

Getting a Second Dog

By Brenda Howard

There are dozen of reasons why folks want to get a second dog. Many times it is to provide a playmate or companion for the first dog. Sometimes it's because you love a breed so much, you want the joy of owning a second one - and sometimes it's because you were in the wrong place at the right time!

First be certain that your first dog, the love of your life, is a dog that will actually like the company of other dogs. Does your dog enjoy visiting other dogs? Does your dog sniff with interest newcomers to your home? You must be the evaluator of the potential your dog has. Have you taken your dog to obedience classes so that you have been able to see him/her react to other dogs?

The joy of a second dog can be tempered by the concern over whether your new dog will get along with the first one. Honestly, just as with people, not every dog likes every other dog. There are certainly steps you can take to assure an easier meeting and hopefully, with time your two dogs will grow to enjoy each other's company. If they don't learn to like each other, then at least achieving peace and tranquility is a good goal to set.

A word about dominance - most folks think that dominance is a negative word when used in reference to dogs. Dominance is not "dictator" - it is simply that in any group be it people or dogs, someone is usually selected the leader. Leaders are not mean or domineering, but are those whom the rest of us look up to and will defer to. This is what will happen with your two dogs. One will be chosen the leader by the two of them. This decision is theirs to make, not yours. You must let the dogs work this out. Most of the time the leadership position is selected with very little fuss, sometimes there is gnashing of teeth, posturing, and what can look like a battle, but no blood will be shed and the two dogs will part with an agreement in place.

In preparation for the new addition, add a second crate to your household. Each dog needs it's own safe place - bedroom - to be placed when eating and for time away from the other dog. Also, the crate will aid you in housetraining the new dog and keeping order in your home.

Whether the new dog is a puppy or an older dog the steps to introduction are basically the same. It is best to make the introductions in a neutral location. What does that mean? Well, your family room is most likely NOT a neutral location. The back yard may not be neutral either. What you are looking for is a place to introduce the two dogs where the first dog does not feel a large degree of ownership. You may not be able to go to the city park, but your front yard is most likely not a place your first dog thinks of as his. Just like in foreign policy - you are looking for neutrality of location so that neither dog has an advantage.

Once you have decided where to make the introductions, place a collar and leash on each dog. Seek the assistance of a friend or family member - each of you will have a dog on a leash. Leave the

leashes attached during the first phase of introductions so that should need arise, you can lead the dogs away from each other. Remove all food, treats and toys from the area so that none of these things can be thought of as "mine" by either dog.

Let the dogs sniff each other - and yes - they will smell each other's rear and privates! This is how dogs greet. If they seem to be making peaceful introductions, let them have a bit more leash. If all is still well, drop the leashes to the ground so that the dogs can freely move about. Give the dogs space to play or not play.

Be mindful that play can cause adrenalin levels to rise which can in turn cause play to turn to a scuffle. Stay close by during the first few introductions or "group" times so that if need be you can separate the dogs. Intervene BEFORE the play gets out of hand. Watch the dogs at play and if things seem to be escalating, separate the two for a "time out" period.

Do not shower either dog with attention. Reward good behavior in both, and redirect them each if they display any behavior you do not like. DO NOT berate, scold, or otherwise punish the dogs during the early phases of their growing relationship.

Hopefully your new dog will bring joy to your home and companionship to both you and your other dog. Keep in mind that just as with children, sometimes they will fight over toys, or other belongings. And just as with children, you need to be the calm and steady reinforcer of the house rules and the peace!

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, The Basset Hound Club of America and The Pet Care Services Association (formerly the ABKA).

The information presented here is not intended to substitute for the advice and care of a veterinarian. Please consult your veterinarian regarding all issues relating to your dog's health.

