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mutts in safe homes always
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a 501(c)(3) non-profit dog (and cat) rescue

Learn about, with, and for, the animals.
Understanding Dogs: Dog Introductions, Multiple Dogs
© Lorraine May, The Misha May Foundation: Understanding Dogs

Multiple Dogs: Dog Introductions

Philosophy

It is optimal to proceed slowly so that all associations are positive. If uncomfortable or threatened, one or both dogs may become tense and mistrustful. Some dogs / dog pairs cannot recover easily, or at all, from this.

Meeting should be a NON-issue.

Dogs use body language to communicate their intentions. Dogs who have been adequately socialized typically do well in introductions, relying upon their innate desire and ability to avoid needless confrontation.

Dogs who are deaf, blind or a tri-pod, or who have cropped ears, docked tails or wear a cone or muzzle, etc. may have difficulty reading or giving traditional calming signals.

Dogs who are timid, insecure, bossy or overconfident, and those who have not been adequately socialized, as well as those who have had negative experiences with dogs, typically need guidance when meeting other dogs.

Goals

- 1) The creation of an initial positive association between two dogs to the extent that they are able.
- 2) The establishment of complete relaxation and trust between two dogs, by creating additional positive associations, through the use of brief meetings for as many sessions as necessary.
- 3) The recovery from any negative interactions through owner knowledge, relaxation and confidence.
- 4) The realistic assessment of each dog's ability to perform safely within a dog interaction in order to inform future limits, techniques or training.

Guidelines

- 1) It is unwise to proceed with "I wonder what will happen when they get together" or "We'll just let them work it out". You should be 99.99% certain of the outcome.
- 2) Typically, only two dogs should be involved in any initial meeting.
- 3) Meet on neutral territory first. Parallel walking on leashes is often non-confrontational. If relaxed, then proceed to yard, then home. If not, meet as often as needed in neutral areas.
- 4) In preparation, collect all toys, bones, bowls, beds, etc, which may cause conflict or guarding behavior.
- 5) Consider possible arrangements: one or both dogs on leash, long leashes or no leashes, crate, gate, fence or car barrier.
- 6) Tennis Court – my favorite if no humans are around. The dog who does well on lead on the outside. The dog who does better off-lead inside. Let them approach and retreat as they want. Keep it light and relaxed with NO expectations. Treats and toys can be used if they don't trigger guarding. Each dog sees the other interacting with their human, playing, following cues and being rewarded. Conclusion possible: Oh – this dog is friendly and safe.
- 7) Leashes must be relaxed. If you believe the dog should be held tightly, then neither he nor you are ready for a meet. Tight leashes reflect and / or create unwanted tension / negative signals.

- 8) Be cautious regarding spontaneous meets with unfamiliar dogs and owners. Dogs who are threatened or attacked even once, especially puppies, often become fearful and aggressive themselves.
- 9) Never encourage or force dogs to meet. If they are not approaching each other, there is a reason. Allow them to proceed at their pace. Stop the one who moves too fast though.
- 10) Allow dogs (train your dog) to arc around approaching people and / or dogs in their natural non-confrontational style.
- 11) Do not leave newly introduced dogs alone prematurely. Manage all new situations, environments, etc.
- 12) Neither the purpose nor the function of dog parks is to socialize unsocialized or compromised dogs. They are for socialized dogs to PLAY off leash comfortably and safely.
- 13) Daycares do not socialize unsocialized dogs unless they SPECIFICALLY say so. Do NOT rely on their word; you have to investigate the program / set-up thoroughly. Find out if they are able to separate the less friendly dogs, keeping everyone safe and NOT tense.
- 14) Sometimes daycares provide an enhanced environment for already socialized dogs IF staff is well-trained and they are well-run, monitored, and all of the dogs are socialized and friendly.
- 15) Because a dog gets along with one dog, it doesn't signify that he likes all dogs. And because a dog doesn't like one dog, it doesn't mean he doesn't get along with dogs. Dogs tend to remember the breed, color, and / or smell of the dog who hurt them and then is concerned by similar dogs. All people don't like all people.
- 16) Age and size matter very much. Small dogs should be protected – scooped up if necessary. Older dogs may just want to pass feeling 'retired' from the social scene.
- 17) Spaying and neutering reduces the hormones emitted but takes months after surgery. Neutered males often feel 'called out' by intact males and unnecessarily challenge them. There is a reason why 'in season' females are not welcome most places. Hormonal or new moms can be edgy.
- 18) Muzzles are fantastic for relaxing owner and dogs. Muzzle training is crucial however rather than just putting it on.
- 19) Punishment will only create tension or label one dog the 'bad dog'. Who wants to trust or meet him?
- 20) There are typically 3 outcomes to a meeting: play = we like and trust each other, ignore = we've had enough for now, fight or posture = oops, you asked too much of us, too long.
- 21) Play is typically going well if both dogs come back to engage. One should not be solely chasing the other or one trying to get away.
- 22) Do not ever roll a dog over on their back for any reason. Especially not to 'help' them show submission. Not even puppies. Dogs offer this on their own and should not be forced to show submission and become confused about their own language.
- 23) Encapsulate moments of success by stopping early rather than extending beyond what they can endure.
- 24) Generally best mates are different genders and ages. Worst are same gender and age.
- 25) Lose your expectations. They may be friends, lovers, or roommates and that can even improve or change with time.
- 26) The first moments are often the most difficult.
- 27) There is no magic.
- 28) Use Rescue Remedy for humans and animals. Wear a scarf or hankie with Lavender essential oil.
- 29) Freedom Harness – can calm walking and meeting.
- 30) I'm not a fan of meeting unfamiliar dogs on leash randomly on a walk. Too much possibility for problems. Way too uncertain.

***Leadership** – YOU are the leader.

You must create safety and trust FIRST and ALWAYS.

A good leader is consistent and fair.

You must learn WHO your dog is and train / accommodate his or her breed(s) tendencies, strengths, weaknesses, maturity level, personality and temperament.

Caution: If a dog has bitten another dog.
If a dog has killed another dog.
If a dog has fought or been used as bait for fighters.
If you aren't certain of the history and feel unsure.
If you feel stressed, worried or incapable of trying.
If you've tried but don't like the result such as you got bitten, they drew blood, they seem mismatched in personality, size or energy level, etc.
Hire a skilled force-free trainer / behaviorist.

Common Problems / Strategies

- 1) Proximity sensitivity – desensitization that decreases necessary distance
- 2) Former victim, fearful but not aggressive – off leash to move freely, with other really respectful dog on leash
- 3) Lack of socialization – safe exposure to nice dogs one at a time in calm settings, classical conditioning: dogs = good things
- 4) Startle effect – no sudden or surprise meetings, crate/gate/car barrier for exposure before actual meet
- 5) Insecurity – confidence building through walks utilizing arc technique, let's go game
- 6) Hormones – spay or neuter, allow for off days
- 7) Breed – traits may require more socialization or may not be conducive to dog friendships
 - GSD – guarding, protective
 - Aussie – herding, bossy
 - Lab – rude, exuberant, over friendly
- 8) Owner tension – a different handler
- 9) Exuberance, rudeness – calmly stop meet if one dog is overpowering the other. It can take a few attempts to match play styles
- 10) Introvert vs Extrovert – accommodate need for space and quiet as Introverts are easily overwhelmed. Extroverts need other Extroverts.

Multiple Dogs in a Household

Philosophy

Each dog in the household will have equal access to resources that provide food, fun and attention.

Dogs will understand that rewards come in response to good behavior.

Dogs will be relaxed because they are certain their needs will be adequately addressed and they won't have to compete with each other.

Each dog is recognized as a valued member of the household, receiving whatever special considerations they may need in relation to food, exercise, medical concerns or personality.

Just as all human children should be treated similarly as valued members of the household, not one favored over the others, so should dogs.

Goals

- 1) A calm anxiety-free living environment created by a confident, yet benevolent, human leader who follows fair and reasonable rules consistently.
- 2) Polite, happy dogs who co-exist peacefully by following appropriate and relevant rules for which they are rewarded.
- 3) A knowledgeable leader who can assess tensions or disharmony early enough to prevent problems.
- 4) A resourceful leader who has plans in place to separate, engage, redirect, calm, reward or interrupt behavior.

Common Problems / Strategies

- 1) Feeding – establish a polite sit and wait before feeding. Feed each dog in a separate designated area to avoid tension or access or even attempted access. It isn't possible for us to understand inter-dog communication well enough to assess the level of tension or threat.
- 2) Play – calmly intervene and separate before play gets too rough or out of control. Match dogs according to play styles, size, energy level and relationship.
- 3) Sleep – provide safe areas for each dog. Rotate sleeping with you. Be sure dogs aren't competing for your bed.
- 4) Rest – separate dogs so they aren't spending 24/7 together. Establish rest periods or nap times for their mental and physical health.
- 5) Visitors – dogs should not be competing at the door for visitor attention. Devise a system where they take turns according to polite behavior. Allow one dog in the room at a time.
- 6) Unrealistic expectations – we sometimes expect more from our dogs than from ourselves or other humans. Give them a break.
- 7) Dominance Theory – suggests that having an 'alpha dog' and treating this one special, or favoring the bossy one, makes sense. This is not being a leader, this is letting that dog run things.
- 8) Bullying – a dog who pushes other dogs around needs to learn impulse control and manners. Often mistaken for the 'alpha'.
- 9) Attention – if dogs compete for your attention, get up and leave. If a second dog tries to interrupt the petting of the first, ignore the second dog. Reward polite approaches where all dogs win.
- 10) Resource Guarding: toys, space, person, house, furniture, what ever seems important. Take it away, limit access to areas with 'sit' and 'wait', teach 'off' and reward, teach 'give' or 'drop it'
- 11) Breed traits – guarding, herding, suspicion, dependence, anxiety, high energy. Acknowledge, accept, manage and modify as possible.
- 12) Associations – each dog should see the other(s) as bringing good things. Everyone gets a treat, a kind word, a pat.

***Leadership**

All of the dogs have access to the leader, YOU, and other necessary resources in fair and appropriate ways.

All dogs understand that the leader is committed to preventing confrontation, inequality and bullying.

The leader is committed to fostering fun, learning and bonding.

If one dog is always pushy (dominant), he needs training to be polite.

If one dog is always fearful or worried (submissive), he needs confidence building.

No dog should always be dominant or submissive. A healthy functional group shares and rotates or allows privileges in a way that works.

Guidelines

- 1) More than two dogs can create additional possibilities for conflict, chaos, and scarcity. Prepare everyone with transitional strategies like short play dates, and positive associations.
- 2) A new dog upsets the balance even if for a little while. There can be resentment, resistance or refusal to accept. Make everything more wonderful for the resident dogs because of the new family member.
- 3) Develop a relationship with each dog separately by spending individual time with each.
- 4) Train for self-control, manners, and tolerance.
- 5) Don't hold to such a rigid schedule that any variation creates stress. For example, meal time can vary by an hour or even two so busy mornings or late nights can be accommodated more easily.
- 6) Don't leave new housemates alone together prematurely. Don't leave dogs of greatly varying size or strength alone together. Don't leave dogs who are in conflict alone together.
- 7) When there is trouble between dogs, separate and confine BOTH calmly, not as punishment but as a chance to calm down.
- 8) Never give the impression through tone of voice, attitude toward, or treatment of, that it would be okay for one dog to bully, annoy, or hurt the other(s).

- 9) Don't consistently treat one dog better than the other(s).
- 10) Be sure each dog receives individualized attention such as agility, dance, games, training or snuggling.
- 11) Watch out for redirected aggression in the yard (dog outside the fence) or on a walk (dog approaching on or off leash) where the target dog is inaccessible, causing your dogs to turn on each other to release the energy build up.
- 12) Train dogs to have a safe space on either side of you until they do it automatically. They approach separately and sit politely away from each other for a treat or attention.

Multiple Dogs: Training

Goals

- 1) Dogs who can learn behaviors working alone with you and then perform them in the presence of each other.
- 2) Dogs who learn how to learn, through consistent well thought out force free training. They expect to be rewarded for trying and mastering.
- 3) Training which has not been 'spoiled' by fear based, harsh, inconsistent, inappropriate expectation training. When cues are spoiled, they cease to motivate or engender trust since the dog doesn't know if he will be rewarded or punished.
- 4) Reward the compliant dog. Ignore the non-compliant dog. Reward him when he joins in.
- 5) Easiest training methods are lure and catch. Luring involves placing a treat under the dog's nose and luring him where you want him to go. Catching means you name and reward behaviors your dog does automatically (sit, lie down, look in your eyes, come) without your asking.
- 6) Integrate your training into real life situations – sit before you eat, look at me before going into the yard. Dogs appreciate and seem to learn better with relevance over repetition.
- 7) Keep training brief unless your dog and you both are really into it. When they have performed the best they can, stop.
- 8) Training always begins with no distractions. Every distraction increases the level of difficulty.

Terms

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Aggressive | Relates to dogs who intend harm. Most dogs are responsive or reactive. |
| Balanced Training | Includes all aspects of punitive and positive. May use choke chain, prong collar, or shock collar which emphasizes correction instead of educating. |
| Canine Leader | Typically confident enough to be peaceful and easy-going. |
| Compromised | Refers to dogs who have limits due to illness, age, trauma, etc. |
| Dominant/Submissive | A 'dominant' dog is a pushy bully. A 'submissive' dog lacks confidence. Dominant and submissive are not 'kinds of dogs'. They are adjectives to describe dog behavior. Healthy functional socialized dogs can behave either way appropriately. |
| Family / Pack | Family is the unit the dog belongs to. Packs are wolf groups. |
| Fear Period | Usually at 4 months or close to a year old. Stimuli can cause deep fears and negative associations for life. Must be counter conditioned and desensitized. |
| Force Free Training | Based on the behavior science of motivation and educating. |
| Learning Theory | Education, not punishment. |
| Motivation | This makes learning happen. |
| P.T.S.D. | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Dogs have this from re-homing, abuse, neglect, etc. The fear that you may die or be in danger causes this trauma. |
| Socialization/ Exposure | Dogs are ideally socialized by 4 months old. They have had planned well thought out experiences confirming that the world is safe for them. They require socialization throughout their lives. Exposure is the random, overwhelming, hit or miss dog park type experience where the dog receives mixed messages about his world and ends up not socialized. |

Temperament/
Personality

Temperament is usually considered what the dog was born with.
Personality is what develops in the environment.

Multiple Dogs

Class Questions:

(Answers are in the body of the document, additional ideas may be listed here.)

- 1) Housemate dogs who attended an overwhelming anxiety-inducing training class which resulted in the more severely affected dog wanting to fight with the less affected one. Both are under 2 years of age. They are being kept separate for now.
 - A. If in a Fear Period, negative associations arose between the dogs.
 - B. Possible carry over of redirected aggression.
- 2) How to deal with dog fights.
 - A. Both dogs are given timeout calmly and without blame. Keep dogs separate until you can ascertain what triggered the fight and if they can perhaps cohabit peacefully.
- 3) How to reduce dog fights with visiting dogs.
 - A. Do not allow dogs to visit or separate them during the visit.
- 4) How to stop incessant barking. (handout will be emailed)
 - A. There is no one answer as each dog and situation are unique. Find out what the dog is trying to express: excitement, annoyance, warning, anxiety.
 - B. Suppressing or punishing this behavior without addressing the underlying need is often ineffective and may elicit alternate undesirable behaviors to expend the energy or express. Sometimes it can elicit aggression if force is involved.
- 5) How to deal with dogs who jump up.
 - A. Teach them 'touch' to orient them down.
 - B. Drop or throw treats past them to distract them from you.
 - C. Run them to the yard and let them expend energy there before greeting you.
- 6) How to help residents who are a young 1 and a cranky 7?
 - A. Don't allow her to bug him. He should have a safe space.
 - B. Reward her when she backs away or rolls over.
 - C. Reward him when he isn't growling.
 - D. Continue to create a positive vibe letting him know it's okay to have a safe space and for her to keep her distance.
- 7) What does it mean if my dog stares at other dogs?

This is considered rude and possible aggressive in dog language. It's best not to let your dog stare as it can really build animosity and negative energy. Teach 'watch me' or just move away.
- 8) What can I do about barking and trembling at meal time?

Feed the dog who is quiet and well behaved first. Wait for the others to settle down.

My Case Studies

BB

Rena & Tara, Brinx, Zeb

Intact Rottie, Chessie

Polar

Ringo & Ice

Duke with Buddy, Brinx and Zeb

Handouts

Barking and Digging

Calming Signals

Counter Conditioning / Desensitization

Dominance Theory

Essential Oils

Impulse Control

Jumping Up

Muzzle Training

Puppy Socialization

Rescue Remedy

Trigger Stacking

Dog Interactions: when to intervene

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/when-to-intervene-in-dog-dog-interactions>

When to Intervene in Dog-Dog Interactions by Patricia McConnell

May 5, 2014 >> 108 Comments

This is one of the questions I am most frequently asked, and with good reason. It's a tough one. It's also relevant to my own life right now, after having just introduced a new dog into the household, and having to make split-second decisions several times in the first few weeks.

I should say first off that there is no ultimate truth here. No research, no data, just my opinion based on experience with thousands of client dogs and plenty of my own. Certainly there is no dearth of opinions about when to intervene when dogs "get into it," from the extremes of "I never intervene, I just let them work it out" to the opposite attitude of calling a dog off instantly, or correcting her, for a hard eye or a quiet growl. You won't be surprised to learn that I live in the middle ground, not being a fan of black and white but rather the depth of color in between.

There are some extremes that I do find helpful, at least in deciding when to intervene. If I am absolutely sure that one dog is going to harm another either physically or emotionally, I will intervene without hesitation. On the other hand, if I am equally sure that a dog is merely using an appropriate social signal in a context that requires feedback from one dog to another, I'll stay quiet. For example, every once in a while a male dog would mount my intact male Border Collie Luke. Luke was brilliant with other dogs; he adored them and worked hundreds of dog-dog aggression cases with professionalism and finesse. However, he didn't like being mounted, and if that happened he would stop and freeze, turn his head and make direct eye contact with the offending dog. If it didn't get off he would emit a quiet, low growl.

I never said a word, because 1) I believed that Luke's behavior was within normal social boundaries—dogs don't have to put up with everything and anything another dog does to them, and 2) I knew that Luke had never been in anything even approaching a dog fight, and 3) I also knew that if I said one word Luke would stop whatever he was doing and come to me. My only concern the few times that it happened was the other dog's response; I'd watch to be sure that the other dog also responded appropriately, if it tensed up I would clap my hands and encourage us all to continue walking.

However, I've also seen and had dogs who over reacted in ways that were not appropriate either in context or intensity. Willie can be in this category; at times he appears to lose his temper, charging after another dog with teeth bared and growls emitting like angry thunder claps. This happens rarely now, thank heavens, but it still can happen. Willie did it once to tiny Tootsie, when he was tired and grumpy, and might have been in some pain from his shoulder. But that still wasn't acceptable behavior, not to me anyway. Tootsie had merely walked by him and he reacted as if she'd broken all rules of canine citizenship. In that case I used my reflexive "Hey!" to stop him, and then backed him up in space and shamed him with a low, quiet voice. "Willie! What did you do?" I put him in his crate after that, not so much as punishment but to let him ponder what had happened and to rest up and prevent another incident.

But those two cases are relatively easy ones; it's that great grey area in between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" that makes it difficult to decide, isn't it? How do we always know if the behavior is occurring in an "appropriate context"? Or if the dog is going to stop after a growl or snap? Argh, no wonder this is such a common question, because there are so many variables to consider, and every case requires a custom approach. The best we can do is be aware of all the variables, which I've listed here in hopes you'll add your own wisdom to the mix.

Context: Willie went after Maggie over a stick the first week that they were together. They were running together in the big pasture, and Maggie was trying to grab a hold of the stick in Willie's mouth. They hadn't yet been together in the house, and clearly weren't comfortable with each other except in a large, open area. Because I knew Willie was still tense about the new dog, I said "Hey" to stop him. I just wasn't confident that he'd stop himself. Was I right to have intervened? Perhaps Willie would have stopped himself and nothing else would have happened. There's no way to know, but I erred on the side of caution, and since they are great friends now, and run together while both holding a stick, my decision couldn't have been too wrong.

Intensity: Did the reaction fit the stimulus? (As in, "does the punishment fit the crime?") Say dog Bloomer walks over to dog Gracie while Gracie is chewing on her favorite chew toy. A hard stare from Gracie to say "Go away" doesn't seem to be inappropriate here, given that it is simply a warning to the other dog. But charging after Bloomer, with teeth flashing and spittle flying would be an over reaction, since all Bloomer did was walk toward the toy. Of course, context comes back into play here: If Bloomer has been mugging Gracie relentlessly for weeks on end, Gracie may have just had it and needed to make her point with more intensity.

Knowledge of the Dogs: I am much more likely to intervene if I know little about the dogs. For example, if an unfamiliar dog comes running up to one of my dogs, tail up, mouth closed and body tense, I'm going to get between it and my dog and end the interaction. If I'm around two dogs I barely know and one begins to go after the other, I'll probably say "Hey!" before I have time to think about it. In both cases, I have no idea of the history of the unfamiliar dogs, and I'd rather intervene when I didn't need to than let things go and have a full-fledged dog fight on my hands. Full disclosure here: Twenty-five years of working with serious aggression cases probably makes one more reactive than others might be. I've just seen far too many stitched-up dogs or cases of one dog living in terror of another to sit back and "let them work it out." The exception to "less knowledge, more action" is if I

know that a dog is potentially aggressive and may cause harm. Then, for obvious reasons, I'll intervene in a micro-second.

Potential for Harm: As must be clear by now, I'm conservative when it comes to dog interactions. If I don't know if a dog is going to hurt or traumatize another I'll intervene to prevent that possibility. If I do know that one dog is probably going to cause serious trouble I'll do more than intervene, I'll do all I can to PREVENT it in the first place. (I'm not sure that it is possible to overemphasize the importance of prevention, but does it help if I put it in caps?) Are there cases in which dogs have been allowed to "work it out" and been fast friends after just one fight? Yes. I just heard about one. However, I have seen a gazillion dogs who fought and were badly injured, or who fought and then hated each other. Yes, sometimes dogs can "work it out" but sometimes that means serious injuries or life long trauma. It's not worth the risk in my opinion. It's important to emphasize that dogs don't have to be physically hurt to be injured. Dogs can be emotionally traumatized, and I've met no small number of them who became dog-dog aggressive after just one incident in the dog park in which "no one got hurt..."