



## Multi-dog Households

The “Bringing Your New Dog Home” handout explains the importance of the shutdown period. You may be bringing your new family member home to meet your resident dog for the first time or you may have done a dog to dog introduction at the shelter. That introduction showed a snapshot glimpse of how the dogs will interact, not a predictor. Luckily, adding a new family member can be a smooth transition. Here is how to keep the peace, now that you are home!

**Body Language-** Being aware of what our dogs are saying is an important part of living with dogs. Most dogs display clear information, we just do not always know what to look for! Did you know that a wagging tail is not always an indicator of a positive experience? Depending on how fast the tail is wagging and what the rest of the body is doing, it could mean trouble. Keep in mind that some dog’s physical features may make it more difficult to read. If ears are cropped or tail is docked, you can’t read them! Below is information on dog body language. The more of one grouping, the less conflicted the dog may be and the easier it is to understand what they are saying.

Body language that indicates a good experience:

- Loose wiggly body
- Soft eyes and eye contact
- Play bows- Back end is up, front end is down
- Playful vocalizations
- Loose, large, circular tail wags



Body language that indicates a challenging experience:

- Stiff body posture
- Hard stares
- Low growls
- Baring of teeth
- Avoidance of other dog
- Tail tucked or high and stiff tail
- Stiff, fast moving tail wag



Stress signs include:

- Lip licking,
- Avoiding eye contact,
- Sniffing, sneezing, licking, scratching and/or yawning out of context
- Tucked tail
- Cheek puffing
- “Whale Eye” When a dog turns their head away but eyes are turned to the side, showing the whites of the eye.



**Day 1- Where am I?** This is when the new dog will assess his new surroundings and family. Your current dog begins to figure out that he has a new roommate, not just a playdate. How to help make this a success?

- Meet outside of the house.
- Keep it moving- canine and human. Allowing both dogs to congregate near the person can cause spats. Taking a walk also helps to loosen us humans up!
- Stay calm, take a deep breath and shake of any tension that you may have. Dogs can sense when we are tense and that can make the introduction more stressful than it needs to be. Have fun with it!
- Make it a priority to have breaks and time apart, not just for day one. Even when dogs have gotten to know each other, they can use a break from each other at least once a day.
- Initial time together, parallel leash walking, starting from a distance.
- Keep the first day (and the first few weeks) as quiet and low key as possible.

**Week 1-3- Time to be proactive, not reactive.** Be aware of areas or situations that may cause altercations while all of the animals are still adjusting. Examples include:

- Put toys away.

- Keep food rewards separate.
- Watch, manage and prevent interactions in small spaces such as hallways.
- Pay attention to body language. Pay attention to signs that mean “I have had enough”.
- Use sturdy baby gates to manage interaction.
- Do not feed together, instead use food time for bonding and training.
- Let each dog have their own “room”. Crates can be used for management and safety.

**Week 3+ - After the” getting to know you “stage.** As your new dog begins bonding with you and getting to know their new home, you will notice some changes in the dog’s personality. You might compare it to: Staying the weekend at a friend’s house vs. moving into the friend’s home permanently!

The way that your dog interacts with animals outside of your home may be different from the way the dog interacts in a home. This is normal!

- Work on training individually and separately
- Remember that all dogs are unique. This applies to personalities and training. Sometimes we forget how much time we took getting to know our first dog. Even a dog with previous training will not know the rules and cues the way that your current dog does.
- Know when to intervene. Most dogs communicate well with each other, but occasionally they need our help. When to intervene? When one dog behaves in a way that is disproportionate to the situation, if a dog is in danger, if play is not reciprocated, if play is escalating too much.



**Desensitizing.** Sometimes one of the animals needs a little more time to get used to each other. In addition to management and supervision, here is an exercise that can help the process. What you need:

- Dog #1
- Dog#2
- Handler#1
- Handler#2
- Treats

1. Dog #2 is far enough away that dog#1 notices but does not react.
2. Handler #1 begins feeding bits of high value treats to dog#1. Dog #2 is in view. (If dog#1 reacts then you are too close!)
3. Handler #2 takes dog #2 out of sight.
4. Handler#1 stops feeding treats to dog #1
5. Repeat these four steps until: when dog#2 appears, dog#1 looks at handler#1 willingly, anticipating a treat.

6. Once this happens you decrease the distance slightly and repeat steps.

7. As this improves, you can add more activity, more interactions, and more distractions

These tips are just a short summary, if you have more questions about your new family member, please contact our behavior staff at: [behavior@jaxhumane.org](mailto:behavior@jaxhumane.org)

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