

How to Introduce Dogs

When you're introducing two dogs to each other, first impressions matter. How the dogs interact in their first few encounters can set the tone for their entire relationship, so follow these steps to set their relationship up for success.

Let them get to know each other slowly

Throwing them together in the back yard and letting them work it out can lead to heartbreak, and occasionally serious injury, if the integration fails.

Have the dogs meet on leash

Keep this meeting on neutral territory like a neighbor's yard, a training center, or a tennis court. Have both dogs on-leash. Take the dogs for a walk together, keeping 10 feet between them so that they can't greet each other or stare. The idea is to acclimate them to each other's presence without causing tension.

Have the dogs meet with the leashes dragging

Keep this meeting on neutral territory. Avoid problem areas like gates, doorways, or closely confined space: The more room they have to move, the less tension there will be. Wait two minutes while they sniff each other, then call them away. If they start to play and it seems to be going well, let them play for a few minutes and then end the session. End each initial session on a good note!

Have the dogs meet at home

First in the yard, then inside the house. Before the in-house introduction, take the resident dog out to the yard, then bring your new dog inside. Bringing the new dog inside to meet your resident dog can cause a negative reaction. Keep each interaction short and pleasant. If signs of tension arise, separate the dogs immediately and try again later. Remember that the introduction will set the tone for their relationship, so it's important to set everyone up for success.

Keep the dogs separate while you are away

Either in separate rooms or crates. This is both to prevent fighting and injuries, and to prevent your new dog from developing behavior like chewing and house soiling.

Work to prevent conflict

While dogs can settle minor disputes with each other (such as growling the other off of a toy or their own food bowl), they shouldn't be limiting each other's access to you, your family or common areas of the home. In multi-dog households, there isn't usually a dominant dog or submissive dog. Instead, dogs' roles change depending on the context involved. For example, a dog that claims access to a favorite toy may let the other dog claim the couch. Reward polite behavior and manage the environment to prevent conflicts from developing.