



Dog to Dog Introductions, Recommendations, and Resources

Congratulations on adding a new four-legged friend to the family! This is an exciting time in your life AND your newly adopted dog's life. We at the Franklin County Dog Shelter want to assist you with a smooth transition when bringing your new dog into your home. This informational handout will provide you with tips and recommendations if you already have a current dog in your home.

Introduction

The first time your new dog and current dog meet should occur on a neutral area and on leash. We typically recommend bringing your dog into the shelter for an introduction prior to adopting but this is not required. We are happy to assist in any first meetings and can help educate you on what to look for. If your dogs are meeting for the first time outside of the shelter, we recommend taking them on a parallel walk together away from your home. This can be throughout your neighborhood, in a park, or a nearby quiet area. Ideally, each dog should be handled by a different person and each dog will remain on a four to six-foot leash. The dogs should be "meeting" each other from a far. Start with a rather large distance between each dog and then gradually walk in closer.

After the introduction, regardless of the outcome, set realistic expectations for further interactions. You should not expect two strange dogs to become best friends right away. While many social dogs seem to adjust quickly, always prepare to allow for slow introductions and decompression time for both the new dog and your resident dog.

Watch Body Language

Dogs communicate with each other through body language. When introducing new dogs, we as handlers need to pay attention to the dogs' body language as well. In a positive interaction, the dogs' bodies should both be loose, tail wagging loosely at spine or neutral level, soft eyes, sniffing respectfully, and when appropriate, can initiate play by offering play bows and short quick play movements. The interaction should be a two way communication between the dogs.

Postures we want to watch for are any stiffening or stillness, hard direct staring, growling, showing teeth, excessive alarm barking, a slow stalking gait, a tightly closed mouth, and a high, tight, still tail. You should also avoid nose to nose greetings. These body language cues can escalate into aggression and should be closely monitored. Not allowing the dogs to interact when these behaviors are shown is highly recommended.

Always supervise time with your dogs. When possible, we suggest two people be present when the dogs are together.

Set Up Your Home Properly

Before the dogs enter your house, ensure you have picked up any toys, bones, food, beds, or other high value resources that may cause tension between the dogs. It is a good idea to have separate areas for each dog to allow them to both have some alone time as well as have separate feeding areas. We do not recommend feeding your newly adopted dog and current dog together. Allowing your dogs to share items such as toys, bowls, and beds is not recommended right away. Dogs should always be supervised in the household together. If possible, each dog should have their own safe space where they can decompress peacefully. If you are unable to keep the dogs in separate rooms, ensure they each have their own crate and ideally cover the crates with a large sheet or blanket for the dogs to have a visual barrier between them.

Leashes! Use Them.

Keeping a leash on both dogs for the first few days to a week is encouraged. The leash can be a useful tool and something easy to grab shall any tension or uncomfortable situations start to arise between the two dogs. Simply grab the leash of one or both dogs, gently guide them away from an uncomfortable interaction, praise them for exiting, and provide a reward. If needed, separate the dogs to allow them to settle before they interact again.

Leaving a leash on your new dog can also be a useful tool when housebreaking. If you notice your new dog displaying signs they may need to use the bathroom—sniffing a lot, circling, posturing to urinate or defecate—being able to quickly grab the leash and guide your dog outside will assist in reinforcing appropriate housebreaking behaviors.

Positive Reinforcement

Utilize positive reinforcement training when your dogs are interacting appropriately together. You can give a reward for appropriate calm behavior such as dogs laying down in the same room together, the dogs coexisting peacefully, or after an appropriate mutual play session. Always be careful when having food around both dogs. If you feel the dogs appear to have conflict over food, separate them before providing the reinforcement (food, toys, anything that is highly motivating to the dog).

It is also recommended you provide positive reinforcement training to both of your dogs **separately**. Engaging in a few short positive training sessions daily will strengthen your bond, create a fun environment to learn new things, and create lifelong learners in a fun, positive way.

*The Franklin County Dog Shelter offers two positive reinforcement training classes that are FREE to adopters. Information on our basic obedience course can be found here <https://dogs.franklincountyohio.gov/Education/Behavioral-Training-Help/Free-Training-Classes-for-New-Adopters> . For information on our Reactive Dog Training class, please email our Behavior Team at behavior@franklincountyohio.gov

Inside vs. Outside

When bringing a new dog home, your current resident dog may develop some minor to severe territorial concerns. These typically arise INSIDE the home. While the dogs may have shown positive interest in each other at the shelter, now that they are at home, your resident dog may have a change in behavior. If you have a secure fenced in yard, allowing the dogs to play outside is likely a better scenario than playing inside initially. If you do not have a fenced in yard, allowing the dogs to take walks together outside often and separating them in calm areas inside the home is a great idea for the first couple weeks.

Keep it Positive

In the beginning weeks of having your new adopted dog in the home, it is recommended to provide decompression for and separation of both dogs. Any interaction between the dogs should ideally be kept relatively short and always be positive. It is important to have the dogs form a positive relationship with each other. If every time they are together it is a positive experience, that association and relationship should continue to grow in a positive manner.

When to Get Help

If you feel the interactions between your new dog and current dog seem to be unpredictable, aggressive, and/or the dogs seem to have more conflict than positive interactions, please consider seeking help. You can either reach out to the Franklin County Dog Shelter Behavior Team at behavior@franklincountyohio.gov, seek

advice from a certified trainer or certified animal behaviorist, or set up an appointment with a board certified veterinary behaviorist who is qualified to assist you.

Resources:

<https://dogs.franklincountyohio.gov/Education/Behavioral-Training-Help/Online-Library-Behavior-Information-Sheets>

<https://fearfreehappyhomes.com/fear-free-happy-homes-videos/>

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/introducing-new-dogs>

Trainers:

To find a qualified trainer in your area you can use the following search options

<https://www.ccpdt.org/dog-owners/certified-dog-trainer-directory/>

<https://karenpryoracademy.com/find-a-trainer/#!/directory/map>

<https://m.iaabc.org/consultant/>

You can also reach out to the Ohio State University Behavior Department to contact a board certified veterinary behaviorist <https://vet.osu.edu/vmc/companion/our-services/behavioral-medicine>

Online Courses:

Instinct Dog Training offers multiple FREE online courses. These courses may offer assistance in having a multi-dog household.

<https://www.instinctdogtraining.com/online-school/>