

Introducing a New Dog to Your Pack

Remember everyone makes mistakes including your new dog so establish rules, guidelines and foremost.

One of the most stressful things about dog ownership can be adding a new member to your family. You may be ready to add another dog but not all dogs like the company of other dogs, and this is the most important thing to contemplate when considering adding a new family member. If your dog doesn't like other dogs while walking, at friends houses, or at the dog park chances are good that he will not enjoy the company of a dog in his territory or sharing his space and his family.

The next thing to consider is size compatibility. I would not encourage the owner of an adult Greyhound to get a Chihuahua! A Chihuahua to a Greyhound might just resemble a bunny or the prey he has been bred to hunt and kill. Most often dogs do better with dogs of like size, or extreme caution must be taken to make sure smaller dogs are not injured by larger dogs.

Sex is also an important aspect of adding a new furry child. Two intact males often grow up to have problems getting along especially when they reach sexual maturity, although neutered males can flourish together. Female dogs often prefer to live with members of the opposite sex. Some of the worst dog fights I have ever seen were between 2 adult female dogs. Intact male dogs often fight till one dog is seriously injured or there is a clear winner, however females often fight to the death.

Age is another vital aspect to consider. I don't know how often I have heard the phrase "If you raise them right..."



Size Matters

Insinuating that a puppy can be trained to love or tolerate anything, but this simply is not the case. Puppies come with no guarantees and often, I believe, they are born with inherent temperaments and certain qualities that are not easily changed. Time and thought should be employed to try to find the best fit puppy possible. Puppies can also be irritating especially for older dogs! An 11 or 12 year old dog may not want to be constantly poked and prodded by the exuberance of a pup, an adult dog may be a better fit for older or slower dogs.

I love adult dogs and rescuing dogs, but it is just as important to make sure you find the right fit in an adult dog. Because I have worked so much with adult shelter dogs as Service Dogs I find it easier to acclimate an adult dog into my pack. Because an adult dog's personality is already formed, and probably because I am a professional, I find much simpler to bring an adult dog home. My main criteria are that the new dog cannot have any issues with my existing dogs. My dog's can take a few days to adjust to having a new furry brother or sister, but I will not allow a new dog to come into my house and bully my animals!

Temperament is also extremely important whether it be a puppy or an adult dog. Puppies are ever changing, the temperament of a puppy may not be the same as it ages and changes. That is what I like about picking out an adult dog, they have pretty much chosen who they want to be in life. If I have an extremely dominant female dog at home (and I do) I would look for an easy going fairly submissive male adult or puppy to bring into my house. If I pick a dog similar in personality to my already established female dog, we are probably going to have dominance problems at some point. Opposite personalities often get along best, as long as there is respect and no abuse going on i.e. I would never allow my girl to beat on the new dog or create a situation of abuse. I would simply be looking for a dog that would tolerate and accept my female dog as pack leader.

Once a dog or puppy has been chosen there should be an acclimation period where the established dog/dogs of the family can still feel like home is their territory.

I recommend keeping both new adult dogs and puppies on leashes for at least a few weeks until the pack orientation is ironed out successfully and everyone is tolerant and accepting of each other. I would never allow 2 new dogs to be together unsupervised in case a problem arose I would want to be there to witness it and make appropriate changes.

As the already established pet, they should feel like their home and yard is still theirs and they are able to come and go without being constantly poked and prodded. If you allow the new dog or puppy free range, the problems of acclimation can become exasperated because the pet feels like he can never get away or have time to himself or one on one time with his family.

It is important when bringing in a new pet to ensure that the old pet still get all the time and attention he is use to, this will help to lessen the shock of a new situation. Make sure you take your first pet out alone and often to get some one on one time while they are becoming accustomed to having a new brother or sister. This lessens the impact and his feelings of change.

Change is difficult for everyone, including our pets and it is important to make sure that their schedules and lives remain as normal as possible when integrating a new animal into their lives.

If you follow these steps and really put some thought and effort into getting a new dog, you should be successful with the integration and the building of your new family!

It's all about baby steps. You don't throw new dogs together in a house, feed them together, give them access to each other 24/7, and expect them to get along perfectly. You crate the new dog when you're sleeping and when you're not home. You gate off parts of your home, so they can spend time apart. You feed them where they can see each other from a safe distance, but not get to each other. You gradually increase the time they spend together. You gradually decrease the distance between them at key times.

Three weeks ago, I couldn't eat with all three dogs on the same side of the baby gates. Food + close proximity = dog fight. Now, however, all three dogs will sit side-by-side waiting for bites while I eat. I still don't leave them alone together when I'm not home, but I'm perfectly willing to let them roam the house and yard together all day when I AM home – whether I am actually watching them or not. They still fight sometimes, but not often and not as wildly as they did before.

Remember, traveling the path to peace in the pack requires patience and baby steps.