

HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR DOG TO ANOTHER DOG

Parallel leash-walking, on neutral territory with two handlers, is a great way to introduce dogs. Neutral territory means an area where neither dog has been or where neither dog resides. An unfamiliar, neutral territory is best to avoid territorial behavior in either dog. Both dogs should be wearing properly fitted collars and be on nylon or leather leashes. Prong collars, choke chains, and Flexi-leads should not be used when introducing pit bulls.

While taking a short walk, allow the dogs to curve around in a natural manner. (This is a strategy encouraged by trainer Turid Rugaas, author of "Calming Signals"). Both handlers should have a firm hold of their leashes; however, they should try to maintain a U-shaped bend in the lead. Taut, tight leashes may communicate tension to the dogs and should be avoided if possible. Avoid face-face, head-on introductions between dogs. Instead, walk parallel to each other, a few feet apart, and alternate which dog is ahead of the other. Also, do not allow a dog to greet another dog if he/she is dragging you towards the other dog or is misbehaving in any way (pulling, jumping, or lunging). Doing so will result in training the dog to misbehave to gain access to other dogs! The dog does not make the decision as to whom he will meet and when. You do!

If the dogs appear to be friendly to each other, allow brief sniffing with one dog perpendicular or "Tshaped" to the other, and then each dog should be called away by the handlers. If either dog stiffens, stands up on its toes, or shows any aggressive posturing, call the dogs away immediately and interrupt the interaction. It is important to interrupt before things go wrong so that you can preserve the possibility of a successful interaction at a later time. It might be necessary to take several walks, in different locations, over time. Multiple introductions in this manner give you a better read for how the dogs will do. Do not rush this process if the introductions seem 'iffy' in any way. Stop the introduction if either dog is showing signs of fear or aggression. Body language that indicates fear or aggression can include: raised hackles, stiff posturing, lip curling, growling, air snapping, tail tucked between legs, one dog avoiding the other or wanting to hide behind the handler, lunging, or freezing.

If the leash walking is successful, it may then be appropriate to go to a fenced area and have one dog on leash, and one off. One handler might work obedience with the leashed dog, while letting the other dog roam around, allowing them to get used to each other's presence and scent. Usually in this scenario, the resident dog is loose, and the new dog is leashed. This gives one dog the ability to safely check things out and move away as needed while you maintain control of the other dog. Make sure the yard or fenced area is free of items that may possibly trigger a fight such as high-value toys, bones, rawhides, etc.

When introducing dogs on leash, make sure that the leashes do not become tangled. Entangled leashes can increase tension and result in a conflict between dogs.

OFF-LEASH PLAY: KEEPING IT SAFE AND FUN!

If the dogs appear to be getting along and your leash walks have been successful, then you might try both dogs off leash. This should ONLY be done in a fenced, fully enclosed area. Always make sure that both dogs are wearing appropriately fitted collars and that there are two handlers present in case there is a conflict between dogs. Also keep in mind that pit bull play can be rough and that it is important to periodically interrupt the play before it escalates into a conflict. The handlers can interrupt the play simply by doing some recalls and then releasing the dogs to go play again. What a great opportunity to practice an important obedience skill - the recall - amid distraction!

We recommended having two handlers present when introducing a pit bull dog to another dog. A squirt bottle can be handy to deter inappropriate behavior, however, keep in mind that it will not stop a fight if one ensues. A water squirt bottle can be used as a mild deterrent for mouthiness, mounting, or other inappropriate behaviors. Handlers of pit bull dogs should be prepared if a fight occurs.

WHAT IF MY DOG DOESN'T PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS?

Some dogs will not play well with other dogs, particularly in an off-leash situation. If you find that your dog gets too aroused during off-leash play, you might limit the time the dogs are off-leash together. For example, if you observe that your dog gets over stimulated after about 15 minutes of playtime, then stop the play after 5 or 10 minutes, before the dog gets over stimulated. Make sure you are praising your dog for appropriate play skills when he demonstrates them. In addition, make sure you select dogs with very good social skills for your pit bull to interact with!

If your dog cannot handle the freedom of off-leash play with the other dog, but did well during the leash-walk, then you may wish to do leash-walks only. Taking a nice walk together with another dog is still socialization!

Another way to socialize your dog is to take an obedience class. If your pit bull does not like other dogs, consider taking a class that is smaller in size. Also, ask the instructor if you can observe a class first to see the training methods used, the type of dogs in the class, and the skill level of the other handlers and their dogs. A beginner class with lots of bouncy, barky dogs may be too much for a reactive pit bull.

Do NOT be discouraged if your pit bull doesn't like other dogs; what is most important is that your pit bull is people-friendly!

INTRODUCING A FOSTER DOG TO RESIDENT DOG

If you are fostering a pit bull and currently have other dogs, it is best to wait until you have had a considerable period of evaluation and observation (at least a few days or even weeks) before doing introductions. Dog introductions can involve several stages of a process, which may be shortened or lengthened depending on the success of the introduction. It is important to take your time with introductions and not rush through them. Do not attempt to introduce dogs if you know very little about the foster dog. As a foster parent, you should never leave dogs loose together when unattended, even for a brief time. The foster dog and resident dogs should always be separated in different rooms or with crates when there is no one home to supervise them. Even if your foster dog and resident dog get along, it is still important to give each dog individual attention AND individual time away from each other.