

## Adding A New Dog to Home with Existing Dog

Bringing a new dog home is an exciting time for everyone in the family! However it can also be a stressful time for both the new dog and any existing dogs in the home! Our “Decompression Period” handout discusses how to help your new dog through this stressful time, whereas this handout will discuss how to integrate your new dog with your existing dogs. Some dogs manage fine when a new dog is introduced to the household, but others can struggle. Failure to take steps to set up for success between the two dogs can result in behavioral problems, aggression or other forms of conflict, whereas thinking ahead and planning a slow introduction will result in a harmonious household!

### Slow is Key

The best way to set your dogs up to fail is by rushing this process, turning them loose together too soon. Unless you are a trained professional it is extremely hard to predict what will happen when two dogs are homed together suddenly, and that is with expert knowledge of dog behavior and body language! Most owners realistically are not experts at dog body language and having a nice slow introduction helps prevent any costly mistakes.

This slow process is important for the dogs too, not all are resilient enough to handle the transition smoothly and having a slow introduction allows for any potential red flags between the dogs to be identified and dealt with before they are free together. Remember as well from the decompression handout that your newly adopted dog will take an average of 1-2 weeks if not longer to show all aspects of their personality and temperament, a slow introduction means you will really KNOW the dogs that you are ultimately introducing!

It is an all too common story that owners speed through this process and the dogs seem “fine” until a few weeks in when suddenly fights start breaking out and the relationship between the dogs falls apart

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quickly. This is just an example of a dog who was likely shut down and not showing signs of their discomfort at their new housemate during their decompression period, a slow introduction would have allowed the owners to see that stress and anxiety

before it had a chance to turn into dog fighting. A slow introduction also gives owners time to help their new dog bond with them and learn the lay of the land in their new home before adding the extra challenge of navigating a new dog relationship. This is good for EVERYONE!

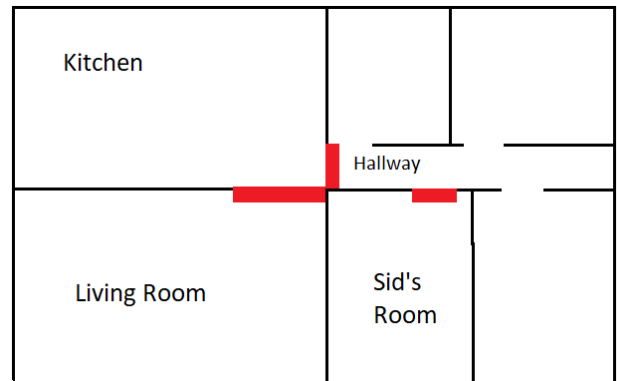
Set up your new dog’s decompression room, and plan to keep your new pup 100% separated from any other dogs in the house for at least the first week they are in your home. Dog’s who have experienced

any kind of trauma or huge life change prior to adoption (such as traveling to Maine from down South, being at the shelter for an extended period of time, being a stray with an unknown history) or who have any known behavioral issues involving fear, anxiety or aggression of any kind should be kept separated for 2-3 weeks minimum, longer if needed. Don't worry, your new dogs can and should interact during this period but it should be done so with structure so that the dogs have a good experience!

### *Plan Ahead!*

Planning ahead for your new dog to arrive will make the entire process much smoother for all humans and dogs involved! Prior to bringing home your new dog set up the decompression room and devise and implement a plan to keep the dogs separate. This is often easier than you would think! You can either divide your house into two areas, one for each dog, or rotate the dogs in the main living space – when the existing dog is out in the house the new dog is in his room, when the new dog is out the existing dog is in the owners bedroom eating a Kong! Consider how your house is set up and which option might work best. Here is an example:

- I had two dogs Maddie, and Shy when we took in Sid the foster dog who had to be kept completely separated from the girls in our VERY small house.
- We installed sturdy baby gates (in red) across Sid's bedroom door, the hallway outside of Sid's room (splitting our house in half) and the living room.
- Sid could be:
  - In his room with the gate closed, leaving the girls free in the entire house
  - On his "half" of the house, leaving the girls free in the other half of the house
  - Free in most of the house, with the girls in the living room behind the gate



As you can see from the diagram, this process sounds much harder than it is! All it takes is a couple of sensibly placed baby gates. If you are struggling to think of how you might create separated zones for your dogs in your home, look at this Facebook post for a ton of really great creative examples of using management (gates etc.) within the home: <https://www.facebook.com/speakingdogwithshana/posts/1815493805240844>

*In our house we installed gates across the living room door, the hallway (dividing the house) and Sid's room. Allowing us to easily move all the dogs around to give them plenty of attention and*

If your existing dog gets stressed when separated from you or needs to follow you from room to room, during this preparation period take some time to teach him to settle on a mat or bed on his own separate from you so that when you have to leave him to go spend time with your new dog he is not distressed.

## Before You Start: Dog Speak

Before you go any further it is critical you first learn how to read your dog and how to tell how both dogs are feeling about each other while you are introducing them. A slow introduction process can be rendered useless if no one understands dog body language and mistakes signs of stress for happiness or invitations to play. Are dogs ALWAYS talking with their bodies and by learning to read them we find that they are predictable animals, when you can read a dog you know how they will react before they do!

### Having a Conversation

Dogs may not be able to speak English, but they are masters at communicating within their species. Dogs use a wide variety of body language, postures and use of space to talk to each other and relationships are built from there. The techniques for dog introductions, and integration rely on allowing the dogs to be in proximity of each other, while being far enough away as to prevent physical contact, so the dogs can “have a conversation” and make their intentions known.

### Now You’re Talking My Language!

So, how do we know what our dogs are thinking during these greetings? We watch their body language of course and read what they are telling us. When observing the dogs, signs that they want to engage with each other are called “distance decreasing signals,” as in “please decrease the distance between us and come closer!!” They can include:

- Loose, wiggly bodies – dogs should wiggle and flex while they move
- “Soft” almond shaped eyes, the whites not visible
- Mouths that are open and relaxed
- Play bows
- Tail that is wagging loosely in a circle, and in a neutral position (not high over the back or tucked).
- The dog may pull on the leash or lean towards the other dog, but this MUST be accompanied by the overall soft and happy body language. Leaning without these cues can be a threat.
- The dog should be willing to eat treats and easily able to focus on their owner when asked, demonstrating they are calm and not fixated on the other dog.

Signs of disinterest, avoidance or stress are called “distance increasing signals,” as in “please go away!” They can include mild signs such as:

- Looking away from, leaning away from or facing away from the other dog.,
- Sniffing the ground excessively (not looking up at the dog)
- Staring fixedly (not breaking the stare)
- Suddenly stopping to scratch or groom
- Yawning, licking lips repeatedly

- A closed mouth with a tense face
- Shaking off as if wet
- Tail wagging FAST and low
- Rolling on back, exposing belly – especially if tail tucked

Or more severe distance cues such as:

- Slow, stiff movements (almost like a cat stalking) with or without hackles up
- Standing tall and “puffed up” directly facing other dog
- Holding head low while staring
- Direct, prolonged eye contact
- Tail wagging HIGH (fast or slow wag)
- Growling, snarling, air snapping at
- Freezing, standing completely still and holding break



*These dogs are being slowly integrated and are demonstrating some "avoidance" a stress response where they choose to purposely orient away from each other*

Every time you are working with both dogs, watch their bodies for signs that they truly want to move closer and be friendly or if they want to charge forward to make the other dog back up, or if they would to move away. Don't be alarmed if you initially see distance cues as this does not mean the dogs can't integrate – take note of what was happening during that time, keep your training time shorter and don't move closer if they aren't ready. If worrisome behaviors increase in intensity or frequency or don't go away in the first few days call a professional trainer to come help you.

## The Gated Community: Building a Relationship

Even though we have gates in place, we want to have our dogs interact and get to know each other! In fact, this period of separation allows us to build the BEST relationship possible for our dogs: we are controlling 100% of their interactions which means we can make sure that 100% of their early interactions are POSITIVE, happy experiences for both dogs, building a positive emotional association between them. There is no better way to jump start a relationship.

If your dog's spend a few days having super positive experiences around each other and zero negative ones and we watch their interactions to make sure they are READY to greet each other and live freely together before we take the gates down you are close to guaranteed success!

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During the time they are separated, every day you will let them spend time "together" (with the gate in between) playing games or doing exercises outlined below! For the first few days, do nothing but short (5 minutes or less) sessions as many times a day as you can playing the games for a few minutes with lots of rewards.

#### A note on FOOD!

The more rewards we give to our dog's during this work the happier they will be, the stronger the positive association will be and the more successful the process will go! To prevent your pups from putting on too many extra pounds with the extra feeding I recommend either using your dogs daily meals and dole them out one piece at a time, mixed with a few treats to keep it interesting! If your dog struggles with missing the meal time routine reserve a very small amount (10-15%) for meal feeding and reserve the rest for training treats. If the dogs are unwilling to eat plain kibble as a treat, reduce their daily rations significantly to accommodate the increased volume of treats that will be in their diet during this transition process.

#### How is it done?

- Play "gate games" for roughly 5 minutes across the gate with both dogs at least 2-3 times a day, or as many times as you can.
- During these games you will watch both dogs for signs that they are comfortable (or not) with this and if they want to engage with the other politely.
- If the dogs are calm, relaxed and engaged for these sessions, increase the amount of time your new dog is out and progress through the steps outlined below until the dogs can passively hang out on either side of the gate for an hour or more without much need for intervention.
- If the dogs are **not** calm and relaxed, continue to show distance cues or you experience other issues, either enlist a professional to help you or try an EXTRA slow introduction, following the same plan but even slower, doing only 2-3 minutes of exposure at a time, more time to adjust etc.

- This is much easier to do with two people, with both dogs on leash but can be done with one. If you are alone make sure your gate is STURDY and can withstand a dog jumping at it (units that mount into cups you drill into the wall are great!), have a leash and collar on both dogs so you can easily take one out of view if needed, stand at the gate while you are working with your dogs and turn your body to face the dog you are working with.

### How long will it take?

This will depend entirely on the dogs, if there are no issues many dogs will be able to fully integrate within a period of 1-2 weeks, basically as soon as they are out of their decompression period. For other dogs it could take significantly longer. In the past when I had to integrate a high dog aggressive dog into my existing group of two dogs it took us 8-10 months of this type of work to successfully cohabitate all three dogs. Pay attention to your dog's body language, they will tell you if they are ready or not!

### Gate Games

#### One for YOU, one for YOU!

So easy! Ask dogs to sit on either side of the gate and hand feed a treat one at a time to each dog. One for you, one for you!

This builds a positive association between the dogs (ooo! I get so many treats when I see this dog!) and helps the dogs check each other out without either dog being too pushy or intense because they are both focusing on you and the treats instead of JUST on each other! As an added bonus this also reduces the chances of food guarding between the two dogs, teaching the pups to calmly wait and they will get their treat too. Move the dogs closer together or further apart as needed.

Here is a Facebook post with a video showing us doing this process when Sid the foster dog first arrived:

<https://www.facebook.com/ProblemSolvedTraining/videos/351104088856401/?v=351104088856401> For those who don't have Facebook, here is a YouTube link to the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8Ogg6yawIM>

### *Find It!*

Maybe even easier than *one for you*, with “find it” simply toss a treat (a large visible one) to the floor saying “find it”, when your dog finishes the treat, toss another – repeating “find it”, toss the treats wherever you want and use this game to easily move your dogs further apart if you need to. Say Rover is a little too close for comfort, all you do is happily say “find it” and toss a treat, Rover will spin around and walk away happily, no muss, no fuss.

In addition to being able to move your dogs further apart if needed “find it” games also help the dogs to get used to each other in a low-pressure situation. Rather than asking them to sit close together and stay in each other’s space they get to move around, focus on chasing down treats instead of worrying about each other. This passive space sharing exercise helps diffuse any tension and pair the presence of the new dog with good things!

### *Parallel Training*

If you have a person to work with each dog in the house, practice parallel training – asking the dogs to do basic behaviors such as sit/down/sit across the gate from each other too, just another way to encourage the dogs to be close together without being too pushy and forward.

### *Who’s Your Neighbor?*

For some dogs, excitement or fast movements from another dog can be scary – in some cases dogs may be totally content together until one becomes excited, starts barking at something or growling playing tug. This arousal causes stress to the other dog and can trigger reactivity or redirected aggression. Thankfully our dogs are safely separated, so it is a great time for them to learn that the movement, energy, arousal and play styles of their new housemate are all harmless and safe.

This is another one easiest if you have two people, but can be adapted to be done with a single person. If you have two people, assign one to each dog, if you are flying solo load up a long-lasting food treat such as a stuffed Kong for one dog, while you work with the other.

Engage one dog in a mild activity such as a find it game while the other dog either snacks on their Kong or gets periodically rewarded by their handler for calmly observing their sibling play. If both dogs do well simply gradually increase the intensity of the activity – can you tug vigorously with one dog with the other showing no signs of stress?

This exercise uses the power of food to help create a positive association in each dog to the arousal and excitement of the other!

### Next Steps!

Play these games multiple times a day across the gate inside your house, and outside in your yard (if you have one) with both dogs leashed and kept at a distance that would prevent physical interaction (you WILL need two people for this). If all interactions go well during your 1-2 week decompression period, it is time to graduate to more free time.

Bring out your new arrival and let them hang out in the free area, so now you have a dog on either side of the gate but instead of playing games the whole time we will encourage the dogs to just relax, “share space” and EXIST together. This step is important! Can the dogs relax and ignore each other on either side of the gate without playing games or being redirected? If so, you’re well on your way to a happy home!

Start small, 10-15 minutes but if things go well extend the time and see how they do even for a period of an hour or more. Provide the dogs with Kong’s or other long-lasting food treats to keep them busy and prevent boredom, and supervise them the entire time – stepping in and redirecting them as/if needed.

## Beyond The Gate

If you have safe spaces to do so, your dogs should be encouraged to spend time with each other outside of the house. Depending on the dogs, this may mean complete off-leash interaction. If the dogs have met previously off-leash as part of temperament testing, are known to be safe and dog-social etc., you

### The Dogs Who Couldn’t Play

*I added a dog aggressive, reactive, new dog to my group of two. The dogs were now free together but Shy would still become triggered and aggressive when Mac and Maddie would play. Play was banned inside the house temporarily.*

*To fix this I let them play, then called Shy over to me and fed her chicken the ENTIRE time, before quickly stopping the play. Over time they could play longer and more intensely.*

*By the end, instead of becoming reactive when the play began, Shy would walk over and lie down next to me happily waiting for a treat (without being called).*



may find you can quickly have a cohesive unit outside. If this is the case, it is great news as it will likely speed the indoor process too, however inside the house is NOT the same and a slow introduction is still needed once you move indoors and into a previously established routine and territory!

Using two people, take the dogs for a parallel walk. Parallel walks are done with both dogs leashed and at a distance where physical interaction would not be possible. Allow the dogs freedom to look at each other or calmly explore the area around them, sniffing and setting the pace/direction while the humans simply reward and praise them for good behavior (rewarding with a treat for offered eye contact and focus, or calm behavior). If you observe anything other than clear signs your dogs want to interact (BOTH of them) in a relaxed and positive manner please refer to the “Dog to Dog introductions” handout for additional exercises to do before letting the dogs off-leash together.

*Remember, even if your dogs are comfortable spending off-leash time together OUTSIDE or in a different “territory” a slow introduction is still needed once you move indoors into a previously established territory.*

When your dogs do start to have off-leash time together, keep sessions short if needed to control energy levels and watch body language closely. Normal dog/dog play should include lots of pauses – play/pause, play/pause, play/pause, and loose, floppy body language. If you have concerns about the intensity of the play between the dogs always air on the side of caution and have them take a break. Remember it is always better to go slower than too fast.

Outside interaction can start whenever the new arrival dog is comfortable enough. Nervous or sensitive dogs may not be ready to leave the house to go somewhere new until they have settled in completely, while other dogs who are more environmentally confident might be ready to explore the world within a few days.

## Bringing it All Together

So by now you will have:

- Set up a decompression room and used that as “home base” for your new dog
- Used some form of gate or divider to provide separate space for each dog in the home
- Played gate games with the dog’s multiple times a day during the decompression period to build a positive association between them and screen for potential issues.
- Taken the dogs for one or more parallel walks together in neutral territory
- Parallel walked, played find it games and built a positive association with both dogs in their own yard (if present)
- Once ready, allowed off-leash interaction (if safe) in yard, with lots of supervision.
- Completed a decompression period, with NO indoor free access to each other for at least 1-2 weeks or as long as needed.

This process may have taken as little as a week or as long as many weeks, depending on how easy the decompression goes, how dog social the dogs are and so forth. However long it takes, wait until all of these steps have been successfully completed before attempting to integrate your dogs. Always, always, ALWAYS remember that slower is better!

### The Integration

- Before allowing the dogs to be free together in the house, walk around and pick up any toys, treats, bones or chews that could be a resource to guard.
- Once your area is clear bring both dogs, leashed into the same area and practice your gate games for a few minutes, without the gate! Reward sitting side by side, play find it (keeping treats away from each other!) and reward for being calm while the other dog is moving around. If all is going well, drop the leashes (leave them attached to the dogs) and disconnect casually, letting the dogs decide what they want to do!
- Start with a few short sessions of this gate-free interaction and watch for any immediate issues. Does everyone's body language remain the same? Any "scary moments"? Notice any triggers that come up now that there is no barrier separating the dog?
- If things go well, gradually increase the amount of time both dogs are free together until it is 100% of the time.
- Continue to keep the dogs separate at feeding times, at night, or during times where you expect a lot of excitement such as company arriving or leaving, family members coming home from work etc. until the dogs are well established, as these are common triggers that can upset a fledgling relationship.
- Your new dog's bedroom should remain their space, and the other dog should not be encouraged to go in there. Each dog should ideally have their own crate to retreat to for privacy – because even the best of friends or siblings occasionally want a moment to themselves, crates should be open to provide the option of privacy at any point.
- Continue to regularly play "one for you, one for me" and other trust building/bonding exercises for the multi-dog household.
- Continue to always watch for signs of stress of distance cues in either dog, take these seriously and provide dogs with breaks or assess for any underlying issues such as guarding or arousal that might be triggering discomfort. Seek professional help if you are concerned about any behavior you see.
- Consider ongoing training exercises such as mat training both dogs, communally rewarding calm behavior, practicing stays and leave it's to keep both dogs practicing good behavior and learning to work and live together!