

Dog to Dog Introductions

How to safely and appropriately introduce two dogs!

Dogs are naturally social animals. They want to be around one another. However, because of human interruption and sometimes error, not all dogs grow up to be dog-friendly. Some dogs are simply never socialized; some suffered from past trauma at the hands (or paws) of another dog; sometimes an owner just doesn't understand their dog's behavior. Just because a dog is social with other dogs, doesn't mean they will want to interact in the same style as every other dog. You should have proper technique and understanding of dog interactions if you are going to allow your dog to interact with other dogs.



Get permission! First and foremost, do not allow your dog to meet someone else's dog without the owner's permission. Telling them "my dog's friendly" does very little if their dog is not, or if their dog doesn't like another dog invading their space. Both handlers need to be on board with the interaction or problems will likely arise.

Know your dog! If you have a 7 month old puppy who loves to play and pounce with dogs, then maybe a full on interaction with a 7 year old, low-key adult dog may not be a very good idea.

It's also helpful to know how to classify your dog's social behavior as well as the social behavior of the dog you'd like them to interact with. Dogs should generally be around dogs with similar energy and behavior. It doesn't always have to be this way, but it's a good model.

Dog Interaction Classification

| Type of Interaction | Typical behavior observed during interactions with other dogs: |
|---------------------|--|
| Calm & Social | Doesn't look to play but enjoys being around other dogs. |
| Playful & Social | Plays appropriately, but doesn't have to play if the other dog isn't into play. |
| Pushy & Playful | Doesn't care if the other dog is into playing or not, they'll continue to push interaction. |
| Mouthy & Playful | Tends to use their mouth during play with other dogs. |
| Paws & Playful | Tends to use a lot of paws while playing. |
| Mouth & Paws | Will play rough with dogs and use their mouth/teeth and their paws. These dogs have a tendency to annoy otherwise social and even playful dogs. |
| Calm & Standoffish | Will avoid some dogs, especially playful dogs. |
| Uninterested | Doesn't appear to have much social skills, seems disinterested in all dog interaction. |
| Aggressive | Will give clear warning signs: growling, baring teeth, lunging. Do not allow this dog to interact with others, and avoid interacting with this dog. This dog needs a lot more training before being allowed interaction with dogs. |

Be fair! When allowing dogs to interact, be very careful not to create an unlevel playing field. This basically means that if a dog approaches on a leash, don't allow your off-leash dog to rush the dog for interaction. This puts the other dog, who is being controlled by their handler, at a disadvantage. This on-leash dog can view the off-leash dog as a threat and react accordingly.

Keep it safe – on leash! It is best that you only allow your dog to interact with new dogs on leash. If you are at a dog park, then that is a different story. However, you should have already had your dog interacting with several types of dogs while on leash before considering bringing them to a dog park.

Be aware of your own body language as well as your dogs! When you are allowing dog interaction, your energy, as well as the other handler's, is key. If you are nervous, anxious and anticipating a problem, then your dog may sense your apprehension and react as a result of the perceived situation. They can start to think “my handler is nervous about this dog coming here; I trust their judgment, so this makes me nervous as well”. While the dogs are interacting, you should interfere as little as possible. This is especially true if these are the first few dogs they are meeting. This is how you will understand your dog's core behavior around other dogs. If we interfere with our energy, or constantly pull the dog away, we influence the dog meet. If you see tension, your dog or the other dog freeze, or if there is growling, teeth baring, then these are the times in which you'd interfere and remove your dog. Remember to look at both dogs' body language as a whole in order to understand how they are communicating with each other.

Do not force the issue! If your dog does not want to interact with the other dog, do not make them. Same goes for if the other dog clearly does not want interaction with your dog, no need to force them.

Having a more clear understanding of your dog's body language will help you to understand other dogs' body language, thus, making you a better handler and more capable of allowing dog interactions! Have fun, be fair and stay safe while introducing your dogs to others!



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