



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Managing Multi-Dog Households

Having more than one dog in a household can be challenging to ensure that all dogs (and humans!) are safe and content in everyday life routines. The positives gained from having more than one pet are wonderful! We believe that you can have a harmonious multi-dog household, providing you are consistent with what you expect, read your pets' behaviour well and make the right choices for your dogs. Multi dog homes can be delightful when they work well, if things go wrong, get professional help early! Contact the Animal training and Behaviour Centre.

Making the right choice

It is crucial when adding another dog to your household that you make 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.

For more information, see info sheets- Introducing a New Dog to your Household and Raising Littermates.

If you already have multiple dogs in your household, following these simple guidelines can assist with maintaining household harmony.

Managing the inside space

If your dogs live inside or sleep inside when you are home there are some simple rules and tips you can follow to make things easier.

Control exits and entries to the house:

- Bottlenecks at doors can easily escalate into aggression. Arousal and aggression are two closely related emotional states.
- Doggy doors take away your ability to control access to inside or outside and can also create bottlenecks.
- Teach “wait” for coming and going through doors to avoid barging/rushing/barking which can increase arousal levels.
- Teach target as a training tool (see clicker training and targeting info sheet) to re position dogs and create more focus.
- Crates/dens/safety zones/tethers/mats - dogs should view these as comfortable happy and safe places and should choose to rest there.
- They are never to be used for punishment.
- Keep them in social areas of the house and not in garages.
- Crates & dens are very useful for high arousal times such as visitors arriving or children's parties.





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It is important to teach dogs to have down time, especially high energy, active breeds of dog who don't tend to switch off unless they are taught to do so!

Keep crates as part of the furniture and not something that appears to indicate a visit.

(See info sheet on crate training for a step by step guide to creating a positive association with crates).

Provide several mats/resting places for the dogs inside (see mat training info sheet).

Use tethering on these mats to ensure no inappropriate interaction occurs between pets without your supervision.

Safety zone areas can be created by using barriers and baby gates.

Make your house like a poker machine.

Keep treat containers around your house so that the dogs could get a reinforcing treat at anytime.

Remember, teach your dogs what you would like them to do in each situation and reward them when they get it right.

Emotional healing/stress busters/anxiety levels

Be mindful of your dogs' stress levels and be aware that after a stressful event (such as a scuffle between pets) adrenalin levels can be high and can take up to 6 days to return to normal.

Some ideas to assist with reducing your pets stress levels in multi-pet households are:

Bach flowers (e.g. rescue remedy)

- T-Touch
- D.A.P (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) plug ins and collars can provide a reassuring effect in a safe location.
- Calming music such as "Through a Dogs Ear" CD
- See your Veterinary professional or the Animal Training and Behaviour Centre for further information.

Managing outside space

Can your house and yard cope with having more than one dog?

Keep arousal levels from outside stimulus (e.g. passersby, postman etc) low by using privacy fencing or visually blocking fencing (eg shade cloth, colour bond fencing). This will discourage barking and fence running which in turn can increase arousal levels. Preventing access to high arousal areas such as front or back fences by separating your yard can help. This way you can also separate your dogs when you are not able to supervise them.

Supervise play times and if dogs become too highly aroused, redirect play to toys and separate dogs. Ensure you keep separated dogs amused and busy with toys or kongs (see Entertaining Your Dog and Kong handouts). Identify and avoid/remove triggers that could cause confrontations - e.g. buried bones or certain toys.

Take the time for individual attention. It is important that your animals get used to being separated so your dogs are comfortable when they are apart from each other. Practice taking individual dogs out on short outings. Attending training classes with individual dogs and short walks are a great way to start.

Ensure each dog gets what they need in terms social, training and life enrichment.



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Training at home? - It is easier to separate and train one pet at a time to avoid confusion.

Who first?

Who do you feed first, or give attention to first? Or should it be random? Our advice is to keep existing routines the same, and then work with what keeps your dogs happy and content. Introduce new changes gradually and remember that some dogs can change what is important to them in life (e.g. resting spaces, objects, attention) depending on factors such as age/sexual maturity and the number/type of dogs around them.

For example; you could try a random rate of attention, a routine for feeding order (but change the feeding spots), random reinforcement for resting spots and spontaneous rewards.

Ideas for non food related enrichment

It is often difficult to find ideas to keep dogs entertained throughout the day if one dog is food possessive or “resource guards” food items such as kongs, bones or treat balls. Here are some suggestions that don’t involve food:

Audible: Leave the radio or TV on

Physical/Social: Have a dog walker/minder come and walk dogs or play with the dogs during the day.

Environment: Try a mix of cardboard boxes, wading pools, dig pits (without food), visual stimulation such as high decks or tank stands (only if dogs are not visually aroused and tend to bark), tug toys on a bungee, different smells (herbs), hiding toys, different textures and surfaces to investigate, more beds/places to lie (e.g. cool spots, dirt), play equipment such as tunnels and cubbies.

Feeding time

The key to smooth feeding times is supervision.

Ensure each dog has enough space and time to eat comfortably and without stress. If dogs have a history of food aggression or guarding, physically separate pets when feeding e.g. put one inside and one outside, feed dogs in their crates or use tethers to keep dogs separate until feeding is finished. (See crate training handout and resource guarding handout).



Fights

What if there is a serious fight? Of course you do not want it to get to the point where your dogs fight (prevention is the key), but here are some basic guidelines if a serious fight does occur between your dogs at home. Keep your own safety in mind at all times - if you are on your own, call for help. Keep your own safety in mind at all times - if you are on your own, call for help.

Do not:

- Pull on collars - this can encourage dogs to turn and bite whoever grabs the collar.
- Physically try to separate the dogs - which can cause more injury if a dog is physically attached to another dog, or you could become the unintended victim.
- Yell at the dogs as this can escalate arousal.



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You can:

- Use water hose or bucket to separate
- Take the back legs and “wheelbarrow” the more aroused dog away (useful before contact is made).

Desex your dogs - hormones such as testosterone can cause more exaggerated/intense behaviours.

Cats and Dogs

Cats and dogs body language does not always mean the same things; consequently they don't always understand each other.

Quite commonly, dogs will chase cats due to their predatory instinct. Follow the same guidelines as for introducing a new dog or puppy into the household (see info sheet), and of course don't include play times if the pets are not suitable. (eg elderly cat and new puppy).

Cats that have lived with dogs before can often be quite calm around dogs, but still ensure that when you are introducing a new dog to a cat that you keep the dog on a lead or tether and you allow an escape route for the cat if it becomes too much for it. Teach dogs how you would like them to behave around cats and reward them when they get it right. Do not use punishment if your dog does the wrong thing as this is proven to be the least effective method of teaching animals. (see Why We Don't Use Punishment handout).



A word on rehoming

Sometimes it is in the best interests of everyone concerned to re-home a dog if things don't seem to be working. There is nothing wrong with this and you shouldn't feel like you have failed. If a dog seems unhappy or if resident pets seem unhappy, re-homing through a shelter or privately is often the kindest thing to do to ensure the dog or cat goes to a more suitable home. Not all dogs will get along; this is why careful thought needs to go into choosing additional pets.

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