



Adding a Dog to Your Household

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Think back for a minute and try to remember the most annoying, irritating, unpleasant neighbor, classmate or fellow employee you ever had to endure. It didn't matter that others may have liked this person; he or she just managed to rub you the wrong way.

Now imagine finding out that this most annoying person was going to be your roommate for life and you were going to be expected to share everything and everyone you loved with them? Or imagine that your husband, wife (or partner) came home one day with a new wife, extolling her virtues, and expecting you to love her like he does. And those who say they love you best think they are doing you a kindness by this? Get real! We don't expect to like every person we meet. We become friends with those we like and learn to tolerate, at a distance, those whose personalities, expectations, and needs clash with ours.

Why then would we expect our dogs, just because they are a dog, to like the company of any other dog? And yet we do this all the time when we add an additional dog to our family—we expect them to get along. And we are surprised and hurt when sometimes they don't.

Many dogs live together in homes and enjoy each other's company immensely—even going into mourning when their beloved companion is lost. But that is only one side of the coin. Unfortunately, rivalries between dogs in the same home can create tragedies that could put Shakespeare to shame.

While rivalries between household dogs can be treated, it is a lot easier to prevent them.

Here are three things that you can do to help increase the likelihood that your new dog and your old dog will get along together and be friends from the start. First give some careful consideration of the needs of your family, human and canine, before you add an additional dog to your household.

"People often get a second dog based on looks alone—they like a particular breed so that is what they get." Says Trish King, Director of Behavior & Training at the Marin Humane Society, in Marin County, California. (<http://www.marinhumanesociety.org>) But if, for example, your resident dog is older and has arthritis, you may not want to get a boisterous, exuberant, large breed puppy which will likely not respect the needs of the older dog. Or if you do, then be a good parent and run interference for the older dog by keeping the younger dog from invading its space, bullying or injuring it.

Second, help your dog to learn good socialization skills. You would be amazed how much doggy communication we humans miss because we aren't attuned to the subtle language of canine body language. But dogs have complex social behavior and communication, part of which is learned. A puppy that grows up in isolation, or only with humans, doesn't learn the subtle communication skills necessary to easily get along with its own species. This is where puppy socialization classes are so beneficial. A well run kinderpuppy class can go a long way toward teaching your puppy how to behave while it is in its most impressionable state. This is good for

any dog, but particularly if there is ever a chance that you will turn into a two dog household somewhere down the road.

Third, pay careful attention to how you introduce any new dog into your household. First impressions matter. Instead of introducing the dogs in your home or yard, have both dogs meet for the first time on completely neutral territory, preferably a fenced yard where they can eventually go off leash. Don't let the dogs rush right up and greet each other, instead, keep them apart and allow them to view and smell each other from afar. Walk them past each other without allowing contact.

Don't be concerned if one or the other dog seems uninterested in the other dog and goes off smelling the bushes –this is appropriate canine behavior. “When a dog investigates unimportant things – like bushes – he's actually communicating to another dog that he is not a threat. That way, they can greet each other in a leisurely manner, without too much tension,” says King. Other suggestions to help your dogs get along can be found on the Marin Humane Society web site.

Lastly, if your resident dogs begin to have serious problems, especially if they injure each other, it is very important to seek help quickly. Dogs can get severely injured or even killed if unrestrained hostilities break out and there is a potential for human injuries as well. The sooner you can address problems, the better. Ask your veterinarian for recommendations and seek the assistance of a veterinary behaviorist, certified animal behaviorist, a certified trainer from the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT.com) or a Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, from the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants.

With the right consideration and preparation, you can greatly increase the chance that your dogs will become best buddies for years to come.