



Newbies News: Socialization: Introducing Your Puppy to Other Dogs

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Whether you are bringing a new dog into your home to live with preexisting dogs, or just introducing your dog to another strange dog, there is a right way and a wrong way to socialize canines. You do not want to make dog introductions the wrong way because it could end up in a terrible dog fight that risks injury to the dogs and the people trying to break it up. One poor lapse in judgment can leave your dog scarred psychologically for the rest of its life. Usually, once a dog has been attacked, it will always be aggressive when meeting new dogs and perceive all strange dogs as a threat. Therefore great care should be given when bringing two new dogs together. Dogs are pack animals and they instinctively seek to establish a hierarchy of dominance when they are forced to be together. It is of utmost importance that the human be the alpha or the pack leader. Each dog must know you will protect them from the other dog and so there is not a need for them to act in an aggressive defensive manner. They must also know that if they do show aggression towards another dog, then you as the pack leader will give them strong correction for their unacceptable behavior.

When introducing two dogs to one another, the key factor is control. It is best if introductions can be made with one dog being confined to a crate and the other dog allowed to approach and sniff the crate while on lead in case a firm correction needs to be given because of growling, barking or other aggressive behaviors. If the situation does not allow for the use of a crate when making introductions then without exception, the two dogs must always be on leads that are held by people who are strong enough to maintain complete control of the dogs. Keep the leash loose, because a taut lead creates a measure of tension in the dogs. As the dogs approach one another, set them at ease with your voice. Communicate to them that it is okay and this is not a threatening situation. Closely observe the dogs' body language. You want to see a wagging or relaxed tail. If your dog drops its tail then it is stressed and unsure, so boost its confidence. Watch for hair rising up on their backs as this is a sign of aggression. If your dog hides behind you or gets between your legs, then it is looking for your protection, so ease them into the introduction and do not be too forceful. Reassure the dogs that you will protect them so there is no need for fear. Ideally, you would like to see both dogs take the posture of a "play bow" where they go down to the ground in the front with their rear in the air, inviting the other dog to

come and play. This is body language where two dogs say to one another, "I am not afraid of you nor do I want to hurt you but I want to play with you." Allow the dogs to sniff one another but do not allow mounting nor posturing where one dog puts his head over the other dog's shoulder and pushes down, because these are acts of dominance and can create a challenge to prove who is top dog by fighting. If you are dealing with two dominant dogs that give you great concern then you may want to muzzle both dogs for the introductions and until you are comfortable with their interactions. It is not advisable to let dogs run loose to romp and play together until they have spent a lot of time together on leash and under control and you feel very confident that they are accepting of one another. Personally I never let two of my Rottweilers of the same gender run loose in the yard. Same sex dogs can be perfectly fine one moment and the next moment something can trigger a terrible fight. The rewards of them running and playing together are just not worth the risks involved in my opinion.

Allow me to give you a few words of warning. Be careful about toys when you have two dogs together as this can lead to article aggression. Realize that your dog will not like and may not tolerate a strange dog jumping up on you. Jealousy can be a real escalator that leads to a dog fight. Watch for stare downs between two dogs because this is usually a precursor before the two engage in a fight. Of course food can also cause a fight. Dogs tend to be very territorial so it is best to introduce two strange dogs on neutral grounds so they do not feel compelled to protect their home turf from an unwanted intruder. Never take the approach that you are just going to put dogs together and let them work it out for themselves. Such thinking is just stupid! It is highly recommended that you enroll your puppy in a "socialization class" after completing all puppy vaccines. This is a great opportunity for them at a young age to begin interacting with other breeds. It is also good to have them in a group obedience class as they get older to continue their animal socialization. While dog parks can be a good experience for furthering their social manners, just remember that not everyone at the dog park maintains proper control of their pets, so be observant to see potential problems before they occur.



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