

Becoming a More Than One Dog Household

by Chris Shaughness

You've made the decision to get another dog. Yeah!! You're sure that you can give both dogs all the love, attention, care, and exercise possible, and the dogs will be great friends. So, all you have to do is bring your new dog home and they'll get along fine, right? Well, not necessarily. Like all creatures, humans included, dogs need to be introduced under pleasant circumstances. Just imagine how you'd feel if a new person came right into your home, started eating your food, and playing with your toys. You wouldn't like that person very much, would you? Chances are your dog won't like his new friend much either if you just let the new dog come in without a proper introduction. Isn't it more fun to meet a new person in an enjoyable situation that is less threatening? Dogs and people learn by association. If we feel good, we will associate that feeling with what we are doing at the time. When introducing two dogs, the dogs will associate good feelings with each other if the introduction is upbeat and entertaining.

Keep it Happy

Your attitude during this process is very important. Dogs can sense our emotions and read our body language better than we realize. If you are tense about introducing your dogs, the dogs will pick up on it. A positive attitude is vital. Be happy! Anticipate that the dogs will get along great, but don't let your guard down. Realize, too, that some dogs may not like each other immediately but can grow into their friendship. And even if your dogs are the best of friends right from the start, it does not mean they won't have an occasional tussle. Be optimistic, but also be conscious that problems can arise.

The Introduction

Okay, now it's time to bring your new dog home. Even though the two dogs may already have met at Gateway (if adopting through DVGRR) or another place where you may have obtained a new dog, it's important that the dogs' next meeting be carefully arranged to continue the smooth introduction. So what should you do? First, arrange for a friend or non-family member to meet you at a place away from your home - a park or someplace where you can easily walk your dogs. (If you cannot arrange for a friend to help, it's fine to have another family member handle your current dog.) Have your friend bring your current dog to the location you've picked. If possible, do not let your current dog see you arrive with the new dog. Have each person carry lots of really tasty treats, the kind that your dog probably only gets on special occasions, like pieces of steak, chicken, cheese, hot dogs.

Start by going for a walk, with both dogs leashed of course. Give them treats as you walk. As the dogs greet one another, give them both the treats and talk very happily. It may sound silly, but introduce them to each other. Say "Tyler, say hi to Hobo!" Or "Look, it's your new friend Bailey!" Maintain the positive attitude and keep up the happy talk. Tell them what good dogs they are, and keep thinking how happy you are that they are together. Most importantly, do not force them to interact. Just let them be, and let them get to know one another on their own time frame. If they are inclined to play together right away, keep the play to a minimum at first. A little sniffing is good so they can get familiar, but intense play too soon can escalate into competitiveness. Continue your walk for as long as you are comfortably able. It does help if the dogs get plenty of exercise prior to coming into your home. That way, they are a little tired and less likely to misbehave. In fact, exercise is always important for a Golden!

Coming Home

Now, what happens when you bring the dogs home? Have your friend continue to accompany you if possible. Take your current dog into the house first, then have your friend bring in the new dog. Again, give lots of tasty treats and praise to both dogs during this process. Remember not to force their interaction. Have a new toy and/or bone ready for your new dog so your current dog does not get upset if the new dog steals her toys. Supervise the dogs at all times! Remember to keep them separated when you cannot watch them. Continue to keep them separated when you are not with them until you feel sure they are getting along without problems. A minimum of several weeks is recommended - any inconvenience this may cause is a small price to pay for establishing a trustworthy relationship between the two dogs.

Hierarchy and Leadership

Now that your new dog is home, you may be inclined to show her a little more attention than your first dog, especially if the new dog has been homeless for a while or came from unfortunate circumstances. However, it is vital that you give preference to your first dog. Never give your new dog preferential treatment, as your first dog may become jealous. Feed your first dog first, let your first dog go in and out of doors first, and greet your first dog first when you come home. Your new dog will accept his new position and will be happy being the subordinate. If your first dog would rather be the subordinate, he and your new dog will work this out between them. For example, you give both dogs a toy. Your first dog isn't very interested in the toy, so your new dog comes over and takes it away. If your first dog relinquishes the toy with no reaction, this more than likely indicates that your first dog is comfortable in the role of subordinate. If, on the other hand, your first dog will not let your new dog take the toy, this shows that your first dog is more dominant over the new dog. As time goes by and your new dog settles in, the hierarchy between the two will become evident without your intervention. Basically, the dogs will decide for themselves which one is the leader and which one the subordinate.

Remember that dogs are pack animals, so people, as well as other dogs, are viewed as either leaders or subordinates. Ideally, you want the humans in your home to be the leaders over both dogs. Dogs are more confident when their humans are the leaders. How do you show leadership to dogs? It's simple. Have the dogs "work" for everything they desire, commonly referred to as showing deference. If your dogs know they must sit and stay for food, treats, play, walks, and affection, they will recognize you as the leader. Your dogs will respect you and listen to you.

Having more than one dog is great fun! Enjoy yourself!