

Living with Multiple Dogs

Where should I begin?

The idea of having a second (third?) dog has been rolling around in your head for a while. Maybe the kids have been bugging you since forever! Maybe your current dog is lonely during the day. Whatever the reason, it seems another dog is in your future. Now what?

What do I need to consider when choosing another dog?

Are you ready? Make sure that you and your family are ready to add to the household. What is your daily schedule? Will you be able to walk two dogs, fit them in the car, assign sleeping and eating spaces? Have you resolved any behavior issues with your current dog(s)?

Does your dog REALLY want another dog in the house? Does your dog have dog friends? He doesn't need to like all other dogs, but he should have some dogs with whom he plays or goes on walks. Make sure you know and understand your dog's body language. Understand when he is beginning to get stressed and cannot handle a new situation. This takes time and practice. (Please review our handout on **Reading Dog Body Language**.)

Does gender matter? It's safest to choose the opposite gender, although by no means necessary. Often two dogs of the same gender can get along nicely. However, if you have the choice and really don't care about the gender of your animal, choose the opposite.

Personality: Try to pick a dog that doesn't have the same "personality" as your current dog. For instance, if you have a very pushy dog, your new dog is better off being friendly but less demanding. If your current dog is shy, you might go for a friendlier, more outgoing new dog.

Why is a proper introduction important?

If you already have a dog and want to add another, there are some precautions you should take. First of all, not all dogs like other dogs. Some dogs are selective – only liking certain dogs; sometimes even certain breeds or breed types. It might take some time to find the right match of breed and temperament for the resident dog. Other dogs seem to enjoy meeting any other canine, until you try to bring the new dog into THEIR house. And still other dogs really do like pretty much anyone. If you're planning on adding to your canine pack, here are some suggestions.

Making a good first impression:

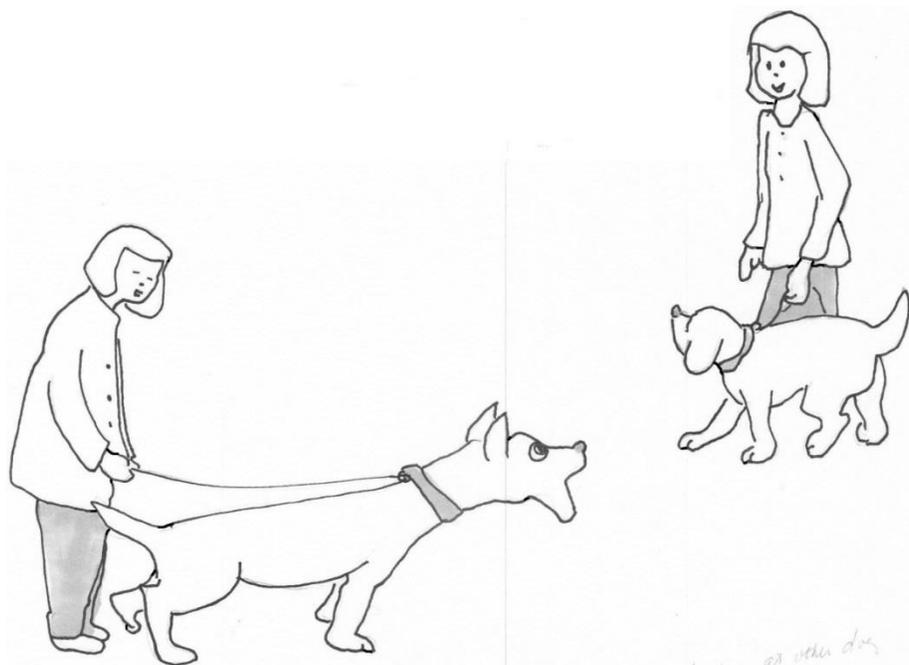
- **First, some basic prep-work:**
 - **Get some help:** You'll need the help of an adult friend to handle one of the dogs.
 - **Pre-select your meeting location:** Your resident dog and your candidate should meet in a neutral area, not in your home or yard, which your dog may feel possessive about.
 - **A Tired Dog is a Good(ish) Dog:** It's often best for both dogs to be tired, although not completely exhausted.



- **Once you are prepped and ready, go for a long (30 minute), side by side walk:**
 - If you can, just start by going for a leashed walk with 6' between the dogs.
 - If that goes well, start moving closer together.
 - If it doesn't go well, add separation or walk in-line rotating positions front to back every 10 minutes. Encourage each dog to sniff and investigate the environment rather than forcing a canine interaction.
- **Add more interactions:**
 - **Long Leashes (15' leash):** Have both dogs on long leashes, held very loosely, so they feel little pressure.
 - **Wide open space:** In a more open space, allow the dogs more interaction while maintaining control of the end of the leash.
 - **People Movement:** People should continue meandering to promote the dogs' continued movement.
- **Dropping the Leash:** drop the leashes at the same time. Let the leashes drag in case you need to pick them up quickly.

What should you be looking for?

- **Aggressive Pulling at Leash:** If you believe either of the dogs is showing signs of aggression, take them away from each other and walk them around separately a bit more. Try again a few minutes later. Sometimes it takes two to three meetings before dogs begin to accept or like each other.
- **Not getting any better:** If they don't like each other, accept it. Sometimes – despite our best efforts – it's not a good match.



Bringing the dog home:

When you take your new dog home, try to go for another long walk before you actually enter your house. Give the two dogs a chance to seal their friendship before you put a strain on it. You may have no problems from here on out. But...

Just in case:

- Manage the dogs' environment. Pick up potential items of conflict like toys, chews and food bowls.
- Set up routines like who gets into the vehicle first and waiting at doors.
- Give them their food in separate bowls. If they're in the same room, then you stay in there as well, making sure there are no problems. Or you can choose to feed the dogs in separate rooms to reduce the potential for conflicts.
- Give them food rewards at the same time, one from each hand. Have both of them learn to work for their calories. Try to avoid giving preferential treatment to one or the other, if possible.
- Teach your dogs – hold mini-training sessions daily with each dog. This is their time for special, individualized attention from you.
- Exercise, exercise, exercise. Long walks will cement your relationship with them, and theirs with each other.

Troubleshooting Issues:

Sometimes two dogs who originally co-existed quite peacefully develop problems with each other. If the dogs have had more than one fight or have injured each other, the situation may be much more serious, and could be one which cannot be resolved. Seek the advice of a qualified trainer immediately.

If civil war breaks out, what are the possible causes?

- ***Perceived lack of resources:*** Food, chew toys, space or access to the owner are considered resources. The best remedy is to have an excess of resources. Too much food, too many toys, lots of space and equal access to the owner, all given only when the dogs ask politely.
- ***Leadership Discussions:*** The two fighting dogs are very close in age, gender and/or rank, and one or both of them has reached social maturity (usually about 2 to 3 years of age, sometimes earlier) and is trying to take the leadership position. The best owner action is to provide structure.
- ***Thanks mom, may I have another?*** A third or fourth dog has been brought in, disrupting the pack and causing disharmony. Time, lots of long hikes, rotating spaces in the home and handler involvement can help this problem, although there are occasions when nothing helps except rehoming one of the dogs.
- ***Lack of Social Skills:*** The new dog has poor communication skills, either due to socialization problems, genetic predisposition or a combination of the above. For instance, some dogs seem to expect all other dogs to love them. Alternatively, some dogs seem to think they can bully other dogs. Both lack the ability to introduce themselves slowly and with the proper respect. The owner can help teach this, but it takes time and effort and the assistance of a good trainer.
- ***Hormones:*** If one or more of the dogs is intact, serious difficulties can arise. An intact female living with another female may suddenly become very aggressive as she "prepares" to mate and have puppies. Intact males are usually quite good with other intact males, but often not good at all with neutered males.



Defusing tension to avoid a fight:

We hope you never have a fight in your home, but just in case, here are some techniques that might help defuse or break up a confrontation. The best scenario is one in which you can predict when a fight is likely to happen – for instance, the dogs begin to stare at each other, or one of them is obviously trying to get a valuable resource from the other. At that point you should intervene.

Most dogs only fight if their owners are present and these techniques are geared for that scenario. If they fight when you are not present, you'll need to consult with an experienced trainer or consultant.

Both these intervention techniques work only if you see a fight coming, not if the dogs are already confronting each other. They also work best if you've practiced them often, maybe twice a day, while the dogs are playing or interacting in some way. That way they'll understand what's coming.

The "Hot Dog" cue:

1. Stand up and move either between them or very close to them, while saying loudly "Treats!" or "Hot Dogs!"
2. Don't hurry, but do walk quickly into another room, like the kitchen, and do something predictable and wonderful, like open the refrigerator door. (Your dogs should follow you if you have practiced this.)
3. Get the best reinforcement you can – like a hot dog – ask for a sit, and then feed them.

"Do it outside" cue:

1. Stand up and move into the dogs.
2. Walk through the dogs, open the back door and go through it. If the dogs aren't actually fighting, taking one or both by the collar could be a good idea.
3. Put or lead them both outside and go back inside the house. The chances are very good that the dogs will just want to be with you and will stop their arguing.

If a fight is underway:

1. Make a large noise with an air horn, whistle or pots and pans.
2. Use a thick blanket to throw over one or both of the dogs, or dump water on their heads.
3. If there are two people, grab each dog by their back legs, then lift up and elevate one leg so the dog is placed at an angle.
4. Whatever you do, don't get your hands near their teeth – they may bite you by mistake.

Training Resources:

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.