

BALANCE DOG TRAINING



MAKING GOOD DOG OWNERS BETTER



DOG-DOG INTRODUCTIONS

Recommended handler skills - basic dog handling, knowledge of canine body language and foundation training with a form of marker training with voice or a clicker.

Recommended dog skills - heel, recall (come command), a strong sit or down and good focus on the handler.

There may be a number of situations in which you would introduce your dog to another dog. Examples are walks in the neighborhood, hiking in a park, dog sitting for a friend, fostering a dog from the shelter, etc. For whatever the reason we need to understand that not all dogs will be best friends and some dogs just aren't very social at all. Safety should always be your primary concern (for you and your dog/s), though accidents will happen and we can not always prevent them. Always work within your comfort zone. If you are uncomfortable about any given situation, stay away from it, if at all possible and seek the help of someone with more experience to help you through the situation.

Every situation may be different, so always be aware and pay attention to what your dog is doing. It may not be your dog in the wrong, but you don't want them to have a bad experience.

Some of the biggest errors in the handling of dogs is having a tense leash. If your dog cannot approach another dog calmly to greet them, then you will need to work on that separately from the walk.

Introductions on a casual walk/hiking:

1. If you encounter another dog out on a walk, always ask the owner if you can greet their dog. If yes, continue to the next step. If no, try again another day.
2. In order for two dogs to greet, the dogs must be relatively calm (not excited and pulling). If either dog is excited and pulling, it would be safest not to greet at that time. Work on calming skills and having your dog focus on you and try again another day.
3. Once your dog is relatively calm and has good focus, I like the three second rule. Have the dogs greet one another so their noses and rear ends are together so they can smell each other. The entire process should not take more than three seconds. After three seconds, you want to mark the pleasant encounter by saying "yes" (or whatever your mark happens to be) and offering a treat away from the other dog making encouraging sounds. Try your best not to pull on the leash, though a light tug may be necessary, if the treat does not work.
4. You will be able to extend the time your dog interacts with that particular dog with each encounter. Brief encounters are always better than extended ones. We want our dogs to have pleasant experiences with nothing bad happening.
5. There will be times when two dogs appear to be best friends with the first greeting. Even though they get along great it is far better to keep the encounter short and arrange a play date in a neutral area, so they can play off lead and not be tangled with leashes. Meeting in a neutral area eliminates the possibility of one of the dogs guarding familiar territory.
6. Always supervise the play, if the play starts to escalate just step in and give them a break. You can add a command cue like "time out" each time you step in.

Introductions on an organized walk/hike:

1. Organized walks will have a number of dogs involved. There will be a variety of personalities within the group and a variety of handling skills.
2. It would be best if the more confident and calm dogs take the lead. Dogs that are insecure or reactive tend to constantly be worried about what is behind them. So these dogs should walk in back.
3. During the walk the insecure or reactive dogs can slowly make their way up closer to the rest of the dogs, as their body language displays a higher level of comfort within the group. If the dog is doing well with closer proximity to the other dogs, then you may try to pass one of the dogs at a safe distance. Make sure you let the handler of the other dog know what you are doing, so they can be prepared as well. The dog you pass should be non-reactive.
4. Continue passing back and forth with that dog as long as your dog's body language is not showing excessive stress. A little stress is ok, but too much stress does not allow the dog to learn anything. If little to no stress is present, the passing can be made more slowly. Giving the dogs an opportunity to get to know one another a little better. On subsequent walks or if the walk/hike is long enough you can begin walking parallel with the other dog. Remember to always have the more experienced handler between the two dogs. Eventually the dogs will be able to walk side by side, but you don't have to rush it. The goal is for your dog to have a wonderful experience on the walk.
5. We are always looking for signs in our dog's body language to progress and deal with a little stress, but being careful not to progress too quickly. Progressing too quickly is perhaps the biggest mistake most dog owners make. We all want our dogs to be a picture-perfect dog that gets along with every human and dog they meet, but this just isn't the case. The most docile dogs can lash out at another dog for no reason whatsoever. That's just the way it is. They speak the language and we can only do our best to interpret the feedback they give us.
6. Be patient and soon you will be able to walk side-by-side with another dog and perhaps have a short greeting session upon the completion of the walk.
7. ALWAYS let your dog determine when to move on to the next step and remember to mark and reward the behaviors you like.

Dog sitting or fostering a dog:

1. Ideally you would want to first take a nice long walk following the guidelines on "Introductions on an organized walk/hike" prior to entering your home. So for this you will need a helper to walk one of the dogs.
2. This structure of walk should continue a minimum of twice per day, until the dogs are walking side by side nicely. This is a benchmark for in-home introductions.
3. Your home should be set up so the visiting dog is separate from your dogs. Preferably in another room with an appropriately sized gate between the door.
4. Over the period of a week or so gradually introduce the new dog to your dog by gradually opening the door, until the door is wide open and they are only separated by the gate.
5. When you are ready to finally integrate the new dog with your dog it should be done following a walk together (i.e. go for a walk together and upon returning they all greet in the house.)
6. Monitor the excitement level and separate them to give them breaks every now and again.