

Introducing Your New & Current Dog/s

Overview

Pack animals such as dogs establish a social structure within the group called a dominance hierarchy. This serves to maintain order, reduce conflict and promote cooperation among pack members. Dogs also establish territories, which they may defend against intruders or rivals. This social and territorial nature affects their behaviour when a new dog is introduced to their household.

Introduction Techniques

Application of the following techniques may help make the transition easier when introducing your adopted dog into the home.

1. Start with a Neutral Location.

Introduce the dogs in a neutral location so that your resident dog is less likely to view the newcomer as a territorial intruder. Each dog should be handled by a separate person. With both dogs on a lead, take them to an area with which neither is familiar (park, beach, friend's yard, etc.). If you frequently walk your resident dog in an area, s/he may view that area as his/her territory so rather choose a site that is unfamiliar.

2. Use Positive Reinforcement.

From the start, you want both dogs to expect "good things" to happen when they're in each other's presence. Let them sniff each other, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do, talk to them in a happy, friendly (never threatening) tone of voice. Limit this sniffing time, as if it's prolonged, it can lead to an aggressive response.

After a short time, get both dogs' attention, and give each a treat. Ideally this will be in return for obeying a simple command (i.e. sit, stay). Then take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other periodically. Continue with the happy talk, food rewards and simple commands.



3. Observe Body Postures.

One body posture that indicates things are going well is a play-bow where one dog crouches with front legs on the ground and hind end in the air. This invitation to play usually evokes friendly behaviour from the other dog.



Carefully observe for body postures that indicate an aggressive response (hair standing up on the other dog's back, teeth-baring, deep growls, a stiff legged gait or a prolonged stare, etc.). If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly and positively getting each dog interested in something else. For example, both handlers can call their dogs to them, have them sit or lie down and reward each with a treat. Once the dogs are focusing on the handlers and the treats, you can try letting them interact again. This time do it for a shorter period and/or at a greater distance from each other.

4. Taking the Dogs Home.

You can take the dogs home once they appear to be tolerating each other without fearful and/or aggressive responses and the investigative greeting behaviours have tapered off. Whether you take them in the same, or different vehicles, will depend on their size, how well they ride in the car, how trouble-free the initial introduction was and how many dogs are involved.

If you have more than one resident dog in your home, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Two or more resident dogs may gang-up on the newbie.



5. Introducing Puppies to Adult Dogs



Puppies typically pester adult dogs relentlessly. Before the age of four months, puppies may not recognize subtle body postures from adult dogs indicating that they've had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments may set limits with puppies with a growl or snarl. These behaviours are normal and should be allowed.

Adult dogs that aren't well-socialized, or have a history of fighting with other dogs, may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behaviors, such as biting. As this can harm a puppy, it shouldn't

be left alone with an adult dog until you're confident the puppy isn't in any danger. Be sure to give the adult dog some quiet time away from the puppy as well as individual attention.

6. When to Seek Help

If the introduction of a new dog to your home doesn't go smoothly, contact a professional animal behaviourist immediately.

Dogs can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve.

Conflicts between dogs in the same family can often be resolved with professional help. Punishment won't work and could just make things worse.

