture that indicates things are going well is a "play-bow"—one dog will crouch with her front legs on the ground and her hind end in the air. This is an invitation to play, and a posture that usually elicits friendly behavior from the other dog. Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hair standing up on one dog's back, teeth-baring, deep growls, a stiff-legged gait, or a prolonged stare. If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly getting each dog interested in something else. For example, both handlers can call their dogs, have them sit or lie down, and reward each with a treat. The dogs' interest in the treats should prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Then try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time period and/or at a greater distance from each other.



Other behaviors that could indicate potential future problems are active avoidance behaviors. This might look like one dog is more interested in sniffing the ground or urinating on things, but always moving away and actively ignoring the other dog. Ignoring is not a sign of compatibility; this could actually indicate that in a home setting where the interactions will be constant, that trouble could ensue. Additionally, if one of the dogs remains “glued” to one of the handlers, it could indicate a significant lack of confidence around the other dog or even possessiveness. These are behaviors that in the home will usually worsen.

Healthy play between dogs may include: role reversals (the chaser becomes the chase), both dogs take brief “breaks” in the play, and both offer frequent play bows. Unhealthy play indicators include: rough physical play that is one-directional (one dog is constantly pinned or cornered), play starts to become primarily vertical (dogs up on hind legs), or role reversals are absent.

Helping Dogs Get Along at Home

When the dogs seem to be tolerating each other's presence without fearful or aggressive responses, and the investigative greeting behaviors have tapered off, you can take them home. It's important to support both dogs in the home regardless of their roles. The roles in a group of dogs are not fixed but fluid and change based on the circumstances. To aid in a smooth transition, ensure plenty of resources for all (have the same kind of bones or number of toys for each dog). Do not allow any dog to control access to you or the couch or bed, etc. If a dog starts to become possessive over these things toward another dog, whether that dog is a new dog or resident, seek professional help as soon as possible. Take your new dog on separate walks by himself so he knows he is included in the pack and so you can work on his leash behavior without distraction.

Introducing Puppies to Adult Dogs

Puppies usually pester adult dogs unmercifully. Before the age of four months, puppies may not recognize subtle body postures from adult dogs signaling that they have had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments may set limits with puppies with a warning growl or snarl. These behaviors are normal and should be allowed.

Adult dogs who are not well-socialized may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behaviors, such as biting, which could harm the puppy. For this reason, a puppy should not be left alone with an adult dog until you are confident the puppy is not in any danger. Be sure to give the adult dog some quiet time away from the puppy and some extra individual attention as well. Additionally, quiet crate time for a puppy is beneficial too.

Expert Help to Resolve Dog Conflicts

If the introductions don't go smoothly, contact a professional animal behaviorist or dog trainer immediately. Dogs can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work, and could make things worse. Call Denver Animal Shelter at 720-913-1311 for assistance with an adopted shelter dog. They can offer additional tips for working on the resident dog's tolerance for this change. Fortunately, most conflicts between dogs in the same family can be resolved with professional guidance.