Introducing a Puppy to Your Current Dog(s)

Step-by-Step Guide to a Safe and Successful Transition
From KL Golden Retrievers

Bringing a new puppy into your home is exciting—but for your current dog, it can be a confusing and overwhelming experience. Just like people, dogs need time to adjust to big changes in their environment and relationships.

This step-by-step guide is designed to help you navigate introductions calmly, safely, and intentionally—so both your current dog and new puppy feel supported.

🐾 Step 1: Prepare Before the Puppy Comes Home

✔️ **Designate separate areas**
Set up a crate and exercise pen for the puppy in a calm space, away from your adult dog's bed, food station, or favorite hangout spot.

✔️ **Create a "safe zone" for your resident dog**
This should be a quiet area (a spare room, crate, or elevated resting area) where your adult dog can go to relax and escape puppy energy.

✔️ **Refresh basic cues**
Work on "leave it," "place," "wait," and "gentle" with your adult dog to give you tools for redirection during interactions.

✔️ **Use scent to your advantage**
Before the puppy arrives, rub a blanket or toy on them and allow your adult dog to sniff it. This introduces their scent in a low-pressure way.

Step 2: The First Introduction (Neutral Ground is Key)

✔️ **Choose a neutral location**
Do the first meet outside in a quiet, fenced yard or neutral space (not inside your home).

✔️ **Keep both dogs leashed—but loose**
Avoid tension on the leash. Let the dogs approach and sniff calmly. If either gets overstimulated, move apart and try again.

✔️ **Keep the interaction short (2–5 minutes)**
End on a positive note. Praise calm interest, sniffing, and appropriate greetings. Avoid overexcitement.

✔️ **Watch both dogs' body language carefully**
Look for:

- Loose bodies and wagging tails = 👍
- Freezing, hard staring, growling, hiding, or excessive avoidance = 🚫 Time for a break

✔️ **Repeat short greetings 1–2 more times that day**
Always keep it low-pressure and end while both dogs are still relaxed.

🏡 Step 3: Bringing the Puppy Inside

✔️ **Have your adult dog go inside first**
Let them settle in, then bring the puppy in on leash and direct them to their designated area (pen or crate).

✔️ **Use management tools**
Use baby gates, pens, crates, or leashes to create separation and structure inside your home.

✔️ **Avoid free-roaming early on**
Don’t let the puppy chase, jump on, or pester your adult dog. It's not fair to expect your older dog to discipline them.

✔️ **Feed separately**
Prevent resource guarding by feeding dogs in separate areas with no access to each other’s food. **Feed your puppy in the crate!**

⏳ Step 4: Gradual Integration Over Time

✔️ **Start with parallel time**
Let them hang out in the same room but separated by a gate or pen. This lets them observe each other in a safe, calm way.

✔️ **Add short, supervised play sessions**
Keep sessions brief and end them before energy gets too high. Gently redirect the puppy if they get too rough or bitey.

✔️ **Use positive reinforcement**
Reward your adult dog for tolerating the puppy, approaching calmly, or walking away instead of correcting.

✔️ **Don't leave them unsupervised** together until the puppy is older, calmer, and fully trustworthy.

🧠 Important Notes on Puppy Behavior

Puppies don't come with social skills. They often:

- Jump on adult dogs' faces
- Bite too hard during play
- Ignore body language cues

Your older dog may growl, snarl, or walk away—and that's okay! It's how dogs set boundaries. But **it's your job to protect your older dog** from being constantly pestered or forced to "parent" your puppy.

✅ Signs It's Going Well

- The older dog initiates gentle play or sniffing
- Both dogs can share a space without tension
- The older dog corrects the puppy once, then moves on (not repeatedly or harshly)
- Puppy reads signals and backs off when told

🚩 Red Flags That Need Intervention

- Prolonged growling, snapping, or pinning from the adult dog
- Puppy ignoring repeated warnings
- One dog constantly avoiding or hiding from the other
- Resource guarding escalating around toys, food, or people

If you see these signs, pause introductions and consult a trainer.

💬 Final Thoughts

Introducing a puppy to your existing dog is a **process—not a one-time event**. It can take weeks or even months for a true relationship to form. Be patient, manage the environment, and celebrate small wins along the way.

When done right, it’s incredibly rewarding to watch your dogs grow into trusted companions for one another.