INTRODUCING A NEW DOG TO YOUR DOG AT HOME

7 Tips for a Successful Dog Introduction

Dogs are social animals that establish relationships through interactions over time. Their roles within these relationships can change daily, so proper introductions are essential to set them up for success. Follow these steps to ensure a smooth transition when introducing a new dog to your home.

Adopting from Little Victories? We will schedule a date and time for a formal meet and greet with our behavior team on site before finalizing an adoption. We still recommend taking these steps upon bringing your new dog home.

1: Introduce One Dog at a Time

If you have multiple resident dogs, introduce them to the new dog one at a time. Meeting too many dogs at once can be overwhelming and may lead to conflict.

2: Choose a Neutral Location

To reduce territorial behavior, introduce the dogs in a neutral place, such as a park, where neither dog is familiar with the space. Walk both dogs about 10-15 feet apart. Gradually decrease the distance, but **avoid direct interaction while the dogs are on leashes.** Reward calm behavior with treats and praise. This step may take multiple attempts before moving forward, but that does not mean the dogs are incompatible. Give them time!

3: Watch for Body Language

Positive signs include a play bow, loose wagging tails, and sniffing the air in the direction of the other dog. Be cautious if you notice teeth-baring, deep growls, stiff-legged walking, or prolonged staring. Raised hackles (hair standing on end) indicate excitement or anxiety and a need for space. This should be considered alongside other body language cues.

If tension arises, calmly and immediately redirect the dogs' attention by getting them interested in something else. Be sure not to add tension by adding pressure to the leash. Keep it loose or soft.

4: Bringing the Dogs Home

Once the dogs have investigated and tolerate each other without fearful or aggressive responses from a distance, move to your backyard or a neutral fenced area. When they are paying attention to something other than each other, drop the leashes (leaving them attached to the dog) and let them interact naturally.

Do not force interaction or interfere with their natural investigations. It is normal for dogs to ignore each other at first or to communicate with each other through a growl or lip curl. Let them communicate with each other and get comfortable. Watch their body language for signs of inappropriate corrections or communication.

When bringing them indoors:

- Keep both dogs on leash (or under complete control).
- Let the new dog explore alone first.
- Remove potential triggers like food bowls, toys, and bones.
- Bring both dogs into a large room (not a narrow hallway or doorway) while on leashes before allowing free interaction.
- Be patient — adjustment takes time but they will develop a relationship.

5: Supervise Until You're Confident

Observe how the dogs interact in various situations, such as when the doorbell rings or during play. If you're not home or cannot supervise, separate them to prevent unsupervised conflicts. Consider using a crate for the new dog in a separate room, even if the resident dog is allowed to free roam.

6: Introducing Puppies to Adult Dogs

Puppies may not recognize when an adult dog has had enough. Well-socialized adults will set limits with a growl or snarl without harming the puppy. However, poorly socialized adults may set limits in more inappropriate ways. Never leave a puppy alone with an adult dog until you're sure they can interact safely. Give the adult dog breaks from the puppy to prevent frustration.

7: Additional Tips for Success

- Remove toys, chews, and food bowls initially to prevent resource guarding.
- Provide separate food and water bowls, beds, and toys for each dog.
- Supervise play until you know how each dog reacts to excitement.
- Feed dogs in separate areas and remove bowls after meals.
- Confine dogs separately when unsupervised.
- Give older or lower-energy dogs a quiet space to retreat from a younger, more energetic dog.
- If your current dog is struggling with behavior problems, it may not be the best time to get another dog. Adding a dog to your family will not solve your dog's behavior problems. Address those issues first.

When to Seek Professional Help

If introductions don’t go smoothly, consult a professional trainer immediately. Dog fights can cause serious injuries, and unresolved conflicts become harder to fix over time.

Taking the time to properly introduce dogs can set the foundation for a peaceful and happy home for everyone involved!