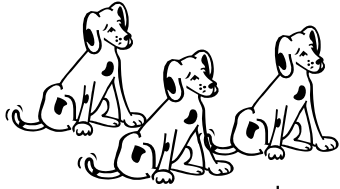




Behavior and Training Department Tips and Techniques



Living With Multiple Dogs

When you own more than one dog, you own a dog pack, and all the complications that go along with a pack. It can be rewarding and interesting, or it can be frustrating or even dangerous, depending on you and your mix of dogs.

There is nothing more important than a pack to a dog. In the wild, dogs would naturally live, hunt and raise their young as an extended family group. They would cooperate in hunting animals larger than themselves, and all adult members would help in raising the puppies. Without this cooperation, they would not survive. Cooperation depends on order and structure, so dogs, like humans, live in a hierarchical society, with one or two dominant animals and several lower-level animals.

There is very little actual violence in a real wolf or wild dog pack, though there can be a lot of posturing, as they clarify who is more powerful than whom! Dogs need to be in good physical health in order to hunt animals larger than themselves, so non-violent cooperation is extremely important. They also need to have a common body language to “talk” to each other.

All of which leads one to believe that peace in the pack is more likely than not to occur, and, indeed, that is true. Many people live with two, three, four or more dogs in their family, with no problems at all. However, there are times when internal strife occurs. Much of it is avoidable, using a little common sense and a little dog sense.

Introducing a new dog to a resident dog

If you already have a dog, and you wish to get a new dog, there are some precautions you should take. First of all, just because a dog is a dog doesn't mean he'll like any other dog you bring in, any more than we humans like all other humans. Some dogs are naturally quite picky – only liking certain dogs, sometimes even certain breeds or breed types. 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 (lucky you if you own that dog!). If you're planning on adding to your canine pack, here are some suggestions.

Guidelines for your current dog

- Make sure that your resident dog thinks of you as being higher in rank than he or she is. Control all the things that she feels are important: food, playtime, grooming, doorways and sleeping arrangements (if you're in doubt, we have other handouts that address leadership). She should be obedient to you. She should also be able to handle NOT getting attention when she wants it (because she won't always be able to). Dogs that are attention-mongers often don't want to share you with anyone else.
- Your dog should already have friends. She doesn't need to like all other dogs, but she should have some dogs that she plays with or goes on walks with. If she's very independent or aloof, or if she fights with other dogs, she may not be a good candidate for a buddy.
- Make sure you know and understand your dog's body language. Understand when she is beginning to get stressed and cannot handle a new situation. This takes time and practice.

Choosing a new dog

- It's safest to choose the opposite sex, although by no means necessary. Often two dogs of the same sex can get along nicely. However, if you have the choice and really don't care about the sex of your animal, choose the opposite.
- 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 more friendly, outgoing new dog. Two dogs of the same age and personality types are more



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likely to want the same amount of attention, and to compete for resources. It's unfortunate but true that dogs should not be the same rank; if they were, they'd be more likely to fight, and that's what we're trying to avoid.

The meeting

- 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.
- It's often best for both dogs to be tired, though not completely exhausted.
- To be safe, have both dogs on long leashes, held very loosely, so they feel little pressure. If possible (and sometimes it's not possible!), walk the dogs past each other two or three times, then drop the leashes at the same time. Let the leashes drag, in case you need to pick them up quickly.
- If the dogs are so eager to meet each other that they're straining at the ends of the leashes, then drop the leashes while you keep moving – don't set up an "instant" territory that your dog may wish to defend.
- If you believe either of the dogs is showing signs of aggression, then 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.
- If they don't like each other, accept it... sometimes – despite our best efforts – it's not a good match.

The first day at home ... and happily ever after

When you take your new dog home, try to go for a 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...

- Set up routines in which all dogs must ask you for permission (sit and wait) to do the things they find reinforcing – where they eat, when they get treats, getting into and out of cars and/or parks.
- Give them their food in separate bowls, but make sure they get enough. This is not the time to have your dogs on a diet! If they're in the same room, then you stay in there as well, making sure there are no problems. I like it when dogs walk back and forth between bowls, but it doesn't happen very often. If they both finish at the same time, you can let them investigate the other's bowl.
- Give them treats at the same time, one from each hand. Have both of them sit and work for their treats. Try to avoid giving preferential treatment to one or the other, if possible. This is very often NOT possible. In that case, you'll have to treat one of the dogs better than the other (see below).
- Act like the leader you are! Expect your dogs to get along with each other, and if there's a tiff, tell them both they're bad, rather than punishing the one you think started the argument. So you might say, "NO! Bad dogs!" and stalk away. If they begin to fight in earnest, you'll need to separate them; but again, don't act like you blame either one.
- Train your dogs – hold mini-training sessions daily with each dog. This is their time for special attention from you (the Ultimate Leader!).
- Exercise, exercise, exercise. Long walks will cement your relationship with them, and theirs with each other.

Civil war

Sometimes two dogs that originally co-existed quite peacefully develop problems with each other. Here are some possible reasons and courses of action.

- There is a perceived lack of resources – food, chew toys, space or access to the owner. 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.
- The two fighting dogs are very close in age, sex 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 demand obedience from both dogs regardless of their rank, and let them work out status at the lower levels. There is a big space between the leader (# 1) and the lieutenant (# 2), so for



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our purposes, we eliminate # 2 and make all dogs # 25. However, if the dogs can't work it out on their own, the owner needs to help by reinforcing the more obvious leader (letting him or her have first access to food/toys/space/the owner). This can be quite problematic, so be careful. We often reinforce the wrong dog, since our perceptions are clouded by affection (see the next point).

- The owner is reinforcing the wrong dog as higher in rank. This is very common. As dogs get older, they lose rank to younger, more vital dogs. Owners don't like this to happen, and often give special treatment to their older dog. The young dog reacts by trying to take rank, while the older dog figures he's got the backing of the owner (the real pack leader), so numbers are on his side. Fights – sometimes very serious fights – are the result. The remedy is to make sure you've picked the right dog to reinforce as leader.
- A third or fourth dog has been brought in, disrupting the pack and causing disharmony. Time, lots of long hikes and minimal owner involvement can help this problem, although there are occasions when nothing helps except re-homing one of the dogs. Occasionally, a lower level dog (alpha wannabe) will feel like the new dog is backup for him or her, and begin to stalk or attack the alpha. This can lead to major aggression, with serious injuries.
- The new dog has poor communication skills, either due to socialization problems, genetic predisposition or a combination. For instance, some dogs (think labs!) seem to expect all other dogs to love them. Alternatively, some dogs (think terriers!) 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. A dominant 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. Your safest bet is to sterilize all the dogs in your pack.

Breaking up Fights

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 break out – for instance, you see 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 – at the precursor to the behavior – you should intervene, and preferably in a controlled, authoritative manner (as though the dogs were two-year-old kids fighting over a toy). Most dogs only fight if their owners are present, and these techniques are geared for that scenario. If your dogs fight when you are not present, you'll need to consult with an experienced trainer or counselor.

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.
3. Give the dogs the best reinforcement you can think of – like a hot dog or piece of chicken – ask for a sit, and then feed them.

"Do it outside!" Again, this technique should be used at the onset of the behavior – when you feel the tension rising.

1. Stand up, move into the dogs, and in a large, authoritative voice tell them to stop the behavior.
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.



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If your dogs are actually fighting, neither of the two techniques above will work. You'll need to work out solutions that are best for you with a behavior consultant.

Following are comments from people who successfully house two or more dogs, as well as foster animals before they are adopted. They are all experienced dog trainers as well as owners. As you can see, different people have different methods of keeping peace... the trick is to find the one that works for you!

#1: 6 dogs, no obvious alpha: "... I made sure when I first got each dog that we took obedience class right away and I took them everywhere with me for at least the first 6 months. I also always crate trained them and let them have their own space (i.e. the bathroom) for as long as I thought was needed for everyone to get adjusted. I also spent a lot of time with the resident dogs without the new dog so they didn't feel it a threat. When I got dogs 2 through 5, I picked them based on my other dogs' personalities. I always stayed away from really dominant, pushy dogs. All in all I think I was just very lucky."

#2: 2+ dogs (with fosters), very obvious alpha:

"The way I did it was to supervise her constantly in the house with them (new dogs in the household). I did classic counter-conditioning, beginning with being very clear that they were under my protection. If she (the alpha) growled or stared, I chastised her..."uh uh" and put her in a "down stay." I made it very clear that I didn't like her behavior. Many "leave its" if she got too close to them such that she would growl. Just as importantly, lots of positive reinforcement for tolerant or accepting behavior."

#3: 3+ dogs (with fosters), very obvious alpha:

"I was much pickier about his obedience – he had to say "please" for pretty much everything. On the other hand, he got privileges the other dogs didn't – primarily going through doorways first, which he considered the ultimate perk of rank. He was very good with canine guests, assuming (quite rightly, as it turned out) that they wouldn't approach him until he had approached them. The other dogs pretty much avoided him, or deferred to him. For instance, if he decided – as he did infrequently – that he wanted to chase the ball, the other dogs wouldn't even attempt it. It was sometimes hard to not feel sorry for the other dogs, but order was kept!"

#4: 3+ dogs, one leader type:

"The one thing around food that I keep very consistent is being completely unreliable and inconsistent as to when I feed, who gets fed first, where the feeding is going to be and what the other dogs are doing while Fido is being fed. I also try to use this time as an environmental enrichment time, allowing my dogs to hunt in the back yard for their meals (sometimes it is harder than others) and doing things like recalls, sitting, retrieving, leave its, or downing while on the hunt, if you will (as well as allowing them privacy every now and then). Whether they have to work for each bite or get it free to be a total dog night depends on the spur of the moment. I am completely unfair in this, as they all do not have to maintain the same behavior patterns as the one who ate before them, and sometimes what I do is dictated by their own activities. I put the ones waiting in queue for dinner on down stays or sit stays during the feeding time, so that they are also being rewarded for their work."

#5: 4+ dogs, three males, one female (the alpha):

"Having a good, fair top dog has done wonders in my home. She is, without a doubt, the ruler of the dogs. She's bitchy, but definitely fair. She sets the rules from Day 1. Since I trust her, and know she's not going to do any damage, or pick fights (she does a lot of lip lifting, low growls, and giving the eye) with new dogs, I basically let her do what she feels she needs to do -- all within reason. If I have a puppy that is incessantly bugging her, I'll do creative management – use baby gates, exercise pens, etc. She reacts differently when new dogs come into the home, depending on their age. When I brought Huckleberry and Sky in as 8-week puppies, she ignored them for a couple days, and only disciplined when they tried to eat out of her food bowl – and they've never tried that again.

Trish King
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