Dogs: New Dog Introductions

We know how exciting and rewarding it is to adopt a dog. You might want to introduce him to all of your friends, neighbor’s dogs, and your own dog as soon as you get home. However, we ask that you wait and instead follow the two-week acclimation period (see handout) because you will have more success that way.

Your new dog and your resident dog:

The best way to introduce two dogs for long-term success is to do it over time because some resident dogs may feel threatened by a strange dog in their home. If an introduction is forced or rushed, it’s possible that there could be friction. The majority of returned adoptions from multiple dog households that we get are due to adopters introducing their dogs before the two-week acclimation period is over and the dogs ‘do not get along.’ Indeed, most of them admit to not doing the acclimation at all.

Importance of the two-week acclimation period:

The two-week acclimation period is important for all adopted dogs, but particularly essential when you are introducing a new dog and a resident dog. By giving the new dogs two weeks to be in the same house without meeting, it gives both of them the necessary time to get used to each other’s smells. Furthermore, the excitement of a new dog in the house slowly wears off, and fades into the background. It is when the excitement and newness wears off that you will formally introduce the dogs.

The introduction process:

For the introduction, you will need one handler for each dog. Start by walking on opposite sides of the street far apart from each other with one dog in the lead. Continue walking this way for some time. If either dog gets overexcited, increase the distance between them. When the dogs seem calm, slowly close the gap between the dogs while remaining on opposite sides of the street.

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Continue walking this way for some time. Next, while still walking (do not stop because movement is your friend in this exercise), both handlers move to the middle of the street but one takes the lead and the other falls behind. Again, while walking, let the second dog sniff the first dog and then alternate dogs so that the first one has a chance to sniff the second one. Keep walking! Next, position yourself so that you and the other handler are walking next to each other with the dogs on the outside. Eventually, change positions so that the dogs are walking next to each other. Keep walking and let the dogs meet.

**Body language:**

Signs to look for that the meeting has the potential to go well include open mouths, loose bodies, back-ends wiggling, tails in neutral position, or a play bow (the universal sign of play where a dog’s rear is in the air and his front is down). Signs to look for that the meeting has the potential to go poorly include closed mouths, tense bodies, erect tails, weight forward, or growling. If you see these signs, call the dogs away from each other and increase the distance between them. You can try again on the same walk or call it off for the day and begin anew the next day.

**In the home:**

Even if the introduction went well, it may take some time for both dogs to be completely comfortable living with each other. For this reason, we suggest that you remove all toys and bones to avoid a potential argument. It is also wise to feed the dogs separately to avoid food aggression. Most fights between dogs in the home occur over food and other high-value resources. Once the dogs have a good rapport, you can let them spend more time together unsupervised.

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Need further assistance with a pet displaying unfavorable behaviors? BARCS is here to help! Please email info2barcs@gmail.com for more help with a training or behavior-related issue with your pet.