

Managing the Multi-Dog Household



Having multiple dogs in the home can be a joy, but it can also lead to stress. If you haven't already acquired your second (third, or fourth) dog, consider these points before bringing in a new pet:

- Opposite sex pairs have the most chance of success, whereas two females are more likely to fight and bicker.
- Choose a second dog whose play style is similar to your current dog(s). Some dogs enjoy chasing over wrestling, and some dogs are delicate players while others are loud and rough and tumble. Play styles that complement each other will keep stress levels low and conflicts less frequent.
- Think about how long you have had your current dogs. Have they had a chance to settle into your environment, and have you had a chance to work on training? Your current dog should have plenty of training under his or her collar before bringing in the distraction of a new pet! Plus, a well-trained dog can often teach 'house rules' and good habits to a new dog.
- Does your current dog enjoy the company of other dogs? Be sure that your current pooch will enjoy a new canine companion! If you have a dog who is aggressive, reactive, or very stressed around other dogs she may appreciate remaining the only pooch in the household.
- Are you looking for another dog to fix a pre-existing problem? Adding another dog into the mix won't fix your current dog's hyperactivity, disobedience, or aggression. Two dogs will be more work for you and your family.

When You First Arrive Home

Choose a quiet time to bring your new dog home, and if possible, provide everyone with some good exercise and play time prior to bringing your pooch home. A tired dog is always a good dog, and exercise can release feel good hormones in the brain, setting everyone up for success.

If your current dog(s) did not make the drive with you to pick up your new pet, do a quick on-leash introduction with the assistance of a family member or neighbor. Allow for brief sniffing, but keep the introductions short. You don't want to cause tension with a long introduction! After a quick sniff, call both dogs away and walk everyone around the block. This will help tire out everyone and is a great way for the dogs to get to know each other without confrontation. After your walk allow all the pets into the house or yard.

It's advised that you keep a close watch on everyone, and leaving leashes on can help give you added control in case you need to intervene. At this point, don't leave your new pet unsupervised with your current pets.

Long-Term Management

The following tips can help keep your household stress- and conflict-free:

- The more dogs reside in the household, the better trained each dog needs to be! Focus on general obedience and do regular training sessions separately and as a group. Great cues that can help manage the household include: "Leave it," "Wait," "Stay," "Go to your bed/crate," "Come," "Sit," "Down," and general impulse control and manners.

- Manage conflict! Feeding time, play time, and people time, are often sources of conflict for dogs. Manage these conflicts by feeding your dogs in crates or separate rooms, keeping high value toys and chew toys off the floor except for one-on-one play or chew time, and giving dogs equal opportunities for affection and attention.
- Reward good and appropriate behavior. Dogs, like people, need feedback! If good behavior gets them treat, praise, and affection, they will be more likely to repeat that behavior in the future. Rewarding the dogs in the presence of the other dogs will also help create a positive association with each other.
- Keep arousal and excitement levels low during play time. Play is an exciting and stimulating time and if left unchecked can lead to fights or disagreements. Make sure play between dogs is structured and provide them with regular time outs and breaks. If you are ever concerned about how two dogs are playing, don't hesitate to interrupt. This is when "leave it" and "come" cues can come in handy!
- Remember that you decide what is and is not appropriate behavior between dogs – not the dogs! Don't leave them guessing, and don't let them "figure it out on their own." Give them regular instruction, training, and feedback.
- Make sure each dog is getting regular one-on-one time with you and the family, and that each dog's physical, mental, and emotional needs are being met.