



# DOG-DOG INTRODUCTIONS: Parallel Walking

Bringing a new dog home is likely going to be a very fun and exciting experience for all human family members. In all the excitement it is easy to forget that your resident dog may feel differently about the new addition. It is our job to facilitate positive and rewarding introductions between our dog family members. Animals that live in groups, like dogs, establish relationships, through which the individuals involved interact and live together. The roles that the individuals play within the relationship can change with each new day or situation. While we would all like our new dog to become fast friends with the resident dog, it is more realistic to expect that it may take a while for them to become best buddies. Relationships take time to build, so proper introductions are important to help the dogs adjust to one another and start to build on their relationship.

## **NEUTRAL LOCATION**

All introductions should initially take place in neutral territory – a place in which there is no familiarity. If you've already done an initial introduction in the shelter, it is recommended to do a second introduction in neutral territory prior to taking the dogs home.

## **GREETING**

Before you begin the greeting process, ensure all dogs are on a 4 to 6 foot standard leash. There needs to be one handler per leashed dog. Each handler should have a pocket full of very yummy treats (chicken, steak, cheese, etc.).

Start the introduction with a series of parallel walks. Walk each dog in the same direction with approximately ten (10)

to twenty (20) feet between them. When the dogs look at each other, reward the dogs for calm body language and behavior with praise and bits of the yummy treat. If the dogs are showing signs of concern, increase the distance between them until the dogs are calm again. During the walk slowly decrease the space between the dogs, continuing to reward for calm body language and behavior.

Once the dogs are comfortable being in close proximity (about 5 feet) to each other, allow one dog to walk behind the other, and then switch. Next, walk the dogs side by side. Finally, allow the dogs to sniff and interact with each other. Pay close attention to the dogs' body language and if needed, break off the interaction by getting the dogs' attention with the yummy treats or squeaker toys/sounds and go back to parallel walking.

If all goes well with sniffing and on-leash interaction, take the dogs to an enclosed area, drop their leashes and give the dogs some space to get to know each other. Be ready with treats and squeaker toys/sounds to redirect the dogs' attention back to you if needed.

Ideally, a successful dog introduction will involve appropriate social interaction between dogs; however, social indifference is ok too.

## **BODY LANGUAGE**

It is very important to pay close attention to the dogs' body language during introductions. Signs that indicate a dog is worried or not comfortable with the interaction include: Growling, hair standing up, showing teeth, stiff body, prolonged staring, avoidance/hiding, ears back or tail tucked.

If either dog starts displaying any of the above behaviors, break off the interaction by getting the dogs' attention with treats or squeaker toys/sounds and get the dogs focused on something else. Increase the distance between the dogs and begin again.

In addition to closely watching the dogs' body language, you will need to closely monitor how the dogs read each other's body language signals. If one dog is giving clear signals of being worried or uncomfortable and the other dog is not responding appropriately (i.e. moving away and/or ceasing interaction), you will need to intervene and redirect the dog's attention.

## **POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

From the first meeting, you want the dogs to expect good things to happen in the presence of each other. Use LOTS of treats to reward the dogs during the entire introduction process.

## **ADULT DOGS AND PUPPIES**

Puppies are not as well versed in communication as adult dogs are. Usually, the only experience puppies have had is interacting with their littermates and their mother. Because their communication skills are still developing, they don't always know how to properly interact with an adult dog.

While it's possible an adult dog may readily welcome a puppy into the home with open paws, it is more likely the adult dog will be irritated. It is normal for an adult dog to correct the antics of a puppy by growling, snapping, showing teeth and moving away. As long as the adult dog's behavior is appropriate (i.e. doesn't make contact with the puppy during these displays) – it is ok. This is how the puppy will learn his/ her communication skills.

At no time should you allow unsupervised interaction between an adult dog and puppy. If you cannot be there to watch, confine the puppy to a safe area.

Give your adult dog LOTS of breaks from the puppy. If your adult dog is correcting the puppy and either the puppy does not listen or the correcting from the adult dog is escalating – run interference and remove the puppy from the area for a bit.

Help your adult dog learn that the presence of the puppy means good things happen. Reward your adult dog with yummy treats and praise for calm interaction and body language when he/she is around the puppy.

## **AT HOME**

Once home, continue to closely supervise all interactions. If you are unable to closely supervise the dogs, separate them. Continue to use positive reinforcement and reward the dogs for calm body language and appropriate behavior.

## **PAWSITIVELY HELPFUL HINTS**

- During the leashed greeting portion of the introduction process:
  - Keep a loose leash – tightened leashes can increase the stress of the dogs
  - Be ready to “leash dance” – you will need to move around with the dog(s) to avoid the leashes becoming tangled
- Do not back each other or the dogs into a corner – always have a clear escape route
- Keep your voice low and calm. Avoid shouting or speaking in high pitched tones.
- Ensure each dog always has a safe space in your home – a space where he/she can get away from the other dog(s).
- Ensure each dog has his/her own feeding and watering station. This will help reduce stress that may occur due a “perceived” lack of resources.
- Give adult dogs LOTS of breaks from puppies.
- Do not leave high value items such as food, bones, treats and/or favorite toys lying around.
- Several short sessions are better than a few long sessions.
- Always stop a session on a positive note.
- If you get frustrated during a session, stop and try again later.