

HOW TO INTRODUCE DOGS

When you're introducing two dogs to each other, first impressions matter. How the dogs interact in their first few encounters can set the tone for their entire relationship, so we recommend following the steps below in order to set their relationship up for success.

Tips for introducing two dogs:

Let them get to know each other slowly and carefully.

Throwing them together and letting them work it out is not recommended. This type of introduction where the dogs are not leashed and controlled can lead to heartbreak and serious injury if the meeting fails.

Always have 2 people for each step of dog introductions!

Have the dogs meet on leash.

Keep this meeting on neutral territory that is not a familiar place to either dog. Keep dogs on a sturdy leash. Do not use a retractable leash for introductions or a leash that is too long for you to have the dog by your side and controlled by you. If the dogs meet on leash and do not show warning signs of trouble, this is a good first step. Growling/snarling, mounting/humping, raised hair across the back, or a very stiff and rigid body by either dog are red flags. If any of these occur, pull the dogs back apart and keep them at a safe distance where they can see each other but not touch.

If there are no warning signs of trouble and the dogs seem fine face-to-face for a good period of time, take the dogs for a walk together, keeping 10 feet between them so that they can't greet each other or stare. The idea is to acclimate them to each other's presence without causing tension.

It is best to have this introduction happen more than once before letting the dogs near each other without control.

Have the dogs meet with leashes dragging.

After all of the above has gone without issue several times, you can let the dogs meet through a barrier or while on a walk together on leashes. Once these types of interactions have gone well, you can attempt to take have the dogs meet in a fenced but neutral area with leashes dragging. Avoid problem areas like gates, doorways, or closely confined space. Keep the area big enough for them to have space to not feel cramped or confined, but small enough that you can quickly and easily get to the dogs to grab leashes if anything were to go wrong. Wait two minutes while they sniff each other, and then call them away. If they start to play and it seems to be going well, let them play for a few minutes and then end the session. End each initial session on a good note!

Have the dogs meet at home.

After all of the above, it is time to have the dogs meet in a place that is familiar to one of them, your home. The first introduction should look just like the first, on leash, but should occur in your yard. If possible, it is a good idea to first have them meet somewhere down the street and walk together, on leash, to the yard. If the in-yard meeting is going well and without issue, you can move inside the house.

Before the in-house introduction, take the original dog out to the yard and then bring your new dog inside. Bringing the new dog inside to meet your resident dog can cause a negative reaction. It is best to have the new dog in a neutral spot in the room (not where the original dog eats, sleeps, or lounges). Put a baby gate in the doorway to create a safe introduction. Then bring the original dog inside on the other side of the gate and allow them to meet through the gate. Both dogs should remain on leash. If signs of tension arise, separate the dogs immediately and try again at the beginning of this step or an earlier one at another time or on another day. Remember that the introduction will set the tone for their relationship, so it's important to set everyone up for success.

If the dogs seem fine through the gate, you can remove the gate after several minutes. Again, keep the dogs on leash for this meeting with a person in control of each dog and holding the leashes. Dogs that are getting along fine can then move to being inside the house but with leashes dragging. Dogs should remain leashed when together for several days before leashes are ever removed.

Keep the dogs separate while you are away.

Never leave dogs unattended while you are not supervising if they do not yet know each other well. Even if you are in the house and inside another room, dogs should be crated or separated by a barrier if you cannot supervise closely and if there are not two people present.

When you are not present or if you leave the house, dogs should be separated in separate rooms or in crates. Never leave one dog crated and the other not crated unless the crated dog is in a room that is not assessable to the other dog. This will prevent a loose dog from taunting the crated dog.

Work to prevent conflict.

While dogs can settle minor disputes with each other (such as growling the other off of a toy or their own food bowl), they shouldn't be limiting each other's access to you, your family, or common areas of the home. If growling or other signs of minor dispute occur, it is important that the human be quickly involved in setting rules. Some multi-dog households develop a pecking order and others can shift dominance depending on context. It's important that in either situation, dogs understand that the humans are in charge and that when humans ask them to do something, they do it. Training with a new dog that hasn't yet learned these social rules is often a great way to ensure the dog responds to the human when asked. When a dog listens to its human, any disputes can more readily be halted.

Remember that each dog is different and that dogs have to learn social rules and manners. Some are taught as puppies and others still need to learn these things as adults. Each dog will be at a different spot when adopted from a shelter. Patience, consistency, and caution are the best tools to making a successful member of your household and a successful dog-friendly pet.