

When you already have a dog and you're bringing a new dog home, you want to make sure the introduction goes well and avoid any unnecessary conflict. Making some preparations before you get home and setting your dogs up for positive interactions during their first few weeks together will go a long way towards the development of a harmonious long-term relationship. If you are adopting a new dog from the shelter, we encourage you to bring your dog with you to the shelter and introduce the dogs to see how they get along before you finalize the adoption.

Even if your dog has a history of getting along with other dogs, this doesn't mean they will like every dog they meet. Dogs, like people, can be choosy about who they like and just because a dog does not get along with one dog, doesn't mean they won't get along with other dogs.

Be prepared to introduce your dog to a few different dogs to find the one they appear to like the best. However, be aware that even if the dogs do get along well during their shelter meeting this does not mean that all behavior will be perfect when they get home. Once you take a new dog into your dog's home there may still be some conflict as the dogs learn to live with each other. This is understandable, so you will need to be patient.

Before Bringing Your New Dog Home

Prepare for your new dog's arrival by setting up a safe place for the new addition. This may be a crate or a separate room such as a laundry room where the dog can be placed to decompress and relax without the need to constantly interact with the other household pets. In addition, you should be prepared with separate feeding locations, and separate bowls for food and water as well as a bed for the new dog.

To avoid any conflict with the resident dogs, pick up and put away all toys and chews. Once the dogs have become very familiar with each other, you can slowly reintroduce these items while supervising so as to be sure that no conflict will occur.

The Ride Home

If you need to take both dogs home in the same car, consider keeping one or both dogs in separate kennels or use seat belts so that the dogs are not able to interact with each other in the car. You might also consider taking each dog home in separate vehicles.

Parallel Walking Introductions

- When dogs are occupied with other activities such as sniffing or investigating, they are less likely to be concerned about the actions of another dog. Therefore, walks can be a great way to introduce two dogs to each other.
- This method will require two handlers, one for each dog.
- Ideally, each dog should know a few reliable cues that they will respond to such as targeting, sitting, making eye contact or responding to their name being called or giving a paw when requested.
- Begin by walking both dogs in the same direction but far enough apart that they can focus on verbal cues and treats or just sniffing and investigating as they walk.
- While walking, each dog should be engaged separately in responding to cues and taking treats. Handlers should be reinforcing the dog at a fairly rapid rate, using a happy, upbeat tone of voice.

- If your dog is unable or unwilling to take treats from you after being called away from the other dog, this is a sign that your dog is over excited or overly nervous. If moving your dog further away does not result in your dog relaxing and being able to take treats, consider stopping and trying the introduction on another day.
- Walks should last no more than 15 minutes and may need to be shorter depending on how the dogs are responding. Always try to end on a positive note.
- Dogs should not be wearing choke or pinch collars for this exercise.
- If at any time during the exercise the dogs begin focusing on the other dog, barking or trying to lunge towards the other dog, then they should be walked further away from each other until they calm down and will again focus on the handler.
- As long as the dogs remain calm and focused on their handlers, gradually decrease the distance between the dogs. This reduction in distance may occur during one walk or over the course of several walks depending on how well the dogs adapt to each other.
- Continue until the dogs can walk within a couple of feet of each other.
- Repeat this type of leash walking in the confines of a fenced yard or other fenced in area.
- Next drop the dogs leashes and allow them to be together in the yard dragging their leashes. Leashes can be picked up by the handlers if any problematic behaviors occur. Periodically call the dogs over, ask them to perform a simple cue or two and reinforce them for that, then allow them to return to playing with the other dog.
- Allow the dogs indoor while dragging their leashes (never leave the leashed dogs unsupervised) so that any inappropriate behavior can be interrupted. Again, periodically ask them to respond to a familiar cue then allow them to run together once more.
- If at any time the dogs show aggressive responses (e.g., freezing, lunging, growling, snarling, snapping, biting) they may be too close together, and should be moved further apart. If the aggressive responses continue, seek help from a veterinary behaviorist or a qualified positive reinforcement dog trainer.
- Do not correct the dogs in any way. Doing so may increase the likelihood of an actual fight breaking out. Dogs communicate using these techniques and actual injuries are unlikely as long as the dogs are reading and responding correctly to the cues of the other dog.
- If actual fights occur where one or both dogs receive injuries, this is a sign of a real problem and you should seek professional help. See our handout on [Reading Dog Body Language](#) to help you understand your dogs' communication.

Additional Suggestions

- If parallel walking is not possible, try to at least introduce dogs the first time in a neutral outdoor space before bringing them home and introducing them in a shared outdoor space, such as a fenced in yard.
- Always do this with leashes still attached and dragging so that inappropriate behavior can be safely interrupted.
- Try to avoid bringing the new dog home and releasing it into the yard or house with your current dog already there. This can sometimes result in some territorial behavior by the resident dog.

- If you feel it is necessary to introduce dogs on leash, be aware that leashed introductions can be very frustrating for dogs, and you may see behaviors that you would not see if the dogs were not leashed.
- If it is possible to introduce the dogs on either side of a fence or similar barrier where they can see and smell each other but not come in contact, that can be a better first step before allowing the dogs together with leashes dragging.
- If that is not possible, remember to drop the leads as soon as possible if the dogs appear to be interacting in an appropriate manner.
- Don't take the leads off; just allow the dogs to drag them.
- Before allowing both dogs in the home, allow the new dog to roam the home for a few minutes with the resident dog outside so that the new dog can become familiar with the home.
- If you have multiple dogs, introduce them one at a time to the new dog either by parallel walking or in an outdoor space.

What if your new dog is a puppy?

If you are introducing a puppy to an adult dog, do not leave your puppy unattended. Puppies under the age of 4 months do not always pick up on and respond appropriately to other dogs' subtle messages indicating that they are uninterested in further interactions. If you notice that your older dog is trying to avoid the puppy or it growls or snaps at the puppy, do not scold or punish your older dog. Simply move the puppy to a separate space, such as a crate, separate room in the house or behind a baby gate. Be sure to give the puppy something appropriate to engage with such as toys and/or a food puzzle and allow them to play by themselves for a while. If your puppy is not able to understand when your older dog needs some space, it is up to you to step in and separate the puppy so that the older dog does not have to escalate to biting.

Pay Close Attention to Each Dog's Body Language During Introductions

Dogs that indicate a desire to play such as play bows, and a generally loose, bouncy body language indicate things are going well.

Behaviors such as the hair on their back or shoulders standing up, growling, teeth baring, rigid body tension or stiff, tails held straight up are signs that one or both dogs is uncomfortable with the interaction. If you notice these types of communications, interrupt both dogs calmly and call them away.

Provide lots of positive reinforcement to each dog such as petting, praising and even treats. When attempting to reintroduce the dogs again, do so on leash a bit further away and for a shorter period of time.

When to Get Help

If the introductions are not going smoothly, contact a qualified behavior specialist as soon as possible. See our handout on [Finding Your Pet a Trainer](#). Conflicts between dogs in the home don't usually work themselves out and punishments can make the problem worse. Furthermore, the problem usually becomes harder to resolve the longer it goes on.