

The Right and Wrong Ways to Bring Home a New Dog

You only get one chance to do it right - and if you make this mistake, you can set the stage for a rocky relationship between your current dog and your new one. Dogs are social animals and their social units have hierarchy, so to minimize disruption and unrest, be sure to follow these steps.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Choose a spot on neutral ground for the dogs' first meeting — a park, a neighbor's fenced yard or a large indoor training facility
- With both dogs on a leash, walk the dogs closer to each other, paying close attention to their body language
- If the initial introduction goes well, the next step is to go for a walk; allow the dogs to walk parallel to each other, but leave a buffer zone
- If all is going well, move to a safe enclosed space and drop the leashes to let them greet each other
- Give the new dog a chance to explore your home on her own; then bring your current dog in
- To facilitate a smooth beginning, try to keep your current dog's schedule the same and make a point to give separate attention to each dog

Adding a dog to your family is an exciting time, but one that must be given careful consideration. As the old saying goes, you only get once chance to make a first impression, and you want to be sure that the introduction goes well. While you may be tempted to throw open your front door and surprise your current dog with a new furry pal, this could make your current dog feel threatened — setting the stage for a rocky relationship.

While dogs are social animals and often enjoy sharing a home with other dogs, remember that their social units have hierarchy. The introduction of a new dog will disrupt the hierarchy that's present and a new pecking order will be established.

Setting the Stage for a Positive Introduction

The first step to introducing a new dog to your family begins before you've even brought her home. First, choose a spot on neutral ground to have their first meeting. Your dog views your home as her territory, so ideally this spot should be elsewhere — a park, a neighbor's fenced yard or a large indoor training facility (set up a time for introduction purposes, when only your two dogs will be present).

If you choose a park, go during nonpeak hours.¹ You're looking for a calm, quiet space free from distractions and other dogs. Outdoors is typically best, as introductions indoors can make the pups feel trapped and heighten territorial feelings. As for timing, choose a time when the dogs are well exercised and lower on energy.

Avoid new introductions if either dog has pent up energy and hasn't had a chance to get in a good run or play session. Also, be sure all introductions are one-on-one. Do not unleash your three dogs onto the new dog all at once, as this is likely to make the dog fearful or defensive.

Pay Close Attention to Body Language

Once you've chosen the place and time, you're ready for the first introduction. You'll need a partner to help you. Each person will keep one dog on a leash. Gradually walk the dogs closer to each other, paying close attention to their body language. The dogs will be close to one another but not given the opportunity to physically interact.

Signs that the dogs are happy include wagging tails or playful antics. A bit of alertness or tension in the beginning is normal as well. But if either dog appears aggressive — such as lunging toward the other dog, snarling, snapping or barking excessively — seek professional help before proceeding further.

Also keep an eye out for signs of fear, such as a tucked tail. And if your dog runs back to your side and sticks to you like glue, don't try to force further interaction until your dog is ready.

Time for a Walk

If the initial introduction goes well, the next step is to go for a walk. Allow the dogs to walk parallel to each other, but leave a buffer zone — just enough space so they're aware of each other but not too close. Take a leisurely stroll, giving the dogs time to sniff along the way, including investigating potty spots to get to know more about each other.

You can also double-back along the same path, giving each dog a chance to sniff the other dog's trail.² If all is going well, move to a safe enclosed space and drop the leashes to let them greet each other. This is the first time they'll be able to actually sniff one another, so it's important to leave the leashes attached at this point, so it's easier to step in and separate the dogs if necessary.

Give them a few minutes together, monitoring their interaction closely, then pick up the leashes and go for another brief walk together. Remember, too, that your mood can influence the meeting. It's important that you stay calm and avoid getting stressed, which will only make the dogs more likely to become tense.

Introducing Your New Pup to Your Home

After the initial introduction, you can introduce your new dog to your home. Ideally, have a partner take your current dog for a walk while the new dog gets a chance to investigate the new surroundings. After she's had time to explore, move to an open room clear of toys, beds and foods, which could escalate tension. Then, bring your current dog home and allow the dogs to interact under supervision.

In most cases, dogs will figure out their family social status and live together peacefully. To facilitate a smooth beginning, try to keep your current dog's schedule the same and make a point to give separate attention to each dog, including going for solo walks and having individual playtime sessions.

Mealtime can also be kept separate, either in different rooms or separated via a doggy gate. Be sure each dog is able to finish its food and don't let the other dog hover or try to eat from the other bowl. While some dogs enjoy sleeping together, you should also provide separate beds for each dog, so each has its own space to retreat to.

If you'll be gone, separate the dogs into their own areas until you're sure they can peacefully coexist. All dogs will have their own timetable when it comes to the adjustment period, but dogs coming from a shelter may require extra time to feel safe and secure. Senior dogs may also require additional time to adjust.

Flower essences and dog appeasing pheromone (DAP) sprays and diffusers can be beneficial to diffuse any anxiety during the adjustment period. If, however, you notice signs of aggression, avoidance or escalating tension, enlist the help of a behavior professional who can assess the situation and help make the relationship work out.

Sources and References

^{1, 2} [PetMD March 18, 2020](#)
