

Introducing a New Dog to the Family Dog

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. Like most animals who live in groups, dogs establish their own social structure, sometimes called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict and promote cooperation among pack members. Dogs also establish territories, which they may defend against intruders or rivals. Obviously, dogs' social and territorial nature affects their behavior whenever a new dog is introduced to the household.

Introduction Techniques

- **Choose A Neutral Location:** Introduce the dogs in a neutral location so that your resident dog is less likely to view the newcomer as a territorial intruder. Each dog should be handled by a separate person. Have both dogs on leads. **KEEP THE LEASHES LOOSE!** If you put tension on the leash, you will pass that tension on to the dogs. A loose leash lets the dog know you are confident and that all is well. With both dogs on leashes, begin the introductions in an area unfamiliar to each, such as a park or a neighbor's yard. If you frequently walk your resident dog in a nearby park, she may view that area as her territory, too, so choose a less familiar site. If you are adopting your dog from an animal shelter, you might even bring your resident dog to the local shelter and introduce the two there.
- **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." Take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals. Continue with the "happy talk," food rewards, and simple commands.
- **Be Aware of Body Postures:** 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 to them, 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. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time period and/or at a greater distance from each other.

Taking your new dog home

- **Taking the Dogs Home:** When you arrive home, let the dogs meet again OUTSIDE. Let them sniff and reacquaint themselves with each other. Then you can enter the house; you first followed by your current dog and then the new dog (if possible). The first month, the dogs will be getting adjusted to one another. It can take as long as a month for them to settle in. During this period there can be a lot of things happening that won't happen long term.
- **Your Goal:** During this period of adjustment, you have one major goal. Your goal is for both dogs to learn that "good things happen when we are together and getting along." When we are alone or not getting along, "*the good things go away.*" When your dogs are together and doing well together, give them lots of attention. Praise them and pet them. Give them a treat. It is easy to forget to reward when the dogs are getting along. When they are laying on the floor and not fighting, occasionally give them a treat or attention just for being good dogs. Don't react only when they are bad.
- **When** your dogs start to spat, withdraw all rewards. You may use separate rooms for time outs (rooms that you are not occupying at the time). If they begin to growl, put BOTH dogs in a separate room. Don't fuss and scold. Just put them in each room. Don't make any value a judgment about which dog is at fault. The culprit may be the dog who didn't growl but started the spat by giving the other dog a challenging stare. The point is, whatever you do, you do to both dogs. *Good things happen when they are together and being good.* Not when they are separated. When you give them a time out, make it 2 minutes or whenever they settle down. If you have to give them time out after time out, do it. Do it without fuss and don't make it for long periods. If they growl upon leaving their rooms, put them BOTH right back without comment.
- **Alpha / Beta** – keep in mind that until the new dog has settled in and found his place in your "pack," your first dog is the natural "alpha" among dogs. You need to "support" him/her in that role for the time being. This means giving "your" dog the first treat, letting "your" dog out the door first, etc. After they have settled in together, you may find that the new dog is taking over as "alpha." If that happens, let it happen and support their choice at the time.
- **You as Leader:** Even though the dogs will have a hierarchy, you are the ultimate leader in your household. Get both dogs used to learning that "all good things come from you." Think of all the things each dog likes to do: eat, walks, brushing, etc. Prior to allowing the dog to participate in that activity, require them to "earn it" by performing a "sit" on cue. This is an easy and fun way to establish our place as ultimate leader.

Fights

No matter what you do, there is always the possibility of a fight. Dogs are pack animals. It is important for a pack to establish their "pecking" order. It is hard for us humans to keep our values out of this process. If one dog is alpha and another is beta, you don't need to feel sorry for the beta dog. He is happy being beta!!!! A beta dog has very few

responsibilities. He is secure in knowing that he doesn't have to run things. The other dog can make the decisions and the beta dog is happy with this. Don't try to compensate for this. The dogs are happy if you don't interfere!!

If you have two strong dogs, or a new dog that has not determined the pecking order, you may have a fight no matter how hard you try to teach them to get along. If this happens, it is because it is a necessary thing. Before it happens, please take time to think this through and determine how you will react. If you think it through ahead of time, you are much more likely to handle it correctly.

FIRST THING – most experts will tell you that if there is no blood, just let them fight it out. If you stop the fight, it will most likely occur again because they weren't able to settle their issues. So, if you can, watch closely but allow them to fight it through.

The human reaction is to reach in and try to pry the dog's mouth off the other dog. Don't do it. Rather, if you are outside, a water hose will work wonders. If you are indoors, have a blanket ready. You can throw it over the dogs. It is hard to continue a fight when you are tangled in a blanket.

No matter what method is used to break up a fight, when it is over, send both dogs into their separate rooms. Do not baby either dog. The loser knows he has lost. Giving him sympathy or blaming the other dog only confuses them both. You are undermining all they learned from the fight, making another fight more likely.

Please be aware that a serious seeming fight does NOT mean that they will never get along. Most dogs will settle in quickly and repeated fights are not going to happen. If they don't seem to be resolving things, you might want to consider using a behaviorist.

- If you have more than one resident dog in your household, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Two or more resident dogs may have a tendency to "gang up" on the newcomer.
- It is important to support the dominant dog in your household, even if that turns out to be the newcomer. This may mean, for example, allowing the dominant dog to claim a favored sleeping spot as his or to have access to a desirable toy. Trying to impose your preference for which dog should be dominant can confuse the dogs and create further problems.