

## Introducing Your New Dog to Other Dogs

Congratulations on your new edition to the family! Below are suggestions for how to introduce your new dog to other dogs in your home or life.

### Get Ready, Get Set...

Ideally, you'll want one handler per dog. One skilled handler, that is. Someone who panics and intervenes unnecessarily can botch the whole introduction by adding stress to dogs who are still sorting out relationships.

Barring skilled handlers, at least find handlers who are good at following instructions and don't succumb easily to hysterical behavior. If you can't find those, you're better off with fewer handlers, although you should have at least one other person present, if for no other reason than to help you if the situation gets out of hand.

### Location, Location, Location

It's best to introduce dogs in neutral territory – ideally outdoors, in a large, open, safely fenced space. The more trapped a dog feels, the more her stress will push her toward defensive aggression. Plus, when you do introductions in one dog's territory, it gives him the home-field advantage, and you risk displays of territorial aggression.

Optimum options include a fenced yard other than your own, an off-leash dog park at low-use time (as in no other dogs present), a tennis court (caution – many tennis courts understandably prohibit dogs), or a large, open, uncluttered indoor area such as someone's unfinished basement.



You may not always have the luxury of a safe fenced yard for introductions. Do on-leash greetings this way – with leashes loose. Both dogs appear reasonably relaxed about the greeting, although the Border collie is a little worried.

### Let's Begin!

Start with each dog on leashes on opposite sides of an enclosed space. Try to keep leashes loose, if possible. Watch the dogs' behavior. They should seem interested in each other, alert without excessive arousal. Ideally you'll see tails wagging at half-mast; soft, wriggling body postures; play bows; ears back; squinty eyes; no direct eye contact. These are clear expressions of non-aggressive social invitation. These dogs are showing friendly behavior!

Warning signs that the dogs may not be ready for a friendly encounter include stiffness in the body; standing tall; ears pricked hard forward; growling; hard direct eye contact; stiffly raised, fast-wagging tails; lunging on the leash; and aggressive barking.

If you see friendly social behavior, proceed with an approach until the dogs are about 10 feet apart. If they continue to show signs of friendliness, drop the leashes and let them meet. It is preferable to let dogs meet and greet off-leash; leashes tend to interfere with the dogs' ability to greet normally, and can actually induce dogs to give false body language signals.



This is an appropriate on-leash greeting: While the Aussie pup is nervous about the introduction, the loose leash allows him to approach (or not!) at his own comfort level.

For example, a tight leash can stiffen and raise a dog's front end, causing her to look more tense and provocative than she means to be, which in turn can cause the other dog to react on the offensive. A defensive dog who wants to retreat may feel trapped because of the leash and act aggressively because she can't move away. Otherwise friendly dogs can sometimes feel frustration if the leash is tight and their frustration can appear aggressive.

Initially, leave the leashes on, dragging freely on the floor, so you can grab them and separate the dogs easily if necessary. Monitor the greeting. You are likely to see some normal jockeying for position and some tension, as they sniff and circle, and then erupt into play. As soon as you can tell that they're getting along, remove leashes and let them play

unencumbered. Watch them! You want to ensure that the play doesn't escalate into excessive arousal (which can lead to aggression), but remember that it's normal and acceptable for dogs to growl and bite each other in play. As long as both dogs are enjoying the action, it's a good thing.

If you see warning signs as you approach with the dogs on leash, you'll need to proceed more slowly. Most commonly you'll see behavior ranging somewhere between completely relaxed and friendly and outright aggressive. You'll need to judge whether the intensity of the behavior is high enough that you need to stop and seek professional assistance, or low enough that you can proceed with caution.

If you do decide to proceed, interrupt any of the dogs' prolonged, hard eye contact by having the handlers divert their dog's attention with bits of tasty treats. Continue to work with the dogs in the others' presence, watching for signs of decreasing arousal/calming. Keeping the dogs as far apart as possible in the enclosed area, walk them around on loose leashes, gradually bringing them closer together until they are walking parallel to each other.

#### **Afraid to drop the leash?**

If you are reluctant to drop the leash for the greeting because you fear the introduction may turn unfriendly and you want to remain in control, you can keep ahold of the leash but move in with the dog at his/her pace so the leash is loose throughout the interaction. Often each dog will sniff the other dog's face and then rotate to sniff the back end. As the dogs rotate each handler should rotate too, to keep the leashes from tangling. If the leashes are not crossed it is easy to turn and walk away with your dog if the greeting turns tense.

#### **Stay calm!**

It's important that you stay calm and relaxed during this process. If you jerk or tighten the leash or yell at the dogs, you'll add stress to the situation and make it more difficult for them to relax.

Say you see signs that the dogs have relaxed with each other; this is where your experience and instincts come into play. You may decide to proceed with dropped-leash greetings. Or you may choose to end the introduction for the time being. It's better to err on the side of caution, and do several more on-leash sessions to make sure the dogs are comfortable with each other. Meanwhile, you'll need to manage the

dogs so they don't have free access to each other. If you're not confident in your judgment about body language, you may choose to enlist the help of a professional at this point in the process.

If tensions between the dogs escalate or maintain at the same level of intensity despite your on-leash work over several sessions, the wise choice may be to look for a different dog to adopt into your home. Alternatively, you may want to do ongoing work with a behavior professional to try to make the relationship work, knowing that management may be a large part of your life for the foreseeable future.

Be careful if you see no interaction between the two dogs you're introducing. What appears to be calm acceptance of each other may in fact be avoidance, where neither dog is comfortable with the other and they deal with it by not dealing with it? The problem with this is that sooner or later the dogs will interact if they're both living in your home, and the discomfort may well develop into aggression. It is important to see some interaction between dogs in order to make a decision about adoption.



Don't introduce dogs in a spot where one dog might guard or feel trapped, such as his car, crate, or even his home; he may be anxious, defensive, or territorial in these high-value locations.



Two-on-one is not such a good idea: The Border Collie is looking more nervous with her ears pinned back and a hind leg lifted. Don't overwhelm your dog!

### **Multi Dog Household?**

If you are introducing your new dog to a group of dogs, it is best to start with the easiest, more social dogs first, one at a time. Assuming all goes well with the one-on-ones, then try a threesome, adding an additional dog as their behavior shows dogs are relaxed.

### **Questions? Contact:**

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