

Dog-Dog Introductions



Adding a new dog to a home with a resident dog can be great fun and offers both your family and your dog extra companionship. However, dogs need time to build relationships. The more quarrel-free you can keep the early stages of the sibling relationship the stronger it will be—and yet quarrels can still easily happen. That's why it's crucial to proceed slowly, even if it seems as though the dogs are getting along without any problems.

Getting Ready

Preparation is half the battle. Before you bring your new dog home, be sure to:

Go shopping for supplies. Your new dog needs his own water and food bowl, dog bed, and dog toys. Don't expect him to share, not until he has known his sibling for a long time.

Set the stage. Pick up all toys, chews, bones, food bowls, and the resident dog's favorite items. When dogs are creating a relationship these items may cause rivalry. (They can be introduced after a couple of weeks.)

Provide each dog with private space. Give your new dog his own confinement area. Furnish a spare room, crate, or dog-proofed enclosed area with his food, water, toys, and bed. The resident dog is not allowed in this area.

Introducing the Dogs

First meeting. The first introduction should happen on neutral ground outside your house and yard, for example on a neighborhood street or in a park. Allow the two dogs to sniff each other briefly—two to three seconds—then call them away and praise them with treats. Next, take a short walk in the neighborhood and let them play off leash if appropriate.

Inside the house. The first time the two dogs are inside your house together, keep them both on leash and keep the introduction short, around five minutes.

Building the Relationship

The length of this phase varies from one "sibling pair" to another. Carefully watch both dogs' body language for clues before you increase their time together. Until then, follow these guidelines:

- Keep all dog play and socializing positive and brief. That way, you avoid over-stimulation or quarrels that may erupt during overly rough or extended play.
- Feed dogs in separate areas, completely closed off from one another.
- Spend time with each dog individually.
- Keep the dogs separate when you can't supervise their interactions.
- Always supervise dogs when around family members, toys, or sleeping spots.
- Praise the dogs in a cheerful voice for having positive interactions.
- Interrupt any growling or bullying behavior, separate the bully to a different area for a few minutes, and then try again.
- Most dogs enjoy walks. Walk your dogs together, so they learn that good things happen when they are together.

Dog-Dog Introductions *(continued)*

Pitfalls

- Don't give chews, rawhides, or bones when your dogs are together. The dogs should enjoy these fun chews but only when they are separated. After several weeks without squabbles, you can try, but always supervise.
- Never use your hands or body to intervene during a dog quarrel. Use your voice, a loud noise, or water to stop the fight. If the dogs do not stop, use a chair or other large object to insert between them, or pull them apart by the rear legs or tail. To learn more about how to safely break up a dog fight, see our handout *Separating Fighting Dogs*.