



MIXING YOUR MINIS: HOW TO INTEGRATE WITHOUT AGGRESSION



Being the new kid is tough, and for a pig it's no exception. Pigs are social animals, and establishing and maintaining a hierarchy is critical to stability and harmony in the herd, whether two pigs or 200. As pig parents, most of us know that pigs fight to establish or enforce hierarchy, but did you know that pig herds establish hierarchy as early as *one week of age*? When you disrupt that sacred social order, be prepared to do your part!

A simple linear dominance hierarchy enables our pigs to feel secure in their access to important resources, such as food, water, shelter, and their own favorite sleeping spot. When we introduce new pigs at MPFL, we employ a slow three part process that reassures them of their access to those resources. Our adopting parents use this process as well.

Step One: Complete Isolation. Isolating a new pig reduces its fear of a strange environment and new people. While the pig is isolated from its new siblings, this is also your best opportunity to begin bonding and building trust. When the pig is comfortable with you in its pen and interacts well with you, trust has been established. This phase is highly variable in duration but may take weeks; it's a wonderful opportunity for you to get to know your new piggy and build a bond.

Step Two: Shared Feeding. This step is all about slow, controlled exposure of your new pig to his new sibling(s) by feeding them together on opposite sides of a fence. All involved learn their precious food remains safe amid the new social arrangement, and there's no need to fight. Also use this time to teach your pigs to share YOU by giving affection to all. Use a strong barrier, such as hog panel, that will handle any aggression that may erupt. As you begin to [expose the pigs to one another](#), have a [sorting board](#) available to you to protect yourself and the pigs from aggression. It's important to know the [Move The Pig](#) technique and to introduce the pigs to both MTP and the board before you begin integrating.

At MPFL, we allow at least one month for this step--even if everyone seems to get along through the fence right from the start. Know your pig. Don't rush her. Relish the journey.



Step Three: Controlled Introductions. In the third phase, leave the pigs in their enclosures side by side as before, and leave the gate open between them at feeding time. Feed on opposite sides of the fence, and when the pigs discover the open gate after eating, they will naturally move to one another's bowls. As they cross paths, they will have their first direct interaction. If they fight, separate them immediately by using your sorting board to push one back into the other pen and close the gate. A serious fight will be a setback to your process, so be ready to separate and NEVER leave the pigs alone and unsupervised at this stage. As always, go slow. Don't assume peace is at hand after a successful event. Give it a couple of weeks. Observe and know your pigs.

You'll be more successful during this first direct contact if you dab a drop of vanilla or peppermint under the pigs' chins, so they'll have a common smell that will help to overpower other scents. Also, a slippery pig is harder to wound. Apply vaseline to the external ear, tail, shoulder plates and armor above the leg joint. This will help bites and head swipes to slide off.

Final Step: Patience! As the pigs spend more time together, keep your patience intact and double down. It's not over yet! Pigs are stubborn, and their sleeping places are sacred to them. When your pigs are ready to live together full time, let them choose their pace and their space. They may sleep in separate corners of the same enclosure, for weeks or forever.

This is a good time to note that you should NEVER add a pig to your family if you can't accommodate permanent independence. The pigs may never become buddies, and there is even a chance they may never choose to sleep in the same enclosure at night. Time and patience are key to your success; remember how much you love your piggies and INVEST in slow, deliberate integration.

If you have additional questions or wish to discuss your specific integration situation, contact us at mypigfilledlife@gmail.com to schedule a phone appointment. Note that every experience and every pig is different, and you should always use your own best judgment when working with pigs.