



# Dog-to-Dog Introductions

Many dogs have forgotten or never learned at all how to properly greet other members of their own species. Dogs are mostly on leashes, behind fences, rushed into greetings by their well-meaning people, and kept from situations that would have otherwise helped them learn canine greeting etiquette.

Dogs aren't all that different from people – they have personal space just like we do – and may become offended when a stranger invades that space. Dogs are constantly placed into situations in which they are forced to endure invasion of their space and are set up to fail at greetings. The sad thing is that the dogs get blamed for snappy behavior or are said to be “aggressive” in these situations. But it's a normal reaction for a dog to get cranky about another dog running up, acting rude and rushing a greeting (especially so when the dog is on its own territory).

It is a must to properly introduce your current dog to a new dog, especially if the new dog is meant to become part of your family. **Do not just walk a new dog into your home with your current dog waiting inside.** Your dog will naturally feel that the newcomer is an intruder, not a new friend.

First impressions matter! Properly introduced dogs are more likely to become buddies. To properly introduce your dog to a new dog, you'll need two people, one person per dog, and some high-value treats. These can be pieces of chicken, hot dog or cheese, anything that will get the dog's attention and that it doesn't get normally.

Start by walking the two dogs on leash in the same direction in neutral territory. If you find that they pull toward each other, stare at each other or are overly excited, then you're too close too soon. Put some distance between the dogs and have them just hang out for a bit at that distance before continuing to walk. Use your treats to reward your dog for remaining calm and focusing on you. This gives them something to do while they get used to each other's presence. Be patient and relax so the dogs can relax too.

As the dogs begin calming down in each other's presence, begin to move them closer to each other. At some point they should become more relaxed, and you can proceed with your walk. What you're looking for is calm, relaxed and confident behavior. Neither dog should be overly aroused, nervous, stiff, or fearful. (If the dogs don't seem to be able to relax and be friendly, it might be best to separate until you can speak to the Foster Team.) If they are relaxed and nicely interested in each other, then go ahead and let them get close enough to sniff.

As they sniff, watch carefully. Warning signs include stiffening, low growling, avoidance, or hard stares. If you see these behaviors, calmly move the dogs away from each other. Remember, some dogs don't like the company of other dogs and they should never be forced into a greeting. Some dogs may need more time or a few more intros to get used to another dog. If the dogs remain relaxed and pleasantly interested in each other, one or both of them may gesture to play. Keep the leashes loose and let them interact on leash for a bit to make sure all goes well. If both dogs are still relaxed and showing loose, happy body language, you can drop the leashes and let them play while dragging their leashes in an enclosed area. **Take away all food from this point forward – as it can be a trigger for an argument.** Watch the play for a while to be sure everyone is minding their manners: no rude behavior or pushy type of mounting behavior allowed initially. Every few minutes, before the dogs reach a state of high arousal or over-excitement, stop the play and get the dogs calm again or walk them. Then let the play resume. **End the play on a good note; don't let them play into crankiness. With you as their leader to give them guidance and direction, the dogs will get to know each other and build a trusting bond.**

After they have successfully played for some time, you can bring both dogs into your house or yard with their leashes dragging behind them. If the new dog is going to be a member of your family, it's best to crate the new dog often and not let it just roam around. Make sure that both dogs are fed in separate rooms or areas, and to not introduce high value objects like chewies, bones or toys too quickly.