



Paw Prints

Resource sheet:

Get your dogs off to a good start together

Congratulations on your choice to add a new dog to your household! The following information will help you get your dogs off to a good start together.

Prepare your home for the new arrival

1. Dog-proof your home

Even if your current dog is completely house-proofed (i.e., no chewing on things, behaves politely, is potty trained), you should dog-proof your home for the new arrival, particularly if the new dog is a puppy. This sets the new dog up for success (if she can't get into the trash, she can't make a mess). Pick up anything the dog might chew, like shoes, dirty laundry or children's toys.

2. Buy new supplies for the new dog

Your new dog will need his own bed, toys, and food/water bowls. Over time the dogs will probably begin to share some of these items, but initially having separate items and their own spaces to retreat to will help reduce stress for both dogs.

3. Put away all of your current dog's toys and chews before bringing the new dog home

This helps to avoid aggression related to toy possessiveness. Start out with no toys around so that they can get to know each other without that added distraction.

Set them up for success on the first meeting

4. Introduce the dogs on neutral ground

It's important to first introduce your new dog to your current dog on neutral ground, i.e., on the sidewalk in a different neighbourhood, at a friend's house (where your dog doesn't go often and where there is no resident dog) or similar place. It's best to have both dogs off-lead. If this is not possible then each dog should have a handler, rather than one person holding both leads, and it is critical that the leads are NEVER tight – use long leads (3-4m) and keep them loose.

5. Reward short, positive interactions

Allow the dogs to sniff and greet for a brief period of time, then have each handler distract them with happy voices and treats to come away from each other for a moment. After each distraction, allow the dogs to continue sniffing and interacting. The purpose of the distract-and-treat is to keep rewarding the dogs for behaving, and to give them little time-outs so that they don't get stressed. If either dog behaves aggressively, stop and seek professional help.

6. Bring them home together

After the interaction, take both dogs to your home together. This is important — if one dog is already there and you bring in the second, you set up the possibility for territorial behavior.

7. Let them explore the yard together

Start by letting them get acquainted in the yard, off-lead if fenced.

8. Continue monitoring as you bring them inside

After a little while, bring them inside and make sure to watch their interactions carefully. Set the tone to happy and jolly and make sure to praise when they are behaving well.

Supervise their interactions for the first days or weeks

9. Feed them in separate areas

Feeding from separate bowls in separate areas avoids problems with food aggression. They may eventually choose to eat out of the same bowl or be comfortable eating next to each other, but this will depend on each dog's temperament and past experiences. Supervise to keep them from stealing each other's food, but don't stand right over either of them — this can seem to them like you are 'guarding' their food.

10. Slowly introduce toys

Once the dogs are interacting well, slowly introduce toys and carefully watch their interactions. Make sure to introduce two toys at a time rather than just one, so that the dogs each have something to play with.

11. Give them individual attention

Remember to give both dogs individual attention. This is particularly important for your original dog, who is having to cope with some very different routines in his life. For example, you could put Josie in her kennel or in a dog-proofed room with a yummy food-stuffed toy (eg., a Kong®), and then play ball in the yard with Chester.

12. Enforce the same rules for both dogs

Make sure that your new dog has to follow the same rules as your current dog. If Chester doesn't get to be on the couch, then Josie doesn't get to be on the couch.

13. Don't leave them alone together

In the first days of their getting to know each other, you should supervise all of their interactions. When you aren't there they should be kept separately so that they cannot reach each other (but make sure they each have plenty of toys — particularly treat-stuffed ones like Kongs®). This prevents fighting and allows you to stop problems before they get out of hand. Over time, start leaving them alone together for short periods of time, and if things are going well gradually work up to leaving them for longer periods.

Help maintain their relationship over time

14. Consider dog training classes

Even if you've done some training with your current dog, taking your new dog to classes helps you focus on teaching her as well as you taught your other dog. Classes also help socialize dogs, giving them a wider range of experiences than they'll get by only knowing one or two other dogs. It will establish you as a leader for your dog, give you the tools to communicate with your dog and build confidence for both of you. If you've never worked on training your dog or attended a class, you might be amazed at what you and your dog can do.

15. Seek professional help if needed

Your dogs may have a few arguments in the beginning, but if these increase or cause injury to either dog, you should seek professional help.

A final note

The old saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" certainly applies to dogs. If you follow this program and put in the time and effort involved in properly introducing and settling your dogs, you will be rewarded with happy dogs and prevent some serious behavioural problems.