

INTRODUCING DOGS TO A NEW DOG

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR ADOPTION OF A DOG

Dogs are social creatures who oftentimes enjoy living with other dogs. While some dogs warm up to another dog almost instantly, others may never warm up to another dog in the home. All dogs, like all people, are individuals, and some enjoy the company of other dogs more than others.

HOW TO PREPARE

Before introducing dogs to one another, become familiar with how to read dog body language. The website ispeakdog.org is a wonderful resource.

When introducing dogs, you should have two people present—one to manage each dog. We recommend attaching a front-clip, anti-pull harness to each dog because this equipment provides people with more control than a collar without restricting the dogs' natural movements too much. Tension on a dog's neck can be uncomfortable and can cause a dog to direct his agitation on the other dog.

Pick up items such as toys, chews, and food bowls that could spark fights between dogs. Keep these items put away until your dogs have had time to get to know each other and bond. Before starting introductions, let your new dog inspect your home and yard without the other dog present. This will help him be more calm following introductions.

Then, take your new dog to the area where you intend to have him meet your resident dog. This will help your new dog be less arousing when your resident dog comes into view. Ideally this introduction would occur in a large space off of your property. A calm park or a quiet parking lot are good options. The calmer the environment, the better because you want both dogs to remain as calm as possible during the greeting. Excitement or anxiety can produce high arousal. You want to limit arousal when trying to help animals bond.

INTRODUCTIONS

Every dog is different, and one technique may work better for one dog compared to another. Be prepared to combine some of the advice below. Slower introductions are better when in doubt. Please call or email our behavior helpline if you need additional advice: 804-643-7722 or behaviorhelpline@richmondspca.org.

- **Walks**—start off walking each dog at a distance from one another. You want them to be aware of each other but not overly excited. Shorten the distance between the dogs as they remain relatively calm. Continue decreasing the distance until you are walking in the pattern of: dog/human/human dog THEN dog/human/dog/human and FINALLY human/dog/dog/human provided both dogs remain relatively calm and polite.
- **Sniffing**—as crazy as it sounds to people, dogs bond best when they can sniff each other and pee where the other dog has sniffed or peed. The dogs will eventually want to sniff rear ends. This is natural and should be allowed. Position the most confident or energetic dog in front, and let the least confident dog approach to sniff when he feels ready. The person holding the dog in front should keep moving and not let this one turn around or jump on the other while the other dog is sniffing. Allow the sniff for a few seconds, then break off. After the least confident dog has gotten several sniffs, then switch and let the more confident dog walk behind to get in a few sniffs. Repeat as necessary. Some dogs need multiple introductions to become friends. If their body language is loose, you can allow them longer interactions. Hold the leashes in a way that the dogs are under control, but not so tightly as to restrict their movements, and don't allow leashes to become tangled.

- At home—once back at your home, on-leash training can be a great way to show the dogs that the presence of another dog predicts positive things. With the dogs near enough that they are aware of each other, but not so close that they could snatch at or snark over a dropped treat, have each person do fun repetitions of basic manners and tricks with the dogs, offering lots of praise and food rewards. Make the session super fun and stress free. Set up a sturdy pet gate, and keep the dogs in separate rooms where they can see each other and sniff through the gate if they like, but with no pressure to interact. As walks and interactions through the gate all seem to be relaxed and friendly, then start letting both dogs interact in your home or yard. Leave leashes attached but dragging at first and have two people present. If interactions become tense, happily clap and talk in a soothing voice and direct the dogs' attention away from each other. Go back to walks or separate the dogs with a gate as needed. As the dogs have longer interactions that are relaxed and friendly, they can start to interact off leash but still under your supervision.

CONSIDERATIONS

Give energetic dogs exercise with a person before doing introductions. Do not let the resident dog take out all of his energy on the new dog. Even if the dogs play nicely, make sure they get lots of breaks from each other and exercise with people to prevent arousal.

Puppies and adolescent dogs have the potential to be extremely annoying to older dogs. Again, give the puppy lots of exercise and playtime. Supervise interactions, and if the older dog seems distressed, separate the dogs until the younger dog is calm. Give the dogs lots of breaks from each other.

If you already have multiple dogs, do introductions one at a time. Bonded dogs will sometimes gang up on a newcomer. As the new dog is getting along with each of the resident family dogs, do more introductions. Make sure to have one person per dog to help introductions go smoothly.

ARE THEY FAMILY YET?

Dogs need time to learn that a new dog is not a threat, then to become friends, and finally to become family. As a general rule, do not leave dogs alone together when you are away from your home until 6 months after adoption. It takes about this long for a new dog to be completely integrated into the family and the structure of a new home.

Introduce toys and chews back into the dogs' routine as they are getting along well. Start with what the dogs perceive to be low-value items. This is determined by the individual dog. Then, over time, start incorporating items that may be of higher value, such as edible chews like bully sticks and toys like tennis balls. Supervise and keep a gate between the dogs as needed.

Feed the dogs in separate rooms or in their individual crates at first. As they become bonded, dogs can usually be fed in the same space. Some dogs will always need to be separated at mealtimes, even when best friends otherwise, and even bonded dogs should be fed with several feet of distance between them.

BREAKING UP A FIGHT

Should there be a fight, do not reach in between the dogs, as you could be bitten. If the dogs are wearing leashes, grab the leashes if possible. If not, place a large object, such as a trash can, between the dogs, or use a spray bottle to spray water on the dogs, or bang metal food bowls together noisily. Immediately separate the dogs and do not start introductions again for at least 24 hours. Give the dogs lots of time to cool down before trying again.

Many fights can result from people moving too fast to introduce dogs. And a fight does not mean that two dogs can never be friends. However, if there is a serious fight, especially when injuries are involved, it may be recommended that the dogs not live together. Please call our behavior helpline for further advice about how to proceed in such a case.