



Introducing a New Dog

I'm about to have some houseguests arrive, and they'll be here for a few days. Why am I telling you this, you ask? Well, it turns out that they have a black lab mix – he's young, a bit spastic, and he has been known to be aggressive with other dogs. So, in the interests of everyone being able to get along for the next 5 days, I am dusting off the old manual to tell you about the best way to introduce two dogs to each other. These are the basics of introducing your dog to another dog. In an upcoming article we will talk about specific strategies to handle severe aggression between two dogs. If you were to rate on a scale of zero to ten, with ten being the MOST aggressive (and zero being not aggressive at all), these techniques will work with dogs in the zero-to-six-or-seven range. Dogs in the eight-nine-ten range...well, they deserve a special article all to themselves. So, without further ado, here is the best way to introduce your dog to another dog, in ten easy steps:

1. **Make sure both dogs are on a leash.** You want to have complete control over the situation. Even if you have a dog who "generally does better off-lead than on-lead" (I put this in quotes because I hear this very often from clients), there is no guarantee that the *other* dog is going to do well – and without a leash on your dog you'll have no way to pull them apart should either one decide to attack. So do yourself and everyone else a favor...leashes, please.
1. **Take the dogs on a walk "together" – single file.** Your temptation will be to let the dogs meet and sniff each other first. Don't do that! The reason that it's often a bad idea is that as two dogs approach each other the emotional intensity runs VERY high – so it is the most risky time in doggy introductions. You and the other person should decide which direction you're going to walk in, and one of you should start off in that direction, with the other person following. Let's assume that the other person starts, so you're the one following behind, for the time being.
1. **Praise your dog, no matter what they do.** Your goal is to help your dog (and the other dog) RELAX in this situation. The only way you are going to do that is by being a supportive, calming voice/presence for your dog. Any barking that they are doing is just their way of letting out steam. As you move on the walk, you will be letting the steam out in a positive way – teaching your dog an alternative to barky spastic-ness and

aggression. Think of yourself as saying “good dog, thanks for letting me know how you’re feeling right now”.

1. **Keep it moving.** As I mentioned earlier, one of the most difficult aspects of a dog-on-dog introduction is the emotional intensity between the two dogs. If they are focused exclusively on each other, there is no way for this energy to dissipate (unless you’re lucky and they just start playing together, which is the way that two HEALTHY dogs handle the intensity). As long as you can keep walking, you can keep the energy of the situation moving, and make it much less intense for your dogs. Instead of them being both “about” each other, they will be “about” the walk they are taking – which is like them being on the hunt together. Yup, you are stimulating their hunting nature, which is when dogs are the MOST social.
1. **Slowly let them sniff each other as they are walking.** Since you are following, it will most likely be your dog that makes the first sniff – in the rear of the other dog. Hey, that’s what dogs do! Remember that utilization of the olfactory sense is an indicator that your dog is transitioning into hunting mode, so it’s a good sign. There may be a slight pause in the action, which is ok (still, though, try to keep it moving). The dog being sniffed will be reacting as well, so both owners need to be vigilant about what’s going on. After the trailing dog sniffs the forward dog it’s generally a good idea to trade positions, so that the dog who just got sniffed has a chance to do the sniffing. At this stage you want to avoid too much stand-still (which can lead to confrontation), so just move past the other dog, get the walk moving again, and THEN let the other dog move in for their turn to sniff. Keep taking turns with each dog having repeated opportunities to be in the lead over the course of the walk.
1. **If one dog poops or pees, let the other dog sniff it – after the dog doing the pooping/peeing is DONE.** Make sure you move the excretor away before you let the other dog into sniff. The sniffing of poop and urine is an important exchange of information and energy between the two dogs. Think of it as a nonverbal way of communicating. Once the two dogs are eliminating in each other’s presence, that’s a very good sign that the dogs are getting used to each other.
1. **Watch for signs of play between the two dogs.** If one dog makes a play bow, that’s an EXCELLENT sign. You will be tempted to just let the dogs play with each other at this point – but NOT YET. For one, if they’re still on leashes that you’re holding then you are running the risk of them getting tangled and the excitement of the moment turning into a fight. If they’re free to run, you’re still running that risk – so keep walking, give

them a chance to chill out a little bit, and be happy that they're showing you signs that they'll be able to get along.

1. **Also take breaks and give the dogs long, slow, massaging strokes down the length of their body.** Your goal is to get your dog as PHYSICALLY relaxed as possible, so imagine that you're a massage therapist in charge of giving your dog the greatest degree of physical relaxation possible.
1. **After you've been walking for awhile, and the dogs have had a chance to sniff each other repeatedly, move so that you're walking next to each other.** It's not important for the dogs to be right next to each other (in other words, you can be between your dog and the other dog). What do you want, however, is for all of you to be walking next to each other – it will give the dogs a chance to experience more direct contact between the two of them while keeping them aligned with a common purpose – the walk (aka the hunt).

That's it! Plan on walking together for at least 30 minutes, if you have the time. You are teaching the dogs a healthy way to deal with the stress of getting to know each other. The way that two healthy dogs will handle that stress is through the dynamics of play – but “play” isn't a necessary component by any means. In other words, after the walk it's not important for the dogs to have “free time” to play with each other – through your walk you just gave your dogs a perfect opportunity to get to know each other in as stress-free a manner as possible. After a successful walk, they should be relaxed and able to handle being INDOORS in each other's company. Just remember to keep the indoor environment as relaxed and low energy as possible.