

## Dog Introductions for a Multi-dog Household

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Many dogs enjoy the company of another dog. Having a multi-dog household can be enriching for both the dogs and the humans in the family, but it requires diligent planning and management to ensure that everyone can live together in harmony.

Dogs have preferences just like people do. Some are very social – they love to play and share their space with other dogs just about all the time. Others are a bit more selective – they like to spend time with some dogs who have a similar energy level or like to do similar things together, but don't like to spend time with all other dogs. Some dogs prefer not to interact with dogs at all, choosing the company of their human friends instead. Before deciding to adopt an additional dog into your family, it's important to know where your current dog falls on that spectrum. Dogs can certainly learn to practice new or different behaviors around other dogs, but not without a lot of careful management and training. Successful integration of a new dogs into a home with an existing dog happens most often with dogs who truly enjoy spending time with each other, or minimally have a mutual understanding of sharing space without bothering one another. A good place to start when trying to determine whether or not your dog might enjoy living with another dog is to walk with, play with, and have indoor or overnight visits with a well-matched friend or family member's dog.

**MANAGE FIRST:** It is a good idea to have a thoughtful plan prior to bringing a new pet home. Avoid putting your new and resident dog together right away with the hopes that they will “work things out”. When you cannot supervise your dogs together, use confinement of one of the pets in a room or crate. This may be something you do for the life of your dogs. Even the best dog friends can get into scuffles, so it is better to avoid this by confining one animal so they remain safe in your absence.

**REWARD CALM BEHAVIOR:** Try to have each introduction be a **positive or neutral**. Use treats and/or petting for both pets. Carry treats with you or stash treats in small containers around in the different parts of your home where the animals cannot get to them. Ask relatives or friends to assist you as you may need two people to reward good behavior for both dogs.

**SAFETY ZONES:** Ensure there are safe, comfortable places for both dogs to rest away from each other, separated by a physical barrier. Both should also have a **“safety zone”** where they have access to their own bed, water bowl, toys, etc. that the other dog doesn't have access to throughout their transition.

**PATIENCE IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS:** Recently adopted animals require a period of time to decompress as they transition into their new environment with their new family, regardless of whether or not their new family includes another animal. Likewise, having a new dog in your home can be quite the adjustment for a resident dog, even for animals who have successfully lived with another animal before. Being patient and progressing through your plan slowly is your **best** chance at creating lasting, positive relationships between your established dog and your new dog.

### Pay close attention to body language:

*Calm dogs:* Low/neutral tail position with gentle, sweeping wag, relaxed muscles along the dog's body and around his ears, eyes and mouth. Dogs exhibiting calm body language can continue with supervised interaction.

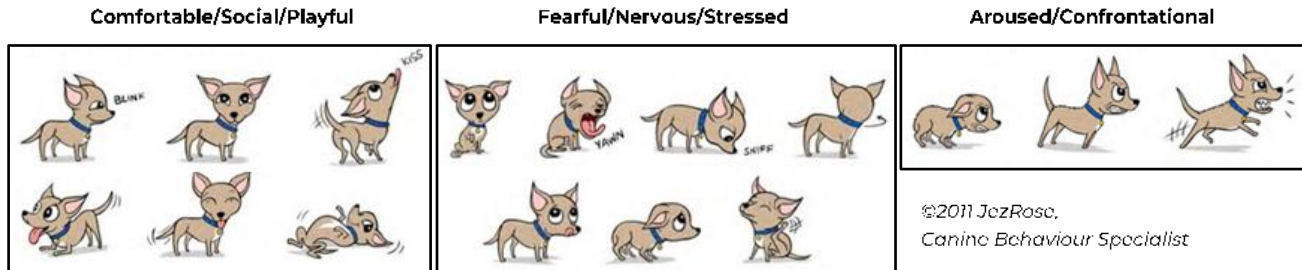
*Active or playful dogs:* Play-bows with fast, loose tail wag, bodies wagging from side to side, jumping around or on each other, nipping at each other's feet or neck. These dogs should be allowed to play for a while but should be taking regular breaks to keep from becoming over-aroused.

*Nervous or fearful dogs:* Body and head low to the ground, tail low or tucked between the legs, ears back, lip licking. Dogs exhibiting nervous or fearful body language can continue with supervised interaction, but should be provided regular breaks.

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*Aroused or confrontational dogs:* Forward posture with tense/stiff muscles, hackles or hair on the back raised, tail erect or curled over the back, rapid respiration rate, growling/barking/other vocalizations. Dogs exhibiting aroused or confrontational body language should be separated by a physical barrier and given a chance to relax before trying again. Contact the MSPCA for further guidance.



**Indoors vs. outdoors:** For some dogs, meeting outside on a walk is a good first step. If both dogs are comfortable being outdoors and exploring their environment, and you have two handlers to safely execute an introduction on a walk or in the backyard, that could be a good place to start. Other dogs are more fearful about their environment, or there may only be one handler available, in which case the introduction should start inside. If you begin your introduction outside, you will still want to follow the indoor recommendations for introducing the dogs, and their behavior is often quite different depending on where they are. Remember to take things slow, with the goal of creating a long-lasting, stable relationship between your established dog and your new family member.

### OUTDOORS

**Step 1:** If possible, start by going for a walk together. Give the dogs plenty of space and give them ample opportunity to explore the environment. Select for grassy, smelly areas that are more conducive to sniffing. Walk closely enough that the dogs can see and smell each other but far enough away that they each have their own space. Try your best to keep each dog's leash as loose as possible. If they are showing interest in meeting each other, allow them to walk alongside each other, but try to keep the momentum moving forward. If both dogs appear loose and comfortable, proceed to Step 2.

**Step 2:** Begin walking alongside each other. Once both dogs appear loose and comfortable, allow them to interact with each other while standing in place, if they want. Calmer dogs may sniff each other's faces, or circle around each other and sniff each other's hind end. More energetic dogs may become playful, play-bowing and jumping up toward or on each other. Remember to keep the leashes loose as much as possible. As the dogs move around each other, it is possible that the two leashes will become entangled. Move with your dog so that you are always behind him, and try your best to keep both leashes free from each other so that the dogs can be separated if necessary. Do not allow one dog to stand with his front feet placed on the other dog. Pay close attention to each dog's body language. If either dog becomes tense, stiff or still, if the hair above the base of the tail or over the shoulders is raised, or if either dog growls or barks, call and guide both dogs in opposite directions away from each other. Keep this initial interaction short (between 5-10 seconds), even if they seem to be getting along. This will help both dogs from becoming over-aroused and will give them both a break.

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**INDOORS** – note that these are recommended timelines. You'll make decisions to move more quickly or more slowly based on the behavior of all dogs involved. Don't rush! Go as slowly as necessary for each dog to be comfortable before moving to the next step.

**Step 1:** Start with the dogs physically separated by a closed door, baby gate, or other secure object. If either dog is particularly excited or worried, try covering the gate with a blanket to limit visual access. Engage each dog in a calm activity like chewing on a bone or playing with a foot toy. Always supervise both dogs when they are interacting with each other through the baby gate. Keep interactions short (no longer than 30 seconds), and reinforce (pet, praise, feed) calm behavior and loose body language in both dogs. Keep a leash clipped to both dogs' collars. If either dog appears stiff, still, if the hair above the base of the tail or over the shoulders is raised, or if either dog barks or growls, calmly lead both dogs away from the barrier. Once the dogs are able to appropriately remain calm in the presence of the other dogs consistently for several days, move to Step 2.

**Step 2:** Allow both dogs to be in the same room of the house. Both dogs should be supervised at all times if they are not separated by a physical barrier. Leave leashes clipped to both dogs' collars so that you can easily guide them away from each other when necessary.

**Step 3:** Continue to closely supervise both dogs whenever they are free together for the next several weeks. They should not be left together without supervision during this time.

Most dogs who enjoy the social companionship of other dogs will adjust to each other over the course of several weeks together. By maintaining a slow and deliberate introduction plan, you are giving both dogs the best chance to have positive experiences with each other.

### Tips:

- If one dog is more nervous or fearful than the other dog, the interaction should proceed at a pace that the nervous or fearful dog is comfortable with.
- If either dog is uncomfortable at any point in the introduction, separate to give them a break.
- If one or both dogs consistently has the hair above his tail or over his shoulder raised, is stiff or still, or is growling, barking or lunging toward the other dog, separate the dogs and contact the MSPCA before continuing with the introduction.