

## Introducing a New Dog to Your Resident Dog

Domestic dogs are social animals. This means that they naturally live together in groups. Dogs establish territories that they often defend against entry by intruders or rivals. The territorial and social nature of dogs needs to be considered when a new dog joins the household.

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**CHOOSE A NEUTRAL LOCATION:** Introduce the dogs in a location that is not part of either dog's territory. This will minimize the chances of either dog viewing the other as a territorial intruder. Each dog should have his own handler. With both dogs on leash, take them to an area, such as a park, with which neither is familiar. If you frequently walk the resident dog in the park several blocks from your house, your dog may view that park as her territory, which would not make it a neutral location. Choose another site.

**USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:** From the first meeting, you want both dogs to expect "good things" to happen when they are in each other's presence. Let the dogs sniff each other, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do so, talk to them in a happy, friendly tone of voice, "GOOD DOG, FIDO! VERY NICE!" Do not allow the dogs to investigate and sniff each other for more than 5 seconds, as sometimes this escalates to an aggressive response from one or both dogs. After a few seconds, get each dogs' attention, move a few yards apart, and give each dog a tidbit of a treat in return for obeying a simple command such as "sit". Take the dogs for a walk together, 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:** A body posture that indicates things are going well is a play-bow. The dog will crouch with his front legs on the ground and rear in the air. This is an invitation to play, which usually elicits friendly behavior from the other dog. Other things to look for include: loose body movements, soft eye contact, relaxed mouth and ears. Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response may occur. These would include hair standing up on the dog's back (piloerection), baring of teeth, deep growls, a stiff legged gait, or a prolonged stare. If you see any of these postures, interrupt the interaction immediately. DON'T do so in a threatening way, but calmly and positively get each dog interested in something else. For example, both handlers can call their dogs to them, move a few feet apart, have them sit or lay down, and reward each with tidbits, which will prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter period and/or at a greater distance from each other.

**TAKING THE DOGS HOME:** When the dogs seem to be tolerating each other's presence without fearful or aggressive responses, and the investigative greeting behaviors have tapered off, you can take the dogs home. Whether you choose to take them in the same or different vehicles will depend on their size, how well they ride in a car, how trouble-free the initial introduction has been, and how many dogs are involved. If you have more than one dog in your household, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Multiple resident dogs may "gang up" on the newcomer.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:** Whenever more than one dog lives in a household, the dogs will establish a relationship determined by the outcomes of interactions between the dogs. Owners cannot choose whether the dogs establish a dominance hierarchy. When a new dog is brought into the family, the social balance is upset because the newcomer's place is unclear.

It may be difficult to predict which dog in a household may be more interested in toys, sleeping spaces food, chewies and human attention. Some dogs may also be less tolerant of other dogs encroaching on their personal space, or may be more "pushy" and interested in controlling the movements or activities of other dogs.

Owners should not allow or reinforce rude, aggressive, or pushy behaviors from their dogs (new or old). Owners' attention, treats, toys, etc. should be given first to the dog(s) who are behaving in the most polite, desirable ways. Owners should not allow pushy dogs to demand owners' attention first.

Keep the resident dog(s)' routine as much the same as possible by keeping feeding, exercise, play, sleeping times, and locations the same as before the new dog arrived. You can also give each dog some time alone with you. Perhaps one dog has a difficult time playing with toys because the other dog takes his toys away. Put the possessive dog outside with a chew toy while you play with the other dog inside (or vice versa). When structuring these individual sessions, the dogs that are not receiving attention should be kept busy doing something else they enjoy. If a jealous dog thinks another dog is receiving special attention, which he is not, it may contribute to a fighting problem.

**INTRODUCING PUPPIES TO ADULT DOGS:** Puppies usually pester adult dogs unmercifully. Before the age of four months, puppies may not recognize subtle body postures from adult dogs, which are signals they have had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments can set limits with puppies with a growl or snap. These behaviors should be allowed, even if the puppy over reacts and "screams". Adults which are not well socialized, or who have a history of fighting with or challenging other dogs, may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behaviors, such as biting, which can harm the puppy. For this reason, new puppies should not be left alone with an adult dog until you are confident the puppy is not in any danger. Be sure to give an adult dog some quiet time away from the puppy and some individual attention as described above.

**IF PROBLEMS DEVELOP:** If the introduction of a new dog to your household does not go smoothly, do not allow the conflicts to continue. The more often they occur, the more difficult it will be to get the dogs to coexist peacefully. Dogs can also be severely injured in fights, as can owners if they attempt to intervene. Punishing one or both dogs is NOT the answer, and is likely to make the problem worse. Talk to your veterinarian about spaying and/or neutering any dogs that are intact, and contact a certified animal behavior specialist for information about behavior modification.

For more help, you can also contact Humane Society Silicon Valley's free animal behavior helpline at 408-262-2133 x263.,

*Based on a handout written for the Denver Dumb Friends League by Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D., Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist.*