



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Introducing a New Dog to the Household

Thinking of getting a new dog? Maybe you already have a dog and you think by getting another one will keep your existing dog company? One of the most crucial steps in this process is making the right choice.

A review of Inter-dog Aggression Sibling Rivalry by Stabler (2003) indicates that aggression in multi-dog households is most common when pets are of the same gender, a similar age, weight, breed and personality.

We do not recommend raising littermates (see info sheet Raising Littermates) due to this research and suggest that you can minimise inter-dog aggression by obtaining a second or third dog of a different gender, breed, weight, age (at least 3 years apart in age) and personality type than your existing dog. Following these guidelines will help you to be more successful when introducing a new dog into the household.

Introducing a New Puppy or Adult Dog

Introducing a new puppy or adult dog is a big decision and one that should not be taken lightly. You need to think of the existing dog/s and how it will affect them and their relationships, and also the time it will take to train a new puppy/dog and for them to learn the household ways and what you expect of them. Take the time to consider what your resident pets would like. The better the match, the smoother the introductions will go.

We do not recommend getting a new puppy or dog to “fix” an existing dogs’ behaviour problem/s. This can often give you “double or triple trouble”. Another dog also means double/triple vet bills, food bills and training bills! If this sounds familiar and you are looking at getting another dog, it would first be advisable to seek the help of an experienced trainer or behaviourist to assist you in improving your existing dog’s behaviour before taking the next step.

The Initial Meeting

It is rude for a dog to just charge right up to another dog, certainly if they didn’t know each other. Think of your reaction if someone you didn’t know rushed up to you gave you a big hug!

It is important for dogs to have a “meet and greet” at a neutral area (such as a park) before a final decision is made. This is to ensure that the dogs “get along” and there is minimal stress associated with the meeting. You may already know how your existing dogs behave when meeting other dogs. If they are consistently worried or behave aggressively when meeting other dogs, perhaps another dog is not a good idea.

We recommend the following strategies to gradually build confidence and encourage polite greetings when dogs are meeting for the first time:





RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Parallel Walking

Some dogs need time to get used to the other dogs presence. If a dog is quite confident, boisterous or pushy when greeting other dogs, and charges straight up to the other dog, it can certainly provoke unfriendly behaviour.

Parallel walking requires 2 handlers (one with each dog) and is best done on loose leads starting with each dog at approximately 20 metres apart. Use high value treats (e.g cheese, salami, roast chicken) to reward each dog when they are calm.

It is fine for the dogs to look at each other, provided it is not a stare. Allow 2-3 seconds of calm glancing before using food to get each dog's attention, then reward.

A fence can be used in between the dogs for safety.

Slowly decrease the distance between the dogs using small increments of about 50cm, provided the dogs are still calm.

When dogs start to "mirror" each others body language (e.g sniffing the ground) it is a good sign that indicates that the dogs are feeling more comfortable with each other.

Zig Zagging

Zig zagging is another method used to build confidence in dogs when they are meeting for the first time and to encourage/teach a polite way of approaching another dog behind a gate or barrier.

You can also use a curving pattern, as this is a much less confronting for the dog behind the fence. Encouraging calming signals from each dog when introducing them can help interactions go smoothly, for example, throwing food treats on the ground to promote sniffing and at the same time you are rewarding your dog for calm behaviour. (See info sheet Canine Body Language).

Up close

If the dogs are comfortable with each other, allow short periods(1-2 seconds) of contact initially, before luring and encouraging each dog away and rewarding them highly. Do not pull the dogs away from each other as this can often relay the wrong message to the dog. You want the dogs to know that good things happen when the other dog is around!

At Home

Some simple rules to follow when integrating a new puppy or dog at home:

- Keep resident pets separate from a new pet initially.
- Introduce new dogs again slowly through closed doors/gates/fences at home.
- Allow controlled interactions on loose leads to create a positive association and slowly allow closer interactions. This may take over several weeks or even months.
- Don't push it! Having a tight lead can negatively influence a dog's behaviour and the dog can also pick up on your emotions. We tend to do this if we are stressed or worried. Ensure you are calm and relaxed and remember to breathe normally
- Allow short supervised play times, even where dogs are compatible.
- Do not allow pets to "work it out" as this can spoil future relationships and elevate stress levels (in both humans and canines!).



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

- If dogs are not able to be separated, ensure you supervise all interactions and learn to read your dog's body language to recognise if they are stressed or over aroused when interacting with the other dog/s.

The Importance of Training

It is important for the new pet to be taught boundaries and learn the established house rules. Of course, formal training is excellent for this and also a great way of building a bond with you! Contact the RSPCA School for Dogs for training classes and dates. Think you're successful? That the work is done? Wait! Now you have to manage your multi-dog household.

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