

Training Plan to Introduce Your Dog(s)

What is a dog-dog introduction, and why is it important?

The following is a plan made by KC Pet Project to conduct a safe introduction between two dogs that will be living in the same home. Dogs are successfully introduced slowly and carefully. Rushed or improper introductions may result in a dog fight. One of the most common ways people are bitten is when improperly breaking up a dog fight, so careful introductions reduce the chance of injury to both dogs and people in the household. The time it takes for two dogs to be successfully integrated will vary by dog and by household.

What are some common misconceptions when bringing home another dog?

MYTH: My roommates/housemates don't need to be involved.

FACT: Everyone in the household must know the plan and timeline for introductions; otherwise, the dogs may meet too soon. Meet with your roommates/housemates to make a plan before bringing the dog home or introducing the dogs.

MYTH: Dogs should be introduced on leash.

FACT: While being held on a leash, dogs may feel tension on their collar and react poorly. This document outlines a safe way to introduce the dogs by dropping the leash and letting it drag from each dog before they interact, allowing them to choose "flight" instead of "fight".

MYTH: The dogs will be able to meet in the house on the first day.

FACT: If the initial introduction goes poorly, it could negatively impact future introductions and delay the entire process. Establish separate spaces for each dog using a crate, separate room and/or baby gate. Remember, this process takes time so be patient.

MYTH: The dogs will be able to be left alone together unsupervised.

FACT: Dogs benefit from time apart. Dogs can grow tired of each other, and a fight could happen when no one is around to break it up. The dogs should never be left alone together unsupervised.

MYTH: I will be able to safely separate the dogs using my hands and body during a fight.

FACT: One of the most common ways people are bitten is while improperly breaking up a dog fight. Keeping startling/aversive tools handy and a leash dragging from both dogs will reduce the chance of injury to people.

MYTH: The dogs will be able to play with the same toys and eat from the same bowl.

FACT: Dogs may struggle with sharing. Pick up all food and toys when the dogs are getting to know each other. Put each of their beds, bowls, and toys in separate areas of the home.

MYTH: I can let one dog on the couch or give one dog extra attention without issue.

FACT: If one dog is treated differently or favored, it may result in jealousy between the dogs. Create the same rules and give equal attention to both dogs.

****If you are unable to proceed to the next step, keep the dogs separate and contact a private trainer or our Behavior Team at behavior@kcpetproject.org for additional help.****

Step 1. Prep Your Home

1. Make a plan with roommates/housemates to separate the dogs. Make it clear that the dogs must stay separate until told otherwise.
2. Prep yourself and your home with the following tools:

Aversive Tools

- Spray bottle of water (nozzle set to stream, not mist)
- Shake can (metal can or Altoid tin with rocks and/or pennies inside)
- [Pet Corrector](#)

Separation Tools

- Two standard 4' or 6' non-retractable nylon leashes
- Wire crate
- Baby gate

Why Use Aversive Tools?

- Aversive tools are a temporary measure to get a dog's attention to interrupt unwanted behaviors before they result in a fight.
- Aversive tools promote normal, healthy social behavior between dogs.
 - Aversive tools help communicate with dogs that aren't social enough to read or understand another dog's social cues.
 - Aversive tools are a way to speak for a dog that is uncomfortable or doesn't know how to correct another dog and to slow down play.

Correct Use of Aversive Tools

- Always start with a verbal correction.
 - Use a verbal marker, such as "eh-eh", before spraying the squirt bottle or shaking the shake can to correct the dog. Ideally, with time, a verbal correction by itself will make the dog think, "I know what's coming when I hear 'eh-eh', so I'm going to stop before I am squirted or they make that noise with the shake can."
- Aversive tools should not cause the dog pain.
- Start with the smallest correction; one spray or a light shake.
 - Starting small allows us to increase the intensity if needed.
 - The shake or spray should interrupt the dog's behavior and get the dog's attention so you are then able to give them information.
- Pet Corrector should ONLY be used when other aversive tools fail to interrupt the dogs.

Selecting a Useful Aversive Tool

- Selecting the best tool will take time and practice.
 - If the dog tries to play with the aversive by biting at the water or trying to grab the shake can in a playful manner, choose a different one.
 - When the aversive is a game, it no longer becomes a correctional tool.

3. Establish separate spaces for the dogs. Set up a crate for the new dog, and/or a baby gate to put in the doorway of the room where the new dog will reside.
4. Remove any resources, like toys or bones, from common areas the dogs will share.
5. Once the house is set up and everyone is on the same page, proceed with Step Two.

Step Two: Tandem Walks

Tandem walks require two handlers. The dogs shouldn't meet on leash. The goal of this walk is for the dogs to see each other without a negative response and to wear them out.

1. Grab a roommate, family member, or friend to help take the dogs on a walk.
2. Each handler will walk one dog outside the home.
3. If the dogs are both inside the home, let the first handler and dog exit and then have the next dog follow.
4. If one dog is already outside, have that dog start moving away from the home while the second person and dog exit the home.
5. Start with one dog on either side of the street leaving plenty of distance as both dogs continue to walk in the same direction.
6. Slowly move closer to each other.
 - o If the dogs are barking, lunging, growling, or showing lots of interest in one another, move farther apart until the dogs are more calm and maintain this distance for longer before trying to move closer.
 - o As you move closer together, each person should still maintain enough distance apart that the dogs are not able to access each other on leash.
7. Watch the body language of both dogs to ensure they are relaxed and calm. The dogs should remain calm and relaxed, and enjoy the walk.
8. If the tandem walk is successful, return home and proceed to Step Three with your calm, relaxed dogs.

****If the dogs are overly interested in one another, displaying on-leash reactivity, or are not relaxed and calm, end the tandem walk and contact KC Pet Project Behavior Team at behavior@kcpetproject.org . Keep in mind that their behavior on leash is not a predictor of their behavior off leash.****

Step Three: Separate in Home

Your new pup needs time to adjust to home life. Separating your dogs is key to a successful introduction. You may need to separate your new dog using a crate or baby gate more frequently while your pets are still warming up to one another. This is a-okay!

1. Return the dogs to their separate spaces *without* letting them interact.
 - a. Dogs may be separated using a baby gate and/or wire crate.
 - b. This allows them to still see, smell, and get used to one another's presence.
2. After the dogs have had a break from one another, allow them to greet through the baby gate and/or crate.
3. If the dogs are reactive--barking, lunging, growling--through the barrier, shut the door or block their view from one another.
4. Repeat Steps Two (Tandem Walks) and Three (Separate in the Home). Don't rush. Every introduction is different and may take days, weeks, or longer.
5. When the dogs show calm behavior near one another, proceed to Step Four.

Step Four: Slow, Controlled Introductions

Dog-dog introductions must be done with two handlers. Before your introductions, have all aversive tools, including a squirt bottle, shake can, and Pet Corrector, on you or within the area where the dogs will be meeting. Remove all toys, treats, and food from the space.

Successful interactions

- Play between the dogs should always be mutual. Although play can be fun, it also gives dogs a chance to communicate serious information.
- A comfortable dog will be loose and wiggly, not tense. As long as both dogs are loose and seem to be mutually enjoying themselves, it is not necessary to stop play. Let the dogs play without interruption; sometimes, when humans try to talk dog, we unintentionally start a fight.
- "Normal" play may mean different things for different dogs. Some dogs enjoy less physical play. Other dogs may enjoy tackling, mounting, and rough housing with

other dogs. Dogs that enjoy physical play may also use their mouths on other dogs. Vocalizations such as growling and barking often happen during play. *As long as both dogs seem to be enjoying it, it is okay to let play continue.*

- It's perfectly fine if the dogs ignore each other and coexist in the space instead of playing. Some dogs may tolerate another dog in their space but may not feel like playing with it. They should not be forced to play with each other.
- A dog being selective about how it likes to play is a natural part of being a dog. When a dog isn't comfortable or wants to stop the interaction, they should be able to tell the other dog by barking, snapping, or showing teeth. Corrections should be seen as a normal part of social interactions and it is healthy for a dog to tell another dog "no".

Avoiding a scuffle

- Dogs communicate when they are uncomfortable using combinations of sounds and body language, such as barking, showing teeth, growling, body checking, nipping, and snapping. The following are signs a dog may be uncomfortable:
 - a. Their entire body is tensed and stiff
 - b. They have a stiff high tail
 - c. Their tail is tucked between their legs
 - d. They duck down with their whole body low to the ground (not a play bow)
 - e. They have their ears back and flat against their head
 - f. They continually licks their lips and/or yawn
 - g. They have their hackles up (hair along their spine stands up)
 - h. They put their head over the other dog's neck
- The goal is to avoid a fight by pinpointing and interrupting actions that may escalate to a scuffle. If an aversive tool is required, remember to use your verbal "eh-eh" first and start with the smallest correction. The following are situations that may require us to become involved:
 - a. The play is not mutual between the dogs.
 - b. A dog is not correcting or stopping the other dog but looks like it is not enjoying play.
 - c. A dog is giving signals or corrections but the other dog is not listening or respecting the warnings.
 - d. A dog goes overboard with its warning and overcorrects the other dog by loudly barking, growling, and pursuing the other dog.
 - e. Rough, rowdy play is escalating and becoming too high energy between dogs that don't know each other well.
 - f. A dog is trying to make space and move away from another dog that keeps trying to interact and pursuing it.
 - g. While a dog is mounting a dog, the dog being mounted is barking, growling, turning their head and trying to mouth the other dog, trying to squeeze out from under the dog, and/ or attempting to run away, but not succeeding.

If the dogs engage in a scuffle,

1. Try not to use your hands or body to separate the dogs.
2. If the dogs are *not* holding on to each other, pick up the leashes dragging on the dogs to pull them away from each other.
3. If the dogs *are* holding on, grab a squirt bottle or shake can. Say a loud verbal correction and then squirt the dog's body or shake the can in the air.
4. If the aversive tools fail to separate the dogs, set off Pet Corrector near the dogs.
5. When the dogs let go of each other, use the leash on each dog to pull them apart.
6. Let the dogs calm down for a minute before checking each dog for injuries.
7. **Keep the dogs separate and contact a private trainer or the KC Pet Project Behavior Team before attempting another introduction.**

Introducing the dogs

1. Pick a large, neutral space that is securely fenced in like a backyard or *empty* dog park for the meeting.
2. Attach leashes to the collars on both of the dogs.
3. One dog and handler should exit the home, enter the yard, and walk far from the entrance. The handler should hold the dog's leash.
4. The second dog and handler will then exit the home and enter the yard.
5. The dogs should see one another and then be able to look away or look at you.
 - a. IF the dogs are barking, growling, lunging, or show a strong amount of interest in each other set up a baby gate in the doorway and allow them to meet first through the baby gate.
6. When the dogs are calm and have broken their focus from each other, drop the leashes and allow the dogs to meet and interact on their own. Do not force the interaction.
7. Remain neutral by giving them a lot of space and not interacting with either of them.
8. The dogs should communicate with each other.
9. Let them play for a bit on their own. Once you feel like the play has calmed and both dogs are relaxed, try giving pets to each of the dogs for a few seconds.
10. Have a few short introductions, no more than 30 minutes each, outside the home before allowing them to share space indoors.
11. Continue separating during feeding time or when the dogs are left alone.
12. After the dogs have had successful meetings, slowly let them spend more time together inside.

Step Five: Continued Management

- Establishing a routine is an easy way to let dogs know what is expected of them.
- Teaching your dog basic obedience skills establishes trust and a stronger bond. A strong bond encourages a dog to listen to your directions and corrections.
- Continue to supervise all interactions.
 - Slow down or stop play that is not mutual by using your tools.
 - Interrupt unwanted behavior between the dogs.
- Prevent resource guarding by separating the dogs before giving toys and treats, and distribute attention and affection equally.
- Understand that fights happen. Make an effort to learn what caused them to prevent the same fight from happening in the future.