

Introducing Your Dog to a New Dog



As of 2007–2008, there were nearly 75 million pet dogs in the United States, living in nearly 45 million U.S. homes. Although the majority of dog guardians (63%) own just one dog, 25% own two, and 12% own three or more. So if you've decided to get a second or third dog, you're in good company!

Adding another dog to your household can bring you and your current dog more fun and companionship. However, it's important to realize that your current dog, might feel similar to how you might feel if your parents picked your friends and then told you to share your toys with them. In the long run, things will probably work out fabulously, but in the beginning it's a very smart idea to take a few extra steps to make everyone feel good about the new arrangement. This article provides some guidelines for making smooth and safe introductions and ensuring that your dogs' relationship gets off to a great start.

Maximizing the potential for a great relationship between your new dog and your current dog is a two-step process. It involves the actual introduction and then management of the new dog in your home. We'll start with introductions and then give you guidelines for helping your dogs through the initial transition weeks of being together in your home.

Introductions

- Leave your current dog at home when you pick up your new dog. One of the worst things you can do is to just throw the two of them together in your car and hope for the best!
- Introduce your dogs on neutral territory, like on a short walk through your neighborhood, in a nearby park or in a friend's yard. Have two people, one to handle each dog, while keeping the dogs on leashes.
- To minimize tension, try to keep the dogs' leashes loose so that they're not choking or feeling pressure on their throats.
- Don't force any interaction between the dogs. If the dogs ignore each other at first, or if one dog seems reluctant to interact with the other, that's okay. Give both dogs time to get comfortable. They'll interact when they're ready.
- Make the introduction positive and light-hearted. As the dogs sniff and get acquainted, encourage them in a happy tone of voice. At first, allow just a few seconds of sniffing. Then gently pull the dogs away from each other and let them walk around with their handlers. After a minute or two, you can lead the dogs back together and allow another several seconds of sniffing. These brief greetings help keep the dogs' interactions calm and prevent escalation to threats or aggression. You can also interrupt their interactions with simple obedience. After a brief sniff, lead the dogs apart, ask them to sit or lie down, and then reward them with treats.

- Closely observe the dogs' body language. Their postures can help you understand what they're feeling and whether things are going well or not. Loose body movements and muscles, relaxed open mouths, and play bows (when a dog puts his elbows on the ground and his hind end in the air) are all good signs that the two dogs feel comfortable. Stiff, slow body movements, tensed mouths or teeth-baring, growls and prolonged staring are all signs that a dog feels threatened or aggressive. If you see this type of body language, quickly lead the dogs apart to give them more distance from each other. Again, practice simple obedience with them individually for treats, and then let them interact again—but this time more briefly. Please see our [Canine Body Language](#) [1] article for illustrations of dogs showing what various feelings look like in dog body language.
- Once the dogs' greeting behaviors have tapered off and they appear to be tolerating each other without fearful or threatening behavior, you're ready to take them home. Before you take them inside, walk them together around your house or apartment building.
- Be patient. Bringing a new dog home requires that everyone make some adjustments, especially your current pets. And it will take time for your dogs to build a comfortable relationship.

The First Couple of Weeks at Home

- It's crucial to avoid squabbles during the early stages of your dogs' new relationship. Pick up all toys, chews, food bowls and your current dog's favorite items. When dogs are first forming a relationship, these things can cause rivalry. These items can be reintroduced after a couple of weeks, once the dogs have started to develop a good relationship.
- Give each dog his own water and food bowls, bed and toys. For the first few weeks, only give the dogs toys or chews when they're separated in their crates or confinement areas.
- Feed the dogs in completely separate areas. Pick up bowls when feeding time is over. (Some dogs will compete over bowls that recently contained food.)
- Keep the dogs' playtime and interactions brief to avoid overstimulation and overarousal, which can lead to fighting.
- Confine the dogs in separate areas of your home whenever you're away or can't supervise their interactions.
- Give your new dog his own confinement area. When the dogs are separated, it might be a good idea to let them get to know each other through a barrier, like a baby gate. Your new dog should be gated in his confinement area, and your current dog should be free to move around and visit when he wants to.
- When the dogs are interacting, interrupt any growling or bullying behavior with a phrase like "Too bad," and then quickly separate them for several minutes. Then allow them to be together again. If your dogs seem to react poorly to each other often, don't hesitate to contact a professional who can help you, such as a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB), a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) who's experienced in treating problems between dogs. Please see our article, [Finding Professional Help](#) [2], to locate a professional in your area.
- Be sure to sincerely praise your dogs when they are interacting nicely.
- Spend time individually with each dog. Give each of them training time with you and playtime with other dogs outside your home.
- If your dogs are very different in age or energy level, be sure to give the older or less energetic one his own private space where he can enjoy rest and down time.

- When your cat comes, toss her a treat. Praise and treat your dog as well if he behaves calmly in her presence. Do this several times each day for a couple of days. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats and vice versa.
- If your dog overreacts to your cat and does something that makes your cat back away from him, distract him and get his attention focused on you. Avoid accomplishing this by using leash corrections. Instead, get your dog's attention by asking him to sit or lie down. Use treats to reward him for his fabulous obedience when something as interesting and distracting as your cat is nearby! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate and get closer to your dog or to retreat if she wants to. Reward her any time she approaches the baby gate by tossing her treats.
- Let your cat set the pace. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting her into a crate or carrier or restricting her movement in any way. If she doesn't seem afraid of your dog, or if she even tries to jump over the gate to see him, you can introduce them in your living room or another large room with your dog on leash. Once you're in the larger room, make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. She should have the freedom and room to retreat, run and hide, slip beneath a piece of furniture where the dog can't follow, or jump up on something that puts her above your dog. Continue introductions until your pets interact in a calm, friendly manner. Cats often bat at a dog they accept with their claws sheathed or rub against him, and dogs respond by gently nudging back or offering a play bow.
- Keep your dog on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold it firmly in case your dog decides to try to chase your cat. Use your recall and "leave it" exercises if your dog starts nosing or following your cat and she seems perturbed. When you ask your dog to come to you or leave your cat alone and he responds, be sure to give him a special treat.
- If your dog seems friendly or cautious, not much intervention on your part is required except to praise and reward your dog for his good manners and your cat for her tolerance.
- Be careful to watch your cat as well as your dog. One well-aimed cat paw with all claws extended can cause serious injury to a dog.
- Interrupt any chasing, barking or agitated behavior from your dog by using a leash to move him away from your cat. Redirect his attention to another activity, or ask him to do some easy obedience exercises for food rewards. To redirect your cat's attention, call her name and use treat rewards like you practiced before bringing your new dog home. Avoid scolding your dog, yelling at him or jerking on his leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your cat and dog to associate each other with pleasant experiences. You don't want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and that bad things happen when the other pet is around. Dogs are more likely to engage in chase or prey behavior when they're tense or aroused, and cats develop many undesirable behaviors—such as urine marking, excessive grooming, hiding and aggression—when they're stressed or anxious.
- When you're not around or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of your house. Most dogs and cats can share a home in harmony once they've gradually become accustomed to each other over time. However, if your dog chases your cat or ever shows intolerance toward your cat in your presence—such as growling when she walks past while he's chewing a bone or being petted by you—keep them separated in your absence.
- Your dog shouldn't have access to your cat's litter box. If he does, it will be highly stressful to your cat, and your dog might eat the feces and litter.
- To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding her on a high surface, like a windowsill, a dresser, a shelf or cat tree furniture.

