

Introducing Dogs

Whether it is a new pet, a foster, or simply a playdate, here are some tips for safely introducing dogs. You cannot force two dogs to become best buds, nor should you expect them to necessarily snuggle or play together. However, under your guidance, socialized dogs can learn to coexist and be perfectly happy and harmonious as a pack.

Bear in mind that not all dogs get on with each other. Some are highly selective about who they like and who they don't, and some might have missed their socialization period altogether and will be very difficult to safely introduce to other dogs. **Unless you are a professional or experienced rescuer/foster/shelter volunteer, you want to have confidence that both dogs are already known to be social and friendly with other dogs** (have been successful in doggie daycare, dog-park, or play-groups) **before attempting to introduce them!**

Think Like A Dog!

- ❖ **Humans like to stand in one spot, make eye contact, extend their hands, and talk.**
 - ❖ **Dogs like to run around and move, avoid too much direct eye contact, and they'd rather smell each other's sides and butts than be face-to-face.**
- Whether taking a walk together or meeting through a fence in the yard: keep your dogs moving!
 - Don't let them sit in one spot and stare at each other. Nothing good ever comes from more than a few seconds of two new dogs locking eyes.
 - In a friendly encounter, dogs sniff each other's sides and butts. Nose-to-nose sniffing for longer than about 2 seconds signals tension and should be interrupted.
 - The whole time, gauge their reaction to seeing the other dogs.
 - Take the lead and redirect the dogs BEFORE any negative body language, growls, or lunges happen.



(If you're unsure about reading dog body language, you should probably learn a little more before introducing new dogs. If you plan to introduce an additional dog to your home, contact a trainer to help.)

Take A Walk

An great way of introducing dogs is to take a relaxed walk together. Moving in the same direction fosters pack mentality and bonding and prevents them from feeling confronted by one another.

- ❖ Have a friend help you (each dog needs their own handler!) and spread it out to keep the dogs at a distance from each other: walk single file keeping a few meters distance, after a while, swap which dog is in front. Keep walking.
 - Gauge their body language: are they relaxing in each other's company? Tails low and softly wagging, bodies supple (not tense), ears relaxed etc.
- ❖ If everything is relaxed and friendly, you can let the back dog get up close to the one in front to sniff from behind for a few seconds (*while keeping walking! Do not stop!*) and then swap it, so the other dog is in front/behind and can go up for a sniff.



With a dog that you don't know for sure is friendly, this would be enough for day 1. Repeat, practice, keep these "at a distance" interactions short and positive, until you are ready to take the next step.

Next steps:

- ❖ AFTER DOING A WALK TOGETHER, walk into a safely enclosed space (yard at home is ideal), and **drop the leashes** and allow the dogs to interact naturally. If things get tense, use your voice to correct, but you have the option of grabbing the leashes and separating the dogs if you need to.
 - Keep interactions short and always end on a positive note. If a scuffle broke out and you had to separate them, go for a walk together for a few minutes, or crate the dogs next to each other for a little while, to allow everyone to calm back down in each other's company before you part ways.

Introducing dogs to the home

If you are bringing a new dog home to live with you, ideally the dogs will have already met at an adoption meeting or similar. If not, a walk (see above) would be a great first intro. However, sometimes that is not possible and **if you get a dog from a shelter, a joint walk on day 1 (as suggested above) might be too overwhelming for them, not to mention that they might need leash-work first / be way too excited or stressed to take a walk.**

Making Friends Takes Time

- ❖ Bear in mind that stress can cause dogs to act out in ways that they might not normally. **Coming into a new home is stressful for the new dog, and for the existing dog!!** Both dogs will need time to adjust and relax before they can be expected to interact normally.
- ❖ For the first few days or weeks (depends on the dog), allow both dogs to settle into their new situation and each other's presence. **Don't force it. Don't rush it.** Keep the dogs separated using crates or baby-gates and introduce them slowly.

If your new dog is coming straight from a shelter, they are additionally stressed from that experience and (depending on how long they were at the shelter) undersocialized and not used to being in a home environment at all. **Shelter dogs are going to need decompression time in your home, before you throw them into additional stressful situations, such as being confronted with a new dog.** Skipping this step could cause problems that might otherwise be avoided!

Not only does decompression time allow the dog to relax, it also allows the dog to explore your house with his nose, learning about your other pets, children, etc. without the stress of a face-to-face meeting with an unknown dog.

Smell First, Then Sight, Then Close The Gap

- ❖ The very first thing you might do is to allow them to smell each other's scents. While one dog is out in the yard or on a walk, let the other explore the house. Then swap, so both get to smell each other's scents undisturbed.
- ❖ **Crate** one dog at a time, with the other free in the same room, so they learn to hang out in the same space. Rotate which dog is crated. A yard with fenced off areas works too, or babygates inside the house. You may do this for several days or weeks.
 - Remember to watch their body language and to interrupt/correct if they fixate or stare at each other too long.
 - Go for a **walk** together (*each dog needs their own handler, and needs to be used to walking calmly on leash*) - SEE ABOVE

→ If you need help with this, please schedule a training session.

What Not To Do ...

Treats

- ❖ We do not recommend using treats to try and get the dogs to like each other. It is far more **likely to cause jealousy** than happy associations, as the dogs feel the need to jostle and compete over the treats.¹ Dog's can't count. They don't know that you are being "fair".
- ❖ Dogs in the wild do not bond over a shared meal - they fight each other for the best bits. Feed your dogs separately (in separate rooms or crated) so they can eat in peace.

Tense On-Leash Meetings

- ❖ Many dogs are more insecure when leashed: their option to run away in case of danger is restricted, so many act more defensive/aggressive toward other dogs when on leash. (Walking in the same direction, as a pack, is ok on leash, but face-to-face leash-meetings are a bad idea.)
 - if appropriate, dogs should be allowed to socialize/play off-leash.
- ❖ **Tension on the leash makes the dogs tense!** We see it all the time; new owners/dogs meet on a walk and (being unsure of how their dogs will react to one another) they hold the leashes tight and barely let the dogs sniff the tips of their noses together, ready to pull them apart. **THIS IS A BAD WAY TO LET DOGS MEET!**
 - If you are holding back, the dog has to pull/strain forward in order to get to sniff, which sends a bad energy to the other dog.
 - Nose-to-nose meeting is confrontational. After 2 seconds the dogs should move past each other's faces and sniff each other's sides and butts, which they cannot do if you are holding them back.
- ❖ **IF you decide to let two dogs meet on leash, you have to "go for it" and let them meet, loose leashes or dropped leashes. If you are hesitant, DON'T!** Better avoid the meeting altogether.

Cheerleading

- ❖ **Don't egg dogs on.** If the dogs want to interact in a playful manner, they will. If they want to just sniff around or hang out, let them!
- ❖ We are not dogs. **We must allow them to socialize with each other in whatever manner THEY choose.** Yelling encouragement ("Get 'em! Go play!") or even throwing toys into the mix to try and force them to play is unnatural and confusing.
- ❖ Getting dogs wound up and excited creates imbalance and is more likely to result in a fight than a relaxed, chill dog-to-dog interaction. If you are preparing to introduce your dog to another dog, your best chance at a good meeting is if both dogs are calm and relaxed to begin with, and have nothing to fight over (like toys or treats).

¹ Unless you are an experienced trainer with perfect timing, and are trying to achieve some specific behavior modification through positive reinforcement, stay away from the treats when both dogs are present.