

# INTRODUCING NEW DOGS TO THE PACK

What's the best way to introduce a new dog to my dog or dogs?

This is one of the questions we get most often. Introducing dogs and helping them to peacefully co-exist can be a major challenge. With so many nuances in play, and so many opportunities to make mistakes, it's an easy one to struggle with.

Whether you're adopting a new dog for yourself, doing foster work, or just having a friend or family member's dog over, there are some solid ways to go about this, and there are some ways that are perfect setups for disaster.

Here's a list of what we've found to work best, and what to watch out for. Be aware that these are macro, all-encompassing principles, not a step-by-step introduction process.

- Create an atmosphere of rules, structure, and leadership. This atmosphere will pull the best out of dogs and discourage their less-best. Meaning, if you actually share rules, structure, and lead with believability, dogs will make their best choices. This is where all the good stuff or bad stuff starts. We all know when a leader is present, and we behave accordingly. If you understand this concept, you're way ahead of the game...and have a much better chance of success.
- Don't create excitement. Understand that excitement—play, affection, high-pitched, excited talk—is often the gateway to elevated states in dogs. These elevated states are almost always present when dogs get into trouble. When working on introducing dogs, remember that calm and cool are always your best friends.
- Don't create competition. Dogs are super happy to fight over resources. Food, toys, chews, affection, furniture, and proximity to you (being on or near you) are the most common triggers, but there can be far more.
- Don't be in a rush. The biggest cause of dog fights and scuffles are from owners moving too fast. Time is often your biggest aid. Just allowing the novelty of newness to wear off can make things so much easier. Be aware that novelty creates excitement, concern, stress, anxiety. So move slow.
- Make sure your own dog or dogs are well-behaved. If you're starting with a mess you've got an awfully good chance of having a bigger mess when you bring another dog into the mix. If your dogs are frantic, pushy, demanding, bullying, possessive, and out of their trees, the chance of having problems are extremely high. Make sure your dogs are polite, chilled out, listening to you, and as calm as can be initially.
- Make sure the newcomer is well-behaved. If you bring a frantic, pushy, demanding, bullying, possessive, out-of-its-tree dog into your home or yard you've got a very high probability of your dogs disagreeing with the new dog. Fights or scuffles are almost guaranteed.
- Don't introduce them. Yep, you heard me. The best way for dogs to feel comfortable and develop positive feelings towards each other is to simply exist around each other. Think of existence as a low-stress introduction, and think of actually meeting and interacting as a high-stress introduction.



The longer you allow them to just exist around each other, the better your chances of a "no big deal" actual meeting. The more they see each other without interacting, the less they care about each other. (How? Place command, walking together, or in crates around each other.)

- Be aware and honest with yourself if you have a resource guarder, scrapper, ultra-dog-insecure, or bully in your crew. This has to be dealt with or managed heavily to avoid fallout. Don't live in denial or make excuses. If you do, you'll find that the dogs will reveal the truth pretty quickly. Be honest and address it, or suffer the consequences.
- Use crates whenever leaving dogs unattended. Do not leave dogs alone together who are new to each other...even for brief moments. Even if they've been angels in your presence. In your absence many things (door bells, delivery people, a squirrel or cat in the yard, objects or spaces in the house) can trigger competition or over-arousal...and fights.
- Don't feed dogs close together. Never feed new dogs out of the crate near each other. This is an easy one to understand (it's dog fight central). Also, don't feed in crates near each other without something separating and obscuring the view of each other. Even in crates, and even from across the room, a dog could feel threatened or competitive when eating. Once out, that tension could create a fight...or a slow-building grudge.
- Address crappy behavior immediately and firmly...from any party. Whether it's your dog or the newcomer, if someone is being a brat or demanding, or a bully, or just posturing, tense, or stink-eyeing, address it straight away! Don't let the dogs feel they have to handle it. It's your job to keep the peace and set the tone. Do it, or the dogs will.
- Don't just toss dogs together and cross your fingers that it'll all be cool. Often it won't. This is the "Hail Mary," lazy, uninformed move, and should be avoided at all costs.
- Learn to trust your gut. This means, don't just look at the surface with the dogs. How does it feel? Is there tension? Are there nuances of crappiness? Or are things feeling relaxed and comfortable? Without a professional guiding you, you'll have to become the person to judge this. You're able to feel these nuances in people. That means you can develop the same ability with dogs...if you really work at it.
- Hire a professional to help guide you. Be sure he or she is actually familiar with this kind of work. Ask them what their approach would be. If it goes against the principles listed here, I'd look elsewhere.

While all this might sound like overkill, I assure you, after seeing hundreds of fighting dogs come through TGD, this is the stuff—done, or not done—that typically creates the problems. Also understand that starting off right is about 4 bazillion times easier than trying to fix relationships that have gone south. Understand that grudges aren't just for humans. Dogs build and act out on grudges, just like we do. Once built, they're extremely hard to dismantle. You're much better off taking the slow, over-cautious, "overkill" approach and never needing to see a behavior mod specialist, than you are rushing things.

Be aware, any time you bring dogs together who are unfamiliar with each other, you run the risk of trouble. This is serious stuff and demands a serious approach.

