



BARC
ANIMAL SHELTER
& ADOPTIONS

Introducing Your New Dog to Your Existing Dog(s)

A step-by-step guide to help adopters integrate a new dog to their furry family members.

Thank you for choosing to adopt! We understand that adopting a new dog to your home and your other pets can be intimidating but don't worry! We're here to help!



Remember that dog relationships, like human relationships, may take time to develop. While some dogs may "hit it off" and become fast friends immediately, others will need more time and patience to develop their relationship. Remember that dogs are individuals and each relationship will be unique. Some dogs will become playmates with other dogs, some will enjoy the companionship of other dogs, and others may prefer to their personal space from other dogs.

Though we know adopters may feel eager to introduce their new pet to the whole family, we recommend providing your new dog with time to adjust to their new environment and decompress from shelter life before introducing them to your other dogs. (Adjustment and decompression times will vary for each dog and recommendations may vary from 3 days - 2 weeks.) Remember that new dogs may also pose a health risk to your resident dogs and adopters should follow any instructions given regarding how long dogs should remain separated.

Things to Remember Before Introducing

- **Familiarize yourself with signs of stress in dogs beforehand.** BARC offers resources for dog body language cues and there are also many resources available online as well.
- **Stay calm.** Don't hold your breath or apply tension to the leash. The dogs are more likely to stay calm if their handler is calm and the leash is loose and relaxed.
- **Keep it positive.** Interrupt any undesired behaviors quickly and calmly. Keep voices happy and maintain a light-hearted setting. Offer gentle re-directions of your dog's attention rather than jerking leashes or reprimanding dogs. (Ex: offer soft claps/pats and a "come here, buddy!")
- **Keep it optional.** Don't force interactions between the dogs. Either or both dogs may ignore one another at first and that's ok! Allow them to remain inside their "comfort zone". They will interact when they are ready.
- **Be patient.** Remember that bringing a new dog home will require adjustments for everyone, especially your current pets. Taking your time and offering plenty of breaks will help ensure a more successful outcome for all!
- **Never reprimand either pet for communicating.** Growling, baring teeth, or even snapping at one another are forms of communication. These cues are used by your dogs to communicate their boundaries and feelings. Reprimanding them will teach them not to communicate with each other (potentially causing an escalation to an actual fight in the future) and to associate the new pet with negative experiences. Instead, calmly remove them from the situation and allow a break time. Always praise positive interactions and communications!
- **Have at least one person per dog available.** This will allow for one person for each leash which is the safest option.
- **Choose a location carefully.** If possible, opt for a neutral and quiet area away from your home, like a quiet park. An outdoor area with plenty of space and minimal other distractions or stressors is ideal. Be sure that any bones, toys, or food are removed from the area.





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Introducing Your Dogs

- If you have more than one dog, introduce them separately.** Begin with your most calm and social dog. This will help you set your pets up for the post positive and successful outcome!
- **Walk the dogs near one another, but not close enough to interact.** Maintain a safe distance of at least 10-20 feet during this time. Give them time to get comfortable with the area and the presence of another dog prior to moving forward. Let them sniff the area and walk around.
 - **If the dogs are calm, gradually move them closer and allow them to sniff one another.** Be mindful of body language and remember that the cues may be subtle or change quickly.
 - Relaxed bodies, loose wagging tails, open mouths, and play bows are cues that the dogs are comfortable with one another.
 - Tense or stiff bodies, furrowed brows, tightly closed mouths, lip raises, or any signs of stress are cues that it is time to take a break. Breaks should be provided as often as needed and introductions may need to be resumed on another day to prevent tension from escalating to a negative experience.
 - **Keep it short.** Allow them to interact for 3-5 seconds at a time before gently calling them apart. Take short breaks and repeat.
 - **Keep leashes loose and don't allow them to become tangled.** Move with the dogs as they sniff one another.
 - **If things are going well and a fenced area is available, you can try letting them interact there.** Leave their leashes on, but dragging behind them, so that you can quickly pick up the leashes if you need to separate them. Continue to vigilantly watch for behavioral changes or cues that either dog is becoming uncomfortable or overly excited. It's always best to intervene before things escalate.
 - **Move at the pace that best suits your dogs.** Outdoor leashed introductions may need to be repeated multiple times before progressing to spending time together off-leash or indoors.
 - **Walk them together again before moving inside.** If you introduced the dogs away from the home and will need to drive them back, give them an opportunity to become comfortable together again before taking them inside your home.



During the First Few Weeks at Home

- **Keep things separate.** During the first few weeks at home, dogs should be given plenty of time separated from one another and should always be kept separated when they are not supervised. Dogs should have their own food/water bowls, beds, and toys in separate spaces. They should also receive one-on-one interaction time with you as well. Barriers such as baby-gates can be great for transition periods as it allows them to visit and become used to one another but still move away from one another if they aren't feeling social.
- **Remove toys, chews, food bowls, or your dog's favorite items from any shared spaces.** During the early stages of your pets' new relationship, these items can cause rivalries or guarding behaviors. They may be reintroduced slowly after a few weeks once the dogs have begun to develop a good relationship.

