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INTRODUCING YOUR NEW DOG TO OTHER DOGS

Before bringing a new dog home, be sure all animals are healthy, have current vaccinations and test negative for parasites. Realize that even if the dogs met successfully on neutral turf, things are different when you bring a new dog home. Make sure there's another person at the homecoming so the dogs can meet on-leash outside.

Prior to the introduction, leash-walk the new dog outside. Then bring out the other dog(s) on leash, preferably with choke/slip collars to provide full control. Make sure you are relaxed, so you don't telegraph anxiety through the leash. Avoid keeping the collar pulled tight, since "restraint frustration" elevates tension and the risk of aggression. The dogs will be more relaxed knowing they have some room to maneuver. Watch carefully so you can make a leash correction if necessary.

Make the meeting fun with a walk and some treats (timed to reward good, relaxed behavior). Introduce gradually, making sure the animals are calm. Pet the resident dog, assuring that everything's OK. If it's not OK, suspend introductions and resume the walk. Be careful to reward only good behavior.

Keep the dogs within sight of each other. (For more than two dogs, introduce each to the newcomer one at a time.) If the animals are receptive to each other, praise each one and reward them with treats and petting to show that good things happen when they are together. If there is a negative reaction, move back to the distance at which neither reacted. Watch for warning signs such as fur raised on the back, staring or stiffening up. If one dog reacts aggressively, don't punish the aggressor; instead, take him in a neutral or less valued area to settle down and ignore him. If both dogs act aggressively, remove each to different, neutral areas. Try re-introducing later in the day.

When correcting unacceptable behavior, timing is critical. Do not wait for the lunge; at the first hint of aggression, such as a stare, correct with a firm "No" and a quick (but not punishing) leash correction, and redirect the dog's attention to you. You must keep control at all times and show the dogs YOU are the alpha. Don't be alarmed if they don't warm up to each other immediately. Either dog may engage in aggressive posturing, barking, marking, housetraining accidents, and possessiveness over toys and people. (If this persists beyond a week or two, consult a specialist.)

When the dogs come inside, a fight could break out, so leave the leashes on for quick control if needed. Keep all toys and treats out of sight until everyone is comfortable. An added advantage to having two people present when introducing dogs is that one can focus on praising each one. However, if you're alone, you can tie one dog's leash to a doorknob or sofa leg at a length that allows the animals to sniff each other at a safe range.

The more socialized both dogs are, the less time it will take for them to become friendly. Try not to be nervous, or your dogs may sense the tension and even defend you from the other dog. To avoid injuries, keep new pets separate from others when you aren't able to supervise. (Some owners find it's best to continue to keep dogs separated at mealtime, and to keep toys off the floor, to prevent fights.) You might crate the newcomer in a family area. Avoid keeping him in a highly coveted area, such as near the other pets' food bowls.

Acclimation can take days or weeks. Be sure to give each pet 10 or 15 minutes of quality time alone with you each day - play, brush, massage, practice rewardable skills. Once the animals react well to each other, remove the leashes. Keep watch, and keep a spray bottle or whistle on hand to interrupt the pets

if they begin to stare or otherwise misbehave. Continue rewarding good behavior with praise and kibble. Always let your dogs know what you expect of them, and they'll be responsive instead of confused.

Socialization is critical - and is more than exposing the dog to new experiences. The owner must act as leader in all situations, as the dog will be gauging the owner's reactions. Remain confident and relaxed, which also allows you to be sensitive to cues from the dog. If a dog does not sense his person can handle a situation, he may try to take charge or react in the only way he knows how - which might be barking, growling, lunging or trying to bite in an attempt to control the environment.