



Dog to Dog Introductions

Bringing home a new dog can be a fun and exciting experience for all the human family members. However, what about your current resident dog? How can you best ensure that your resident dog and your newly adopted dog develop a safe and healthy relationship?

Here's a brief how-to guide to facilitate positive and rewarding introductions that develop into a joyful bond for all the canine members of the family.

Neutral Location

Even if your dogs have already met in a shelter, it is best to have them meet again somewhere away from your home. Plan on having space to move away if needed, in as low stress an environment as possible.

1. Parallel Walk

1. Choose **the right equipment**. Dogs should not be on a retractable leash (prone to failure/injury), or any equipment designed to cause discomfort (prong/shock/choke chain).
2. Make sure you have HIGH VALUE treats. We mean lunch meat, cheese, hot dog, etc., cut up small. Store bought training treats often are not high value enough in exciting/distracting situations!
3. **Instead try a 6-8ft leash, or (if comfortable) a 10-12ft long line.** Long lines (such as those from hightailhikes.com) can start out being used at standard 6-8 ft lengths, then can give dogs a larger radius if meet is going well while still maintaining the safety of an on-leash interaction. A well-fitted harness is ideal.
4. Wide open environment with natural opportunities to sniff is preferred (ex. open field/park vs sidewalk on a busy street).
5. Use a **separate handler for each dog**, each with a treat pouch or pocket full of high-value treats.
6. Prepare to communicate with the other handler. Discuss/plan ahead of time and share observations/ideas before.
7. Walk each dog in the same direction with **at least 10 feet between them** and keep as much distance as necessary for the dogs to feel comfortable (even if that distance is significantly more!). *Gauge comfort level by offering treats.* If your dogs are not eating high value food (hot dogs/lunch meat/cheese, all cut up small), you may be too close.
8. **Look for signs of concern** from the dogs, like raised hair on their neck or back, barking, lunging, whining, growling, fixed stares, or inability to take treats. If you see any of these signs, move the dogs farther apart before continuing the walk.

9. At this comfortable distance, **any time one dog looks at the other, give the looking dog a treat.** You can offer treats directly to the dog's mouths, or offer a treat scatter on the ground. Scatters can work to break line of sight, and help decrease heart rate as dogs use their noses.
10. **Slowly decrease the distance** between the dogs while continuing to give treats for looking at each other. If the dogs show any of the above-listed signs of discomfort, calmly move them farther apart until they relax, and you can begin again at a greater distance. Avoid corrections such as scolding, telling your dog "no," or jerking the leash. This can add additional tension or frustration for the dogs.
11. Once the dogs are comfortable walking within about 5 feet from each other, **allow one to walk in front of the other. Then, switch.** Continue offering treats for looking at each other the whole time.
12. Finally, **allow the dogs to walk side by side**, remembering to constantly treat for both loose leash walking and looking at each other.

2. Meet on Leash

1. Keep a loose leash. Tightened leashes can increase the stress of the dogs.
2. Be ready to "leash dance." You may need to move around with the dogs as they investigate each other to avoid the leashes becoming tangled or caught.
3. Do not back each other or the dogs into a corner. Always have a clear escape route.
4. Avoid shouting or yelling.
5. If the dogs appear tense (freeze for more than two seconds, growl, or snap); a dog startles or tries to escape or hide; or the meeting otherwise does not appear to go well, each handler should try to get their dog's attention with treats, a squeaker, a happy voice, and movement while separating the dogs again and going back to parallel walking.
6. If the dogs do well with the meeting, take them to an enclosed area where leashes can be dropped.

Build Positive Associations

From the very beginning, it's important that both dogs understand that good things happen to them when in the presence of the other dog. Use treats liberally, a happy voice, and avoid any scolding or punishing.

Adult Dogs and Puppies

Puppies often do not have the communication skills that adult dogs have and may not know how to appropriately interact with an adult dog. We do not want to punish an adult dog for correcting a puppy, but *ideally we want to set up the environment so that the adult dog is not set up to NEED to correct the puppy. It is our job as responsible guardians to make sure we are NOT leaning on our older dog to "teach" the puppy via corrections.* At best, this can result in an adult dog who is less than enthusiastic about spending time with the puppy. At worst, it can result in a fearful or reactive puppy, OR a puppy who (when they get older/larger) feels much more comfortable using

those corrections (growling/snapping) at the older dog, sometimes to inappropriate degrees. This is a common problem, and avoiding creating it is MUCH easier than trying to fix it later!

Instead:

- **Practice being able to call your puppy to you, each time resulting in a very tasty treat.** Practice this OUT OF CONTEXT from when your dogs are together, so your puppy has some muscle memory with it. That way you have the beginnings of a tool you can use to separate your dogs when necessary.
- **Set up areas where you can encourage your puppy to take breaks.** This might be an exercise pen with exciting chews and toys, a crate with a snuffle mat full of treats, or other area where they can have fun away from the adult dog.
- **Preemptively watch BODY LANGUAGE during interactions** (see our Decoding Dog Play handout for tips). When you begin to see LOW level signs of discomfort from the adult dog, preemptively call the puppy away (using your practice above) from play and into the break areas. If needed, move your adult dog out of line of sight to decrease frustration for the puppy.
- **If needed, leave a drag line on one or both dogs** so that if necessary you can step on/pick up a lead without having to get close to the two dogs if one cannot be called away from play.

At Home

Keep in mind that moving from an outdoor space to inside a home can present additional challenges. Tighter spaces are more tense (think strangers on a street vs in a crowded elevator). Use management (leash), especially if one dog is more eager to interact than the other.

Continue to supervise all interactions. If you are unable to supervise, separate.

Continue to use yummy treats and ample praise when the dogs are interacting together to build positive associations.

Ensure each dog always has a safe space in your home – a space where he/she can get away from the other dog, such as a crate, or gated area.

Feed dogs separately! Use separate rooms, crates, or with a baby gate between them and provide separate watering stations. This will help reduce stress and conflict that may occur due to a perceived lack of resources.

Give adult dogs **LOTS** of **preemptive** breaks from puppies.

Keep the space clear of resource guarding risks. Do not leave high value items such as food, bones, treats and/or favorite toys lying around.

Several short sessions are better than a few long sessions. It's okay for your dogs to primarily live in separate spaces for the first few weeks.

- **Try to end sessions on a positive note.** Better to cut the meeting short while things are still going well than to wait until feelings are hurt!

What if My Dogs Still Don't Get Along?

Sometimes it takes more than a day of parallel walks for dogs to feel safe in each other's company. This does not mean they will never get along. If this applies to you.

1. Take them home and *keep them separated* either by placing them in separate rooms or by utilizing a crate rotation.
2. Some dogs do best living in the same house for a week or two before beginning introductions. *Do not rush the process.*
3. Take care that every time the dogs see each other through the baby gate, a crate, or at a distance, you are generously showering them with treats until *seeing each other becomes the best part of their day.*
4. Once they can see, hear, and smell each other without any negative reaction; *they will be ready to try that parallel walk again.*