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Multi-Dog Households: From First Date to After the Honeymoon



- *** **Initial Introductions**
- *** **Navigating the Transition**
- *** **When to say “When”**



INITIAL INTRODUCTIONS

EVERYONE AGREES:

- *** Neutral area best.
- *** Outdoor better than indoor.
- *** Freedom of movement (at minimum, loose leash).
- *** One handler per dog.
- *** Don't hover, keep moving! Stay "relaxed".
- *** Distract if dogs become stiff or tense, keep first introductory sniffs brief.

And then, there are the controversies...!

Where Should the Introduction Take Place?

INTRODUCTIONS AT SHELTER MANDATORY?

PRO's:

- *** Experienced dog handlers present to facilitate the interaction.
- *** Allows for an evaluation of the owners' skills.
- *** Good opportunity for client education.
- *** Can eliminate some problematic match ups.
(Maybe...)

INTRODUCTIONS AT SHELTER MANDATORY?

CONS:

- *** Predictive value of the interaction unknown.
- *** Set up unrealistic expectations?
- *** Can force an interaction in ways least likely to facilitate good relationship between dogs.
- *** Compromises credibility of the shelter staff?



BEST PRACTICE

*** Help adopters understand that the interaction is NOT necessarily predictive.

*** The interaction is understood as a way for professionals to facilitate a good first meeting of the dogs.

*** Introductions should only be done IF best practices can be followed (dogs with lots of space, little pressure, etc.)

What are We Looking For?

- *** Loose bodies.
 - *** Clear social signals.
 - *** Arousal minimal, and brief.
 - *** Play ideal (but not nec'ly predictive of behavior in the home.)
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- ? Does your shelter have a list of criteria?
 - ? Are staff all trained and tested for consistency?
 - ? What are the deal breakers?

WHAT TO ASK?

- *** Resident dog's experience with other dogs.
(Must distinguish between one particular dog and "other" dogs.)
- *** New dog's history, behavior at shelter/foster.
- *** Ability of owners to "read" and to manage dogs.

Most Common Mistakes of Shelters/Foster Groups

*** Assuming behavior at shelter/foster predicts behavior in a specific home.

- >> Behavior changes once a dog becomes a “resident.”
- >> Behavior within a group of dogs is not the same as behavior to one other dog in a household.



Most Common Mistakes of Shelters/Foster Groups

*** Not disclosing the full history of a dog to potential adopters.

>> Sometimes this is from a lack of knowledge about a dog's behavior out of the foster/shelter setting – but not always.

*** Prepping owners of importance of timing (quiet time at the house, owner with time to spend with new dog.)

THE TRANSITION: First Day Home

- *** Meet outside if possible, dogs free to move.
- *** Keep people and dogs moving, don't hover!
- *** New dog enters home first.
- *** Have plan before bringing dog home of how to give dogs a break from one another.
- *** Parallel walks.
- *** Quiet day, avoid visitors, arousal.
- *** Owner needs a support system organized **before** bringing dog home.

THE TRANSITION: Day Two, Day Three, Day ...

Be proactive about avoiding
potential problems areas and contexts:

*** High arousal at doorways (management just as good as training here.)

*** Dinner time: Start by managing, can easily train to avoid problems.

*** Limited Resources: Manage at first (put toys away), can condition as time goes on.

(One dog resource guarding toys? Put toys away for awhile.)

THE TRANSITION: Day Two, Day Three, Day ...

- *** Spend time with each dog as an individual.
- *** Immediately begin teaching dogs that being patient and polite pays off.
- *** Decide if best to walk separately or together.
- *** Lots of quiet time; new dog is probably “shell shocked,” resident dog emotional
(Confused? Irritated? Fearful?)

LONG TERM MANAGEMENT

Support the “Alpha?”

No! Teach dogs to be
PATIENT AND POLITE!



Most Common Mistakes of New Owners

- *** Expecting the new dog to be as well trained as the resident, without putting in the time and effort.
- *** Missing signs of tension, an inability to “read” dogs.
- *** A lack of knowledge of how best to intervene:
(Distractions, Body blocks... what else?)



Most Common Mistakes of New Owners

PERHAPS THE TWO MOST PROBLEMATIC:



- *** Lack of patience and faith (universal)
- *** Believing that they must support the “dominant dog,” whoever it is.

Adopters Must Have a Backup Plan!

- *** Satisfaction guaranteed best practice.
- *** Easy access to help (must know who to call BEFORE the dog comes home).
- *** The knowledge that “buyer’s remorse” is common, understandable, and predictable.
- *** The knowledge that it usually takes 6 to 12 months for dogs to “settle in.”

WHEN TO SAY WHEN



The “All They Need is Love” Mythology

Nope, that ain't enough.

- *** Not all dogs can thrive in every environment.
- *** Adopters **MUST** have the same alternative as foster homes and shelter workers.

Getting Rid of Guilt

Just because some people treat dogs like toasters, doesn't mean everyone does.

Greater love hath no person than to take responsibility for a dog, which might mean accepting that your home is not the right home for a particular dog.

Service providers **MUST** accept dogs back without causing adopters to feel guilty.

Factors to Consider



Quality of Life of the Dog:

*** Is the dog in constant danger or under continual threat?

*** Is the dog getting what he or she needs to live a relatively stress-free and fulfilled life?

Factors to Consider

Quality of Life of the Owners:

*** Can they realistically manage the problem?



*** Are the dogs causing them emotional distress, marital stress, family discord? How much emotional energy do they have left?

*** What access do they have to services that can help them?

Resources

- ASPCApro [Canine Communications Webinar Series](#)
- Emily Weiss’s ASPCApro blog [“Stop the Introductions”](#) (July 2013)
- *Book: [Feeling Outnumbered: How to Manage and Enjoy Your Multi-Dog Household](#). London & McConnell.*
- *DVD: [Feeling Outnumbered: How to Manage and Enjoy Your Multi-Dog Household](#). McConnell.*
- *Book: [Love Has No Age Limit: Welcoming an Adopted Dog into Your Home](#). McConnell & London.*
- *Book: [Do Over Dogs: Give Your Dog a Second Chance for a First Class Life](#). P. Miller.*



Related ASPCApro Webinars

aspcapro.org/webinars

These webinar recordings have been approved for CEUs by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT):

[Canine Body Language](#)

[Human Body Language and Dog Behavior](#)

[Defensive Dog Handling](#)

[Canine Communications: Dog Introductions](#)