



Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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Introducing Your New Dog To Your Resident Dog

Dogs are generally very social animals and can appreciate the company of another of their kind. However, extra care has to be taken when introducing a new dog to a resident dog in a household to help things start off on the right foot. It is best to introduce dogs slowly and carefully, to make sure that they develop positive associations with each other and understand appropriate ways to interact. Extra caution should be exercised if one of the dogs was removed from his litter too early or has not been properly socialized with other dogs throughout his life.

Introduction Techniques

► **Choose 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. A separate person should handle each dog. With both dogs on a leash, take them to an area with which neither dog is familiar, such as a park or neighbor's yard. If you frequently walk your resident dog in a park near your house, she may view that park as her territory, so choose another site that's unfamiliar to her. We recommend bringing your resident dog with you to the shelter and introducing the dogs before adopting the new dog.

► **Use Positive Reinforcement:** From the first meeting, 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 tone of voice -- never use a threatening tone of voice. Keep their leashes relatively loose, since the pressure of your dog's collar on her neck can trigger reactivity. Don't allow them to investigate and sniff each other for a prolonged time, as this may escalate to an aggressive response. After a short time, get both dogs' attention, and give each dog a treat in return for obeying a simple command, such as "sit" or "stay." Take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals. Continue with the "happy talk," food rewards and simple commands.

► **Be Aware of Body Posture:** One body posture that indicates things are going well is a "play-bow." One dog will crouch with her front legs on the ground and her hind end in the air. This is an invitation to play that usually elicits friendly behavior from the other dog. Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hair standing up on the other dog's back, teeth-baring, deep growls, a stiff-legged gait or a prolonged stare. 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 and reward their dogs with high value treats for coming away from the other dog. The dogs will become interested in the treats which will prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time 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 them home. Whether you choose to 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 has been and how many dogs are involved.

► If you have more than one resident dog in your household, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Two or more resident dogs may have a tendency to "gang up" on the newcomer.

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 signaling that they have had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments may set limits with puppies with a growl or snarl. These behaviors are normal and should be allowed. Adult dogs that aren't well-socialized, or that have a history of fighting with other dogs, may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behavior, such as biting, which could harm the puppy. For this reason, a puppy 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, and perhaps, some individual attention as described above.

When to get Help

If the introduction of a new dog to a household doesn't go smoothly, contact our behavior specialists at 713-869-7722, ext. 187, or email animals@hspca.org. 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 make things worse.