

Multiple Dog Households

How wonderful to have more than one dog in your household!

You get to know each dog's personality, silly quirks, likes and dislikes.....and pretty much gives a whole new dimension to owning a dog, in more ways that you can imagine.

Whenever you introduce a new dog into your household, there are some very important things you need to be mindful of, as well as an entirely different way you need to co-exist with multiple dogs.

On the most part, dogs will get along just fine with each other. Some form very strong bonds together and others simply learn to tolerate each other.

Introducing new dogs

We recommend going for a walk first up. Walking is a very primal activity, which was used as a means of migration by the early settlers and our dog's ancestors. Walking helps form bonds as the dogs 'migrate' from point A to point B. So take the dogs out for a walk together for at least 45 minutes before heading to a neutral area.

The neutral area should be somewhere where there is no association to either dog/s. Once walked, dogs will be a little tired and much calmer. Keep the leads very loose and allow the dogs to have a sniff. If possible, take off the leads and have them introduce themselves naturally and without restraint.

Use interrupters like a ball or toy to interrupt their attention every now and again.

There is no right or wrong way from this point on, and what you see will be pretty much the type of relationship that may form between the dogs. Watch for pushy/bully behaviour which should not be allowed. Should dogs get into a fight, pick up both back legs together and 'wheelbarrow' the dogs away. Under no circumstances should you put your hand in to try to separate.

In most cases, dogs will figure each other out and once they are happily tired, now is the time to take them both home.

Rules

All rules apply for all dogs in the household. Here is small list of do's and don'ts:

- Dynamics change whenever you introduce a new dog, so follow a strict NILIF program (refer to NILIF sheet) for all dogs especially the first 2 weeks.
- No dogs on the couch/bed or any area belonging to humans
- No favouritism at all....NONE! All dogs are treated equal, regardless of who was there first or who is the youngest or the most hard done by!!!!
- Stick to your household rules and ensure the new dogs is taught these from the minute they enter your home....do not deviate at all!
- Feed separately
- Don't make a big fuss over any dog!

Fights will occur....

The savagery of a dog fight can horrify any dog owner. Every owner tries to avoid situations where their dogs might get into a fight, although unfortunately they almost never prepare themselves should such an event ever occur in their household

Most fights are over a resource. Hence we term it, "resource guarding"! The first most important thing to remember about household dogs that get into a fight is that it is almost always over resources (possessions).

'Mine!!'

When I ask you what your dogs' resources are, you might think of:

- Food or food bowl
- Toys
- Beds

The above are correct but we need to add to the list things like:

- General area around YOU
- Any form of attention from YOU
- Rooms or doorways that lead to YOU
- Sitting areas close to YOU
- YOU

Get the picture??

Resources are anything that an individual dog sees as very important to his existence; therefore the mere fact that he or she must share these with another dog is normally not agreeable to the dog.

Pushy Dogs

Just like us, dogs have individual personalities and traits. Some dogs are naturally submissive and content with just 'being', whereas other dogs can be quite pushy/bossy and may tend to bully the more submissive dog around simply because he/she can!

The pushy dog in your household is the one that is always seeking your attention, never letting the other dog/s close to you.

Every time the pushy dog gets the 'win' (Eg. Getting your attention first and moving the other dog further away from you), he/she becomes empowered and unfortunately will continue to step up a notch each time.

You must watch for cold hard staring (refer to images), usually given from the pushy dog to the submissive dog which is used to warn it to move or stay away.

It is important to interrupt this behaviour immediately. You can do this by blowing a loud air horn or whistle, clanging pots or even a quick squirt from a water bottle to the offending dog. The aim is to interrupt the behaviour and move the offending dog on very quickly. He/she has just lost the privilege of whatever it was he/she was guarding against the other dog.

You are in charge, so you call the shots!

Forget the old "Pat and feed the dominant dog first" rubbish. This creates more problems than solves them!

Treat ALL dogs in your home as equals, meaning all dogs must abide by your household rules as well as practice manners and self control. Therefore YOU pat/feed whichever dog YOU want to first!!

If you call Dog A and Dog B comes over, you need to ignore Dog B. If Dog B becomes pushy, then slightly push him away with a "matter of fact" attitude (no words or eye contact) until he gets the message that it's not his turn for your attention.

In some cases where the dog is very stubborn, a quick squirt from a water bottle may help relay the message. You can then swap dogs. Do this exercise often but always watch for signs of staring from either dog.

Attention on Demand – no no!

Don't put up with pushy behaviour from any of your dogs if they demand attention from you. With more than 1 dog in the household, this almost always escalates to a fight because as mentioned above, we empower the pushy, more determined dog each time.

Walk the dogs together

Plenty of walks as a pack are very important. Walking is a primal activity, which our dog's ancestors did a lot of. It's a sort of migration from A to B. Walking helps form the bond and acceptance within a group of dogs, therefore walking all dogs together is important.

I love you too!

Make the submissive dog very important in your life! Many times we pay so much attention to the bossy/pushy dog that we forget the one that gets relegated to the bottom of the pack.

Take the submissive dog with you on outings. Bring him/her into the house **on their own** or take them out to training or on adventures on their own with you from time to time. This will help demonstrate that the submissive dog is as equally important to the pack as the other, as well as being highly valued by you.

This won't make the pushy dog jealous! Jealousy is a human trait, not a dog's. Upon arriving home, the pushy dog may merely want to sniff the other dog to see where he/she has been. The pushy dog may even be happy to see the other dog return home and try to engage play.

Separating after a fight

If your dogs happen to get into a fight, it will be necessary to break it up so that no damage/harm is caused to either dog and escalation doesn't occur.

Safely break up fights by:

- A very loud sound
- Pour water on the dogs
- If there are 2 of you, each pick up each dog by the back legs and wheelbarrow them away. Do NOT leg go until they are within good distance away and you can safely get hold of the dog's collar.

Try not to scream, shout or throw things at the dogs, as this WILL escalate the fight! Try to remain as calm as possible.

Never separate completely!

In the initial stages of unrest amongst the pack, fights will be minor, easily broken up and forgotten about.

As the fights continue, they may increase in intensity and regularity. In this case we cannot stress how important it is NOT to separate your dogs within the household after a fight. This can cause "unfinished business" syndrome where they will continue the fight as soon as they are let into the same area together again.

Instead:

- Separate dogs approx 20 or 30 metres apart – PARALLEL to each other, not face on!
- Each person holds on to each dog and must patiently wait until the dogs have calmed down. *This could take up to 1 hour in some cases.*
- You are waiting for dogs to go into a laying down position...ready to rest.
- No panting
- No stress in and around the eyes
- Body must be totally relaxed

Once both dogs are in this position, you can let go and walk away or inside.

If your dogs continue to fight after being reunited, then go ahead and separate but call a trainer/behaviourist in immediately.

If you have separated the dogs from within the household

If you felt you needed to separate the dogs within the household, then re-joining them can be a challenge.

In most cases, separated dogs cannot usually be reunited again due to many reasons, however your trainer will provide you with some tactics which may be helpful in assisting the reuniting of your dogs.

NOTE: It is important to accept that sometimes your current pack dynamics is not conducive to the dogs living harmoniously together. This is when a decision may need to be made as to whether you keep both, or one of the dogs at all.

What to look for!



Shepherd in this picture giving clear warning signals to the Border Collie

Nose wrinkled forward, tight and sometimes curling up showing 4 front teeth.

Border Collie has low posture and is looking away - avoidance



Golden Retriever's face is tight and tense. Eyes are 'hard' and staring.

Tails is swishing around in tense fashion. This is NOT a happy tail wag!

Other dog's ears are out sideways and his face is low (nose pointing downward) in avoidance



Ears up, face rigid and hard stare. Black dog giving lighter dog a distinct warning sign.

Lighter dog has lowered posture, ears are to the side indicating a calming signal



The final warning before the strike...the lip curl!

Sometimes accompanied by a very low growl, sometimes not.

There isn't much time between the lip curl and the bite, so ideally you want to avoid this escalation at all costs.

It is imperative that you learn to recognise your dogs' body language as there is almost always a lot of conversation going on between them without you even knowing it.

Learn to recognise the warning signs of cold stares, stiffening posture and lip curling, as these will help you get in early and interrupt the behaviour.

Note:

You should contact a behaviourist/trainer at the first sign of unsettledness amongst your dogs. There is no such thing ever as a single only fight. Once they start, fights will continue to escalate both in frequency and in intensity if not managed correctly, so be sure to seek professional help asap.