



# Setting Your Dogs Up for Success

## Slow Introduction to Other Dogs

Slow introductions have proven time and time again to be essential to the success of introducing a new dog into a multi-dog households.

### **When you bring your dog home:**

Wait until you have had a considerable period of evaluation and observation (at the very minimum 72 hours) before doing dog to dog introductions. This even applies if you think all of the dogs involved are easy and friendly. Some of the most rescue-savvy individuals spend weeks on this process. Dog introductions can involve several stages of a process, which may be shortened or lengthened depending on the success of the introduction. It is important to take your time with introductions and not rush through them.

Your foster dog will have plenty to acclimate to and interact with until it is time for dog introductions.

1. Have your new dog on a leash and take them outside for a chance to relieve themselves in the proper area, then bring them to "their" spot in your home, which may be a crate, quiet room or gated off area depending on the dog's crate training and comfort level.
2. Provide water, a blanket or towel and a Kong stuffed with yummy food, and allow your dog to have some alone time to adjust to their new surroundings.
3. Do not hover. Check in every few minutes or so to ensure that your new dog is not being destructive, soiling inside, etc., but give them as much space as possible. Being in a brand new place with unfamiliar dogs and people is SCARY and exhausting.

### **To start, crate and separate for several days, even a week.**

Your resident dog(s) know the dog is there and can see and smell a new dog in the home. Let them acclimate. Your new dog's stress levels are going to be very high for the first few days.

*Before* you begin introductions, it is important to keep a couple things in mind, noted below. Why? Once you are off on the wrong paw with an introduction, it's hard to 'undo' it.

- Remove high value toys, chew items, and possibly food bowls, from the dogs' access in the home, especially at first.
- If you are not already schedule-feeding your pets, now is a good time to start. Free feeding (i.e., always having a full bowl on the floor accessible to the dogs) may encourage guarding behavior or result in a conflict. Instead, feeding may be done in crates, which also helps with crate training. Or you can feed the dogs in separate areas.
- Implement obedience into the daily routine, 'sits' for food, water dish filled, at doorways, etc. This helps maintain a routine in the home and improve basic obedience for all dogs in the home. Do not allow dogs to crowd or get pushy at doorways...too much opportunity for a conflict in a tight space. Teach your dogs a 'back up' cue and to 'sit' at the door.
- Read up on and be cognizant of different types of canine behaviors: resource guarding, barrier frustration, same-sex aggression, territorial aggression, etc. Any of these behaviors in either dog



can complicate an introduction.

- Familiarize yourself with dog body language. If you are not confident about your body language reading skills, ask a trainer or experienced partner to help with introductions.
- Stay relaxed, but vigilant.
- Is your new dog a little too wild on the leash? During the separation period, start working on loose leash walking, which will be helpful during initial introductions.
- Do not introduce a new dog to multiple resident dogs at the same time. Start with your friendliest or least reactive dog and gradually introduce them. Do not try to push introductions with several different dogs in the course of the same day.

### **When it's time to start introductions:**

After the mandatory minimum separation period of 72 hours, you may be ready to begin the introduction process, or you may need to wait longer. Brief, repeated introductions over time that end on a positive note are far more beneficial than a long, drawn-out introduction that may become problematic.

Parallel leash walking, on neutral territory with two handlers, is a great way to introduce dogs. Neutral territory means an area where neither dog has been or where neither dog resides. An unfamiliar, neutral territory is best to avoid territorial behavior in either dog. Both dogs should be wearing properly fitted martingale collars and be on nylon or leather leashes. Prong collars, choke chains, e-collars and flexi-leads should not be used when introducing dogs.

While taking a short walk, allow the dogs to curve around in a natural manner. (This is a strategy encouraged by trainer Turid Rugaas, author of "Calming Signals"). Both handlers should have a firm hold of their leashes, however, they should try to maintain a U-shaped bend in the lead. Taut, tight leashes may communicate tension to the dogs and should be avoided if possible. Avoid face-face, head-on introductions between dogs. Instead, walk parallel to each other, a few feet apart, and alternate which dog is ahead of the other. Also, do not allow a dog to greet another dog if he/she is dragging you towards the other dog or is misbehaving in any way (pulling, jumping, or lunging). Doing so will result in training the dog to misbehave to gain access to other dogs! The dog does not make the decision as to whom he will meet and when - you do.

If the dogs appear to be friendly to each other, allow brief sniffing with one dog perpendicular or "T-shaped" to the other, and then each dog should be positively called away by the handlers after a few seconds. If either dog stiffens, stands up on its toes, or shows any aggressive posturing, call the dogs away immediately and interrupt the interaction. It is important to interrupt before things go wrong so that you can preserve the possibility of a successful interaction at a later time. It might be necessary to take several walks, in different locations, over time. Multiple introductions in this manner give you a better read for how the dogs will do. Do not rush this process if the introductions seem 'iffy' in any way. Stop the introduction if either dog is showing signs of fear or aggression. Body language that indicates fear or aggression can include: raised hackles, stiff posturing, lip curling, growling, air snapping, tail tucked between legs, one dog avoiding the other or wanting to hide behind the handler, lunging, or freezing.

If the leash walking is successful, it may then be appropriate to go to a fenced area and have one dog on



leash, and one off. One handler might work obedience with the leashed dog, while letting the other dog roam around, allowing them to get used to each other's presence and scent. Usually in this scenario, the resident dog is leashed, and the new dog is loose. This gives one dog the ability to safely check things out and move away as needed while you maintain control of the other dog. Make sure the yard or fenced area is free of items that may possibly trigger a fight such as high-value toys, bones, rawhides, etc.

When introducing dogs on leash, make sure that the leashes do not become tangled. Entangled leashes can increase tension and result in a conflict between dogs.

### **Moving on to off-leash play:**

If the dogs appear to be getting along and multiple leash walks over time have been successful, then you might try both dogs off leash. This should ONLY be done in a fenced, fully enclosed area. Always make sure that both dogs are wearing appropriately fitted collars and that there are two handlers present in case there is a conflict between dogs. Also keep in mind that dog play can be rough and that it is important to periodically interrupt the play before it escalates into a conflict. The handlers can interrupt the play simply by doing some recalls and then releasing the dogs to go play again. What a great opportunity to practice an important obedience skill - the recall - amid distraction!

Handlers of dogs should be prepared if a fight occurs. Please read [here](#) and [here](#) for information on how to prevent a fight and how to break one up.

Even after successful introductions, the foster dog and resident dogs should always be separated in different rooms or with crates when there is no one to supervise them. Even if your new dog and resident dog get along, it is still important to give each dog individual attention AND individual time away from each other.

### **What if a dog doesn't play well with others?**

Some dogs will not play well with other dogs. If you find that your dog gets too aroused during off-leash play, you might limit the time the dogs are off-leash together. For example, if you observe that your dog gets over stimulated after about five minutes of playtime, then stop the play after three minutes (or less), before the dog gets over stimulated. Some dogs can go "from 0 to 60" very quickly during play, and you may have to interrupt them as often as every 5 SECONDS. Make sure you are praising your dog for appropriate play skills when he demonstrates them.

If your dog cannot handle the freedom of off-leash play with the other dog, but did well during the leash-walk, then you may wish to do leash-walks only. Taking a nice walk together with another dog is still socialization!

External Source: [www.pbrc.net](http://www.pbrc.net)

### **Beyond dog introductions, be sensitive to the initial "shutdown."**

Remember, this is a stressful change for your new dog. Be sure to keep adventures to a minimum their first two weeks to avoid setting them up for failure. Your new dog should wait some time before joining you at PetSmart, going to visit Aunt Sally, hosting a BBQ Party, meeting your best friend's kids, or



stopping by your in-laws. What should you do?

- Give the dog its own comfortable, safe space
- Leash your new dog to you at all times. The dog should start learning that you are its everything. This also helps with identifying any undesirable behaviors. For example, even house trained dogs can revert to accidents their first month in a new home.
- Keep interactions positive, and don't try to train too much too soon.