



## Introductions

We recommend a DFW Rescue Me volunteer assist with introducing your new dog to your resident dog. Relationships between canines can be pretty complex, beginning with their very first meeting. Like most animals who live in groups, dogs establish their own social structure, sometimes called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict and promote cooperation among pack members.

Dogs also establish territories, which they may defend against intruders or rivals. Of course, dogs' social and territorial nature affects their behavior whenever a new dog is introduced to the household.

### Preparation

Before you bring the new puppy or dog home, remove anything your resident dog might guard, such as food bowls, bones, chew toys, toys, and beds. Even if your dog has never exhibited possessive tendencies before, it is best to exercise caution. If your home is cluttered, clean it up. Congested areas are more likely to trigger aggression because the dogs may feel forced upon each other.

### Choose a Neutral Location

Introduce the dogs in a neutral location so that your resident dog is less likely to view the newcomer as a territorial intruder. Each dog should be handled by a separate person. With both dogs on leashes, begin the introductions in an area unfamiliar to each, such as a park or a neighbor's yard. If you frequently walk your resident dog in a nearby park, she may view that area as her territory, too, so choose a less familiar site.

### Use Positive Reinforcement

From the first meeting, help both dogs experience "good things" when they're in each other's presence. Let them sniff each other briefly, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do, talk to them in a happy, friendly tone of voice; never use a threatening tone. (Don't allow them to investigate and sniff each other for too long, however, as this may escalate to an aggressive response.)

After a short time, get the attention of both dogs and give each a treat in return for obeying a simple command, such as "sit" or "stay." Take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals. Continue with the "happy talk," food rewards, and simple commands.

### Be Aware of Body Postures

One body posture that indicates things are going well is a "play-bow." One dog will crouch with her front legs on the ground and her hind end in the air. This is an invitation to play, and a posture that usually elicits friendly behavior from the other dog. Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hair standing up on one dog's back, teeth-baring, deep growls, a stiff-legged gait, or a prolonged stare. If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly getting each dog interested in something else.

For example, both handlers can call their dogs to them, have them sit or lie down, and reward each with a treat. The dogs' interest in the treats should prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time period and/or at a greater distance from each other.



## Introductions

### Taking the Dogs Home

When the dogs seem to be tolerating each other's presence without fearful or aggressive responses, and the investigative greeting behaviors have tapered off, you can take them home. Whether you choose to take them in the same vehicle will depend on their size, how well they ride in the car, how trouble-free the initial introduction has been, and how many dogs are involved.

If you have more than one resident dog in your household, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Two or more resident dogs may have a tendency to "gang up" on the newcomer.

It is important to support the dominant dog in your household, even if that turns out to be the newcomer. This may mean, for example, allowing the dominant dog to claim a special toy or favored sleeping spot as his own. Trying to impose your preference for which dog should be dominant can confuse the dogs and create further problems.

### Introducing Puppies to Adult Dogs

Puppies usually pester adult dogs unmercifully. Before the age of four months, puppies may not recognize subtle body postures from adult dogs signaling that they've had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments may set limits with puppies with a warning growl or snarl. These behaviors are normal and should be allowed.

Adult dogs who aren't well-socialized, or who have a history of fighting with other dogs, may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behaviors, such as biting, which could harm the puppy. For this reason, a puppy shouldn't be left alone with an adult dog until you're confident the puppy isn't in any danger. Be sure to give the adult dog some quiet time away from the puppy, and some extra individual attention as well.

### When to Get Help

Dogs can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work, and could make things worse. Fortunately, most conflicts between dogs in the same family can be resolved with professional guidance. Contact a professional animal behaviorist when problems persist with your dogs.

### What Not to Do

Do not hold the puppy in your arms for the adult dog to greet. This may cause the puppy to feel trapped and threatened. Instead, stand with your feet slightly apart so the puppy can take refuge between your feet if he feels overwhelmed. Do not permit the older dog to trample, bowl over, or otherwise intimidate the puppy.

Do not put the dogs in small spaces together, such as a car, crate or small room, before they are completely comfortable with each other. Each dog should have his or her own food bowl, bed, and toys. Place the food bowls far apart until the dogs are relaxed when eating together. Do not allow one dog to intimidate the other so that one dog abandons his food. Teach each dog to eat from his own bowl and leave the other bowls alone, even after everyone is finished.



## Introductions

If a fight breaks out, DO NOT let them “fight it out.” You may have heard this popular advice, but permitting the dogs to continue a fight can set the tone for a difficult relationship. Interrupt and separate the dogs if they begin to fight or if one dog beats up on the other dog. It is always better to interrupt fighting so the dogs do not develop a pattern of aggressive behavior.

### **How Should Fighting Dogs be Separated?**

Get the dogs apart however you can, while doing your best to not be bitten in the process. It is quite common for owners to be bitten breaking up a fight, often by their own dog. Your first action should be to shriek and yell—this works with many dogs. If the dogs are on leash, pull them apart but be aware that you may inadvertently cause the dogs to injure each other as some tend to clamp down with their jaws to resist the pull. If the dogs are off leash, try getting behind one, grabbing him by the body, and lifting him off the ground. Sometimes, the feeling of being airborne causes the dog to stop fighting. Be very careful because this strategy places you in a vulnerable position! If you can't grab them, try grasping the aggressor by the tail, ear, or testicles. Pinch hard to encourage the dog to turn away from his opponent and toward you, but be ready to jump back if the dog turns to bite you. If one dog is locked onto the other, you may need to pry the dog's jaws open with your hands or with a stick. Another option is to use your fingers to temporarily cut off the dog's breath by placing pressure against his windpipe. Spraying the dogs with a water hose or blasting them with an air horn or Direct Stop citronella spray can also be effective