

Potter's Angels Rescue, Inc.

Proper Dog Introduction

Whether you are getting a new dog or have had your dog for years it is a good idea to know how to properly introduce them to new animals and dogs. Although dog parks are a well-intended creation, the fact is that it can quickly turn into a dog owner's worst nightmare in quick fashion. Too few people actually understand dog posturing/body language enough to know the difference between a dog being dominant and a dog just wanting to play. And it is never good for two strange dogs to meet for the first time off leash and this can and has turned into tragedy for many dog owners that were just trying to get their pup some fun exercise.

The same holds true if you are welcoming a new dog into your home. The key is to go slow and allow them time to accept each other's presence. DO NOT let the new dog barge right into your home to meet your current dog. That is a good way to start a dog fight that you may not be able to recover from. You want to give them both the best chance to live harmoniously for the rest of their lives and starting with a fight the minute they meet each other is not the way to do it.

When you arrive home with your new dog give him 10 minutes or so to walk the yard, go potty and adjust to the smells of the yard. If they seemed stressed by the presence of other dogs (excessive drooling, shaking, or otherwise stressed) give them longer to calm down and take them for a walk to release some of that nervous energy. It is so important that the first meeting go well and be as stress-free as possible for both dogs. This is why it's a good idea to have some very yummy goodies on hand to use as a distraction if needed, or just to reward them for good behavior.

Once the new dog seems relaxed, have a friend bring your dog out on a leash (or a Gentle Leader which is an excellent tool for first time meetings) and stand 20 feet away. Watch both dogs. How are they reacting to the sight of the other? Though dogs may bark to communicate, they also say a lot with their bodies. Tails, legs, noses, mouths and more help the dog convey messages about their mood, emotions, and intentions. A responsible dog-owner should be able to interpret at least the basics of their dog's body language in order to better understand their canine companion.

You want both dogs to meet when they are calm and relaxed NOT when they are at the end of the leash pulling towards one another or overly excited by each other. Now let's go for a walk! With you on one side of the road and your friend on the other take them for a walk side by side but not within reach of each other. Do not allow them to pull towards one another just keep them walking forward. In the beginning, you can expect them to be anxious to meet each other, but don't cave in to them. Keep in mind who is supposed to be the boss here and if you have to pull them along until they are fully focused on the walk instead of the other dog then that is what you do. As they become less interested in each other, you can gradually walk closer and closer to each other. As long as they are giving calm and relaxed body signals (broadly wagging or relaxed tail, soft eyes, relaxed mouth, etc.) allow them to sniff one another. Be patient, it is better to give them too much time to adjust to each other than not enough. I like to walk them for a minimum of 15 minutes.

If either dog is showing signs of stress or aggression (Stiff raised and quivering tail, tucked tail, body tense, eyes wide, hackles raised, and of course the more obvious sign of growling) you should discontinue the dog introduction. You do not want to introduce dogs if one of them is feeling uncomfortable. If the new dog appears fearful, but not aggressive, you may want to try the following method of introduction, which will allow them more time to adjust to the presence of another dog. But if either one is acting overly aggressive or dominant with the other, you may need

to try a different dog all together. Keep in mind that aggression is usually fear based due to a lack of confidence or socialization. This can often be a timely and difficult behavior to conquer in a dog and should only be done with the help of a professional trainer or behaviorist.

Assuming that both dogs are proceeding well and showing good body signals with each other, the next step is, moving into the home without provoking any territorial behavior from your current dog. To prevent confusion amongst the dogs, provide leadership and guidance to the new dog from the very beginning. It does no good to spoil a dog just because it is their first day in their new home or they have had such a hard life, besides, you don't want to make your current dog jealous!

Although, YOU should be the leader in all circumstances to prevent the dogs from arguing over who is the boss, your current dog should still be given everything first, such as food, treats, attention, and going in and out the door. It is also wise to keep a leash on the new dog for the first week in his new home, not only to give you something to grab onto should a fight ensue, but also, to correct him as needed (getting on the furniture, accidents, etc.) until he learns the rules of the household. Keep in mind that disagreements will happen between dogs. It is only natural for this to happen. Give them time to work things out before giving up; eventually they could be best friends ☺

Multiple Dog Household

If you have several dogs at your home the one on one introduction may not be realistic, but it is still important to progress slowly to avoid overwhelming the new dog. This is when a crate can come in handy, assuming the new dog is comfortable in one. You DO NOT want to use this technique if the new dog dislikes being in a crate already. Begin by adjusting the new dog to the scents of the rest of your pack by walking them in the yard where your dogs eliminate. Allow the dog time to explore and sniff around. Once you have given them time to do that you can remove your dogs from the home and allow the new dog to explore freely inside the home, eventually moving them into the crate. While the new dog is exploring the yard and your home observe for signs of stress (drooling, tense, etc.). This will be the deciding factor as to where they should be crated (in living area where the dogs hang out or in a quiet room off to the side). If the new dog seems stressed by the presence of your dogs, it may be best to allow them more time to acclimate to the presence of your dogs by gating off the room the crate is in or even just keeping them in a separate part of the house entirely allowing them a longer adjustment period.

Once the new dog is comfortable in the crate, you can allow your dogs in one at a time to meet the new arrival. Keep your dogs from obsessing over the crate and just let them go about their business. It is good to have some treats on hand to distract everyone if needed and that includes YOU. You should not focus all of your energy on the fact that there is a new dog in the home either, you should go about your business (do some dishes or cleaning). If you are nervous, stressed or excited- all of the dogs will pick up on that and it will become a bigger deal than it needs to be. My dogs have become so accustomed to this practice that they just approach the crate, smell for a bit, and then continue on their merry life. If your dogs are upset by the new dog then you should remove them- the point of this is to acclimate the new dog NOT stress them out further than they already have been, so if it is not going well, you should put the crate in separate room and give everyone more time to get used to the presence of a new dog in their home.

If all parties involved seem to be doing well, meaning they are not paying attention to each other and have totally accepted the fact that they are all in the same room without negative reactions, then you can start the one on one introductions inside the home. Beware- It can take hours to get to this point so be patient. You should do this with at least two adults- one to hold each dog on leash.

Remove all of your dogs from the home and begin with the friendliest of your dogs. If you are still unsure how the new dog will accept your dogs (or vice versa) you can use a cage muzzle to protect anyone from injury and, most importantly, to keep YOUR confidence that no one will get hurt. You are the catalyst that can set things off in the wrong direction, so if you are nervous or unsure, you need to do whatever it takes to feel comfortable with the introduction. If you decide to use a cage muzzle, it is vital that the dog with it on does not get attacked while they are defenseless, so if you are inexperienced and not feeling comfortable progressing to the next step then call someone who can help you (ex. us if it is one of our dogs!)

Another tool that I always use when introducing two dogs is the Gentle Leader, which is a head collar that gives you better control over the dog. This is NOT a muzzle and dogs with this on can still bite, but it gives you full control over their head, as well as, naturally calms the dog by hitting on pressure points.

Keep in mind that we are always here if you need us and if you don't feel comfortable with a dog in ANY way, you can and should contact us for help. The ultimate goal is to do everything as safely as possible and to avoid injury to the dogs or yourself and we are always happy to help