

Suggested Guidelines for Introducing Unfamiliar Dogs

Relationships between dogs can be very complex from the very beginning. Dogs are pack animals and almost immediately determine the social structure called dominate hierarchy. This hierarchy serves as the social pecking order to maintain order and or reduce conflict and promote cooperation among pack members. Dogs are territorial creatures and may affect their behavior when a dog is introduced into a new household. Below are some suggested guidelines to having a successful positive experience when introducing a new dog into your home and or pack.

Choose a Neutral Location

Introduce the dogs in a neutral location. By doing this your resident dog or dogs are less likely to view the newcomer as a threat or territorial intruder. Each dog should be handled by a separate person. With both dogs leashed, introduce the dogs in an unfamiliar area for both dogs. For example, if you walk your dog in the same park daily, do not introduce the dogs in that park as your resident dogs may see that park as his or her territory and may view the new dog as threatening his or her territory.

Positive Reinforcement and Body Language

From the first meeting, help both dogs experience positive things when in each other's presence. If you see the dogs are using their nose to try and communicate then let them sniff each other while closely monitoring for any behavior changes. Look to see if the body language changes. Hair standing up, stiffness in the body, position of the tale, prolonged staring, ears forward, deep growls. All of these are signs of dominance. If you notice any of these behaviors, calmly separate the dogs, get the dogs focused on something else, walk away and have the dogs sit calmly. Then reward the sit calmly exercise with affection, treat, or toy.

Never yell, scream, or jerk the dog away (this creates a negative experience). Do not get upset with either dog if you experience this behavior. Many dogs have issues and have never had the proper socialization they require to live a balanced life. This is up to human to be patient, consistent, and be empathetic. Negative training usually creates fear and will be harder down the road to a cohesive pack.

Taking the Dogs Home

After the dogs seem to be tolerant of each other in a neutral location without fearful or aggressive responses you can take them home. First, **before you go inside the house, take both dogs on a long walk together.** If there are multiple dogs in your home you may want to introduce the dogs separately depending on the balance within your own pack. Sometimes multiple dogs tend to gang up on the new housemate. It is important to support the dominant dog in your household, even if that turns out to be the newcomer. Trying to impose your preference for which dog should be the dominant can confuse the dogs and create further problems.

If introductions do not go smoothly, contact a trainer or behaviorist immediately. Dogs can be severely injured or even killed in fights and the longer the problem continues, the harder it will be to correct. Punishment in the human way will **NOT** work but with the right help, most of the time the issues can be resolved.

Managing the New Dog in Your Home

Before you bring a new dog into your home, pick up all toys, food bowls, and other possessions your current resident dog may claim as his or her own. This will prevent any fights over prized possessions for the first couple of weeks. You may return them in a week or two and provide the new dog with his or her own toys. In the beginning, give the dogs toys only when they are separated.

When you first bring your new dog home, put your current pets in separate areas of your home. Walk the new dog around your home on a leash and show the dog where he or she will sleep, eat, and drink.

Establish boundaries in our home by closing doors, using baby gates, and crates closing off areas while all resident dogs get accustomed to the new pack member and vice versa. Keep the resident dog's feeding and sleeping area separate so there are no territorial issues with food or territory.

Now, your dogs may enjoy each other right off the bat as playmates and be friendly. Always supervise their play and keep the dogs from getting over excited. Over excitement can lead to a fight creating injury. If you notice the dogs getting overly excited while playing, separate the dogs for a few minutes until they calm down. Always praise or reward for playing nice. Devote plenty of time to each individual dog for both training and play. If you have senior dogs in your home it is important to give the senior dog time and space. Finally, always separate a new dog in the house when not supervised. Never leave free to roam with current resident dogs.

Three Dogs Are a Pack

When people have three or more dogs is when genetic instincts regarding pack behavior really kick in. It does not matter if it's three or thirty dogs. The fact is that genetic instincts will control the social structure when you have three or more dogs. Below are some of the issues that develop when people create dog packs.

- Dogs become much more territorial (just like wolf packs).

- Three dogs or more develop a **Ranking Order** which includes a pack leader (human). Every dog knows exactly what rank it is within the dog pack. When dog packs do not have a strong human pack leader, one of the three or more dogs will assume that role and become leader, then you may have serious problems.

- When a new dog is added to a home, every dog in that house has to re-establish its personal rank within the new family pack. Re-establishing rank is usually where dog fights come into play.

- Usually the worst fights are inter-female fights.

- When fights begin in a large dog pack (three or more), most of the time all of the dogs will gang up on the weakest dog.

- Once a dog is attacked, it may be traumatized for a long time unless there is a strong human pack leader.

- A dog can love you and not respect you. Love and respect are two totally different things in the mind of the dog.

- Most dogs do not want to be pack leader, but if forced to become pack leader, they usually become stressed and nervous. This is why if you choose to have a dog pack (three or more) you must be a strong pack leader and each dog must first respect human.

Finally, there are many different ways to introduce, train, balance dogs. The most important is finding which works best for you, your family, and your dog or dog pack. Hopefully the above information will assist you in introducing your new foster and or adopted dog into your home by reducing the stress and having a healthy balanced relationship with all of your dogs. If all fails, get help from professional.