



Proper Dog Introductions

Allowing your dog to meet a new dog is a situation can go very badly very quickly if not handled properly. Before we get into our recommended Proper Introductions guide, let's go over a few of the "Don'ts" when introducing two dogs.

Don't:

- Introduce two dogs on tight leashes
- Introduce two dogs while one of them is on a leash
- Introduce dogs while wearing anything except a slip leash (and muzzle if applicable)
- Introduce dogs demonstrating significant stress signals
- Introduce dogs while one or both are tied
- Introduce dogs with toys or treats present
- Excite either of the dogs prior to the introduction
- Introduce a female dog while in heat
- Introduce more than two dogs at a time

So, you can see there are plenty of things not to do when introducing two dogs, but let's talk about what you should do when preparing to introduce two dogs.

Preparations

Aggressive Dogs

If one or both of the dogs has any type of history of dog aggression, dog reactivity, or getting into fights with other dogs, it is highly recommended to "Muzzle Condition" your dog prior to the day of introduction (See the Alpha K9 guide to Muzzle Conditioning).

If one or both of the dogs has any type of reactivity to other dogs, even if they just really excited when they see other dogs, you should complete the "Continued Exposure" Program prior to formally introducing the two dogs. (Even if neither dog shows any concerning behaviors towards other dogs, Continued Exposure is the best way to prepare two dogs for formally meeting.)

You should review the Alpha K9 Defensive Handling Techniques guide prior to introducing two dogs for the first time.

Location

You should choose a relatively neutral space for the two dogs to meet, such as a not very busy, small, fenced in dog park area. If there is no space conveniently available, you can use your fenced yard. This should definitely be done in a fenced in area as both dogs will be allowed to be free without control of the leash at certain points in the introduction.

Ensure the space that you choose is free of any toys, treats, chews, or significant equipment such as training equipment, place beds, soft beds, agility equipment, etc.

Partner

You must have a partner! It is important to have an additional handler to assist when introducing two dogs to ensure the safety of the dogs and the people involved in the process. Additionally, in the event of a dog fight, you will find great difficulty holding two dogs apart from each other if both want desperately to get to the other. Choose a partner that you trust to apply proper leash handling procedures as necessary and that will remain calm no matter what happens.

Equipment

Each dog should be on a simple rope slip leash that has a tab to hold the slide ring of the leash in place to prevent the leash from loosening so much that it may fall off. If either dog is trained on e-collar or remote collar, they may continue to wear it during the introduction. If either dog is muzzle conditioned, they may wear a properly fit basket-type muzzle during the introduction.

If you have not “Muzzle Conditioned” either dog, DO NOT put a muzzle on them. If you believe that one or both will require a muzzle, you MUST muzzle condition the dog(s) prior to introductions.

Now that you have fully prepared, let's get started!

Step 1: Bring the first dog into the fenced in location on the slip leash and let the dog be on a “Free” command and not in a proper heel, and walk with them clockwise around the edge of the space. The second dog should be brought into the space as the first dog is at the furthest point from the entrance to the fenced area.

The second dog should be walked similarly, also clockwise following in the same direction as the first dog. Each handler should allow the dogs to sniff the ground but should keep them moving. Both handlers should attempt to remain at opposite sides of the space from each other.

Ensure that the space is secured and all fence gates are securely closed so that neither dog can escape.

Each handler should pay close attention to their respective dog. If either dog shows excessive signs of aggression, reactivity, barking, hard stares, or baring of teeth at the other dog, you should end the exercise and begin the same process again the following day. Also you should continue the “Continued Exposure” program.

Step 2: Paying close attention to each dog, both handlers should continue walking clockwise, directly opposite each other for upwards of 1-2 minutes, allowing for both dogs to become familiar and relaxed in the space. The handlers should allow the dogs to sniff the ground and allow them to mark if they desire. If either dog marks, as the other dog approaches the spot that been marked, allow them to investigate, sniff, and even mark if they desire at the same location.

Step 3: During this step, it is very important that both handlers are synchronized. Which ever handler is the primary handler or is decidedly in charge will decide when it is time for both handlers to simultaneously drop their leashes. When both dogs are relatively calm and have

thoroughly investigated the space while walking around the perimeter, you can decide to drop the leashes.

The primary handler will coordinate with the other handler and give a command similar to “1, 2, 3, Drop.” It is important that both handlers drop the leashes simultaneously because in the event that one handler is still holding the leash of one dog, and the other dog comes towards them, this may inadvertently trigger a dog fight. (See the list of “Don’ts at the top of the program).

When you drop the leashes, just allow the dogs to drag the loose ends of the leashes on the ground as they are free to roam the space.

Step 4: Once you have dropped the leashes both handlers should continue moving calmly around the space and avoid any type of sudden or jerky movements. Do not remain stationary.

Both handlers should pay attention as the dogs meet each other and watch for signs of stress, fear, or aggression. If either dog begins displaying any of these signals you should separate the dogs using your body by stepping in between them, or you can use a garden rake or broom to make space between the dogs (try to not make too much physical contact with the dogs with your body or the rake/broom at this time).

If the dogs begin playing, watch for signs of either dog wanting a break in the play or if either dog is being too pushy or dominant in their playing.

Step 5: Allow the dogs to interact for 2-3 minutes if they are playing intensely, and up to 5 minutes if their interaction is fairly uneventful. After the appropriate time has elapsed, each handler should calmly, and simultaneously gather the handle of their respective leash and each dog should separately be removed from the space one at a time.

Repeat this whole process, Steps 1 - 5, as many times as necessary as well as obedience training with both dogs until you are comfortable that they will not have negative interactions in their future interactions.

In Case of Emergency

Even with every possible preparation, things can still possibly go wrong. In the event that the dogs begin to fight, each handler will quickly and calmly grab the handle of their respective slip leash and pull the dogs away from each other.

In the event a dog has latched onto the other dog and will not let go, DO NOT pull them apart from each other horizontally. If you attempt to just pull them away from each other at this point, you will cause MORE damage. If a dog is latched on and is refusing the release the other dog, simply pull upwards on the slip leash until the dog’s front legs are off of the ground. Hold the dog in this position until they release the other dog (Should take less than 30 seconds). The moment the dog has been released lower the dog back down to the ground and continue walking the dog around the space. Check both dogs for injuries.