

## What's Up!?

### Dog-to-Dog Introductions

Dogs' relationships with other dogs are not always spontaneous. They can have associations tied to interacting with dogs just like they do with treats. You want your dog to have positive associations when interacting with other dogs. Sometimes a dog will bounce back from a bad encounter with another dog and remain friendly and social. Other times, even just one negative interaction with another dog can change the association from positive to negative.

#### **Nobody likes a pushy pants.**

Knowing your dog's boundaries is the first step in setting your dog up to succeed. Ignoring the boundaries or wishing or willing the dog into situations are ways to set him up for failure. We don't need a dog to be perfect; we just need the dog to be a *perfect fit* for the dog's home. As people, we are not comfortable in every situation and we do not like everyone we meet. It's OK if your dog doesn't like every dog he meets or isn't perfect in every situation. Don't force your dog to do something just because you hope or wish your dog was different than your friend's dog.

#### **You are your dog's best advocate.**

Furthermore, don't succumb to social pressure. It's okay to say, "no" to allowing other dogs to greet your dog if you don't feel the exchange will benefit your dog. Often times we feel guilty for telling others to keep their dog away. You have to be an advocate for your dog and not allow him exposure to situations where he will be unsuccessful.

#### **Tense and Intense**

Some dogs may naturally become more easily aroused than other dogs. The leap from aroused to reactive, or aggressive, may occur more quickly in one dog than another. It is important to recognize arousal in dogs during introductions. The easiest way for a person to recognize arousal is to look at it in terms of intensity. Is the dog "intense" or more laid back? What is his body language telling you? Often, but not always, a dog that is consistently intense from situation to situation has a higher drive and the subsequent high, intense energy level and easily aroused nature. With dogs of this nature it is best to channel that energy into a positive activity and not let his interactions with dogs become the primary outlet for this energy.

#### **Slow and low.**

The two most important things to keep in mind when introducing dogs are: go slow and keep the energy level low. Realistically, these guidelines apply unevenly from dog to dog, as each dog is different and an individual. Some dogs can take to being social and interactive right away. But these guidelines are structured around a philosophy of "safety first" and maximizing the chances your dog can succeed. Doing it "right" is better than doing it "quick."

- ✓ You can't go too slow when you introduce dogs. Unless you have experience with the dog and know it to be friendly and stable, even in stressful or aggressive situations, don't assume he is. One way for slow exposure is to use the "crate and rotate" system, but with the new

dogs crate in the main living area where it can observe you with your pack and your dogs can get used to the new dog being around.

- ✓ Ideally, they would then be around each other, with a barrier like a baby-gate, a fence, or a crate, for a few days or even weeks before they are openly introduced.
- ✓ The best way to reduce the barrier is on a brisk walk together. Both dogs heading in the same direction, expending energy, is a great positive association to build with the other dog. Some dogs will be consistently friendly with other dogs.
- ✓ After several positive introductions of increasing duration, it may be time to let the dogs interact for extended periods of time. Make sure the dogs stay supervised as they get to know each other so you can continue to guide them in positive interactions. In the beginning, they should refrain from vigorous play. You want to keep the energy level low while they get to know each other and they learn to trust that they are all safe in this group and environment.

### **New Car Smell.**

The intent behind this slow exposure is to get rid of the “new car smell.” Canine introductions can involve a complex series of behaviors motivated by many different stimuli. When the “new car smell” is present, and we add excitement by introducing a dog that exhibits stimulating behaviors, things can get complicated. By slowly introducing the dogs and allowing the “new car smell” to wear off, when they are finally allowed to interact directly, the new dog is “old hat” and the excitement can be greatly reduced, although not entirely eliminated.

### **Thin line between love and hate.**

When the dogs begin to play more vigorously it is your job to monitor the energy level. Play can get intense and some dogs can be overwhelmed, scared, defensive or just caught up in the moment. This grey area is the “thin line between love and hate” and it, along with everything else here, applies to all dogs of all breeds. To avoid the hate, trust is needed between the dogs, but they may also need guidance from the person. When a dog is stimulated, he is in an elevated and tenser mind-set. It doesn't take much for that stimulation to escalate into a scuffle or other behaviors that are not normal for your dog. When the dogs get too intense, stop the play and allow them to reengage at a lower level. If the dogs seem unable to calm down to an acceptable level to play with each other, then end the play session and try it again some other time.

### **Get Real.**

When it comes to introducing two dogs, or one dog into a pack, be realistic. If you have a dog in a temporary situation, like if you're dog-sitting, or a foster home, you may not need to introduce him to your dogs. In these cases a “crate and rotate” system can keep everyone safe and happy; the dogs are never out together and no one has any negative associations. However, in a long term situation a slow and deliberate introduction is best.

As a final note for introductions, if you are introducing a new dog into a pack rather than just to a single dog, treat the introduction as a series of single introductions. Introduce to each dog individually first and then to the pack in singly increasing numbers. If you have questions or trouble with introductions of any kind, contact a positive reinforcement trainer in your area.