



Introducing unfamiliar dogs

A smooth & safe introduction

When planning to introduce two unfamiliar dogs, it is important to first consider each dog as an individual. There are many factors to deliberate before the actual introduction takes place. Physical and psychological similarities and differences between the dogs should be considered. If the dogs are both of different breeds, their breed traits should be an important factor alongside the dogs' personality. For example, introducing a sighthound (who is likely to have a chase drive) to a small, fluffy dog may not be constructive. If the small dog is energetic and interactive, this may stimulate the sighthound's chase drive and can result in unnecessary and accidental harm to the smaller dog. Similarly, the individual dog's play style should be a factor. Bull breeds are more likely to indulge in body barging play, including plenty of physical contact. If introducing to an anxious dog of any breed, or as mentioned before a sighthound such as a Greyhound, the play styles may clash. The sighthound may prefer a game of chase and this could result in either dog building frustration.

The history of both dogs should be analysed; this will help determine whether the dogs will be a match as their personalities may not be breed specific. Not all sighthounds will chase, and not all bull breeds will play rough. In addition to the dogs' personalities, their gender and neuter status will come into play. We must also consider the dogs' gender and neuter status as this may affect either dog's interaction. A female dog in heat will have higher levels of estrogen and may

experience behaviour change; she may be more 'flirty' with the other dog or she may become more intolerant, which would affect the introduction. The second dog can also be affected by this; an entire male who is normally steady and intent may become sexual and pester the female for attention. Similarly, both the dogs' ages should be considered; an older dog may not be the best match for an adolescent, exuberant dog. It is however possible to overcome some of these issues and attempt a successful introduction. If we consider two dogs, one of which is very energetic and wants to engage in play and the other is a more steady, settled dog who is happy to greet other dogs but is intolerant of dogs who are over the top. Prior to the meet, the energetic dog should receive a physical and mental burn off in the form of physical exercise and some trick training and enrichment. This will allow the dog to burn off excess energy, whilst the mental enrichment will bring him back down to a more relaxed and focused state before the introduction.

During the introduction, external factors which may help the 'greet' go more smoothly can be considered. Dog-appeasing pheromone collars can be used on both dogs to reduce fear and anxiety, and may support both dogs by introducing a calmer state of mind. Likewise pheromone or herbal based plug in's may be used in the home once the dogs are ready to enter.

When both dogs and handlers are confident to introduce the dogs, this should be done in a more neutral environment such as a field or woodlands. Again the dogs' history will come into play, if a dog is more likely to build up frustration upon seeing the other dog; they should be out of view until ready to meet. A more worried dog may benefit from seeing the dog in the distance and slowly working his way towards him. If one or both of the dogs are anxious or nervous, it may be beneficial to use a buffer dog. This is a dog that is steady and confident whilst independent, he can be introduced to both dogs individually prior to the meet or all can be introduced as a group. The dogs should begin by doing a parallel walk together within a few feet of each other without rushing into a greet. If one of the

dogs is more anxious, he should be allowed to approach the other dog in his own time and guided by the handler to a bum sniff. The greets should last for three seconds before the dogs are called on by their handlers and praised for calm behaviour. Head on introductions should be avoided as this can increase the tension and body language signals may be misread. The dogs should continue the parallel walk and if both are relaxed, they should be given freedom for a face to face sniff. Confident and steady dogs will generally avoid a long lasting head on introduction and will circle fluidly whilst sniffing the other dogs' body. If the dogs need more handler guidance, they should be allowed to sniff for three seconds again before being recalled.

Once the initial meet has gone smoothly, the dogs can either be let off lead or given more freedom on their long lines and allowed to engage in play or to explore the environment together. Another important factor is lead tension; if possible, off lead greets should be considered as these are less likely to put pressure on the dog. If this is not possible, the handlers must ensure the leads are relaxed at all times during the greet and that the leads do not become tangled to create strain.

Before allowing both dogs into an indoor space, such as the home, it would be beneficial to have more than one introduction on different days in the neutral environment to create numerous positive experiences. Once ready to enter the house, the dogs should first be given time and space to explore the garden and outdoor space together, being supervised from a distance. It is essential that all resources such as toy & food are removed from the situations to prevent any resource guarding. Both dogs should have access to separate water bowls, separate beds and resting areas. If necessary, a baby or stair gate can be used so the dogs are able to have time away from each other whilst in the same area. If one dog is more energetic than the other, it is essential he does not pester the other dog for interaction and that both dogs have the space to move away.