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INTRODUCING NEW PUPPIES OR DOGS TO EXISTING DOGS

Will they get on - and if not why?

Bringing a new puppy, or dog, into a home where there is already an existing dog, or dogs, is something many people may consider, but also have concerns about. In terms of how well, or not, this will go, or how quickly the new dog is accepted by others. For so much of this can depend on the nature of the dogs concerned, and how well – or not - the new pup's or dog's integration into your household is managed. Because it is only through putting together the wrong mix of canine characters, or not better controlling any newer dog's more gradual integration into an existing pack, that sparks more commonly fly.

THE NATURE OF DIFFERENT DOGS

I have always been fortunate enough to own dogs with more socially tolerant and accepting natures. Though I do also deliberately breed or choose dogs for this particular characteristic, as it tends to keep animosity in any canine household to a minimum. However, when you have dogs like these, you also have to be aware that introducing any new dog with a more pushy, controlling or domineering nature is likely to cause the other dogs great stress.

So if I am going to get a new puppy, or keep one back from any litter I have bred, it must have a nature that completely gels with that of my other dogs, in terms of gentleness, kindness and overall greater willingness to socially cohere and avoid conflict. Because nothing else would work. But I still have to ensure that the new puppy's integration into life with other dogs is most appropriately managed by me, to reduce the chances of conflict even further. The puppy will also have to work hard to earn their acceptance by other dogs, with a suitable mix of more respectful and submissive behaviours to their elders when required. And these are things only dogs can teach other dogs.

THINKING AHEAD

Before bringing any new puppy or dog into your home, it is actually crucial to think about the nature of your existing dog or dogs and how amenable or not they might be to some canine stranger suddenly intruding upon their territory and normal domestic set up. Because this will greatly determine the way in which you should integrate a new pup or dog, and how long it might take.

I have known existing dogs physically attack a new young puppy; a pretty traumatic scenario which could have been avoided with a better pre-assessment of this possibility, as well as the more gradual integration of the puppy into your household – as outlined a bit later. But you also do not want new puppies themselves to be the bullies. And one of the less pleasant things you will ever see, or have to experience as an owner, is your gentle and meek older dog being constantly harassed and bullied by the pushier new youngster you have brought into your home.

Puppies usually work better as new canine housemates, if only because they tend to be more socially adaptable, and thus adjust that much quicker to the necessary social etiquette, routines - and tolerance levels! - of existing dogs. However if you have gentler, easier going dogs at home, still try to pick a new puppy with similar characteristics to ensure a more successful start to their relationship. If taking on an older – or rescue – dog, be aware that their adult

characters will have become more set, or established. Which is why it is critical for them to meet your existing dogs, as often as possible, on neutral territory, to see how they get on, before deciding to take them on.

SEPARATE TERRITORY

Either way, it can be challenging for any existing dog to have a new one, of any age, suddenly thrust upon their territory, and you must respect this. Some dogs may become hostile to any newcomer as a result, or others seem to be noticeably stressed or depressed. But it does pass if you handle things right and just be patient.

In the case of any new puppy or dog I would also recommend initially setting up a completely separate territory for the newcomer to live in, shut off from your existing dog(s) with a dog gate. This means your existing dogs can decide when, and on what terms, they want to interact with the newcomer, and also when they can return to their own space, untroubled by them, when they want to.

This not only makes the acceptance of a new dog a more gradual process, but also makes existing dogs feel far more in control of what is happening. Whereas new dogs given unlimited opportunity to pester existing dogs in their precious former peaceful territory and space is a recipe for far greater tension and conflict. Over time, you will know when it is the right moment to introduce, and integrate, your new dog into your existing dogs' quarters.

STICK TO ROUTINES

In the meantime do your best to stick to the normal routines you had with your dog or dogs before the newcomer arrived. Like play times, and ensure they still get lots of attention. Also ensure your existing dog or dogs have at least one puppy-free walk a day, just with you. New dogs or puppies anyway should go out separately with you daily, and not always with your other dogs, to begin building that all-important one-to-one bond with just you. Otherwise they may start overly-fixating on your other dog or dogs instead, making it harder to train them later, or hold their attention when out.

WHAT TO DO AND EXPECT

Sometimes when a new puppy is brought home existing adult dogs may teeth bare or growl to tell the puppy when they are being more rude or annoying. Do not be alarmed by this as it is normal, and puppies need to learn for the future the consequences of ruder behaviour towards adult dogs. Only intervene if you really think more serious aggression could occur, and in general, supervise all early interactions between new and existing dogs, who need to know that you will take charge immediately should either party show disrespect or hostility towards another. Never forget the part you should always play yourself in establishing 'rules of conduct' and harmony within your own household of dogs.

All dogs must have the same rules, set by you, to follow every day, otherwise resentment can occur. Similarly puppies so often demand - and get - more attention from owners than existing dogs, which again can lead to resentment, so ensure this doesn't happen either. Make sufficient time for them all.

Also never let a new dog steal an existing dog's food - another flashpoint. Feed your new dog/puppy somewhere away from your existing dog(s) if there is a risk of this happening at mealtimes.

‘MY DOG WON’T ACCEPT A NEW DOG’

It is not uncommon for owners to say that their existing dog will ‘never accept’ a new dog living on their territory. And given that dogs are essentially social, or pack, animals, I am often intrigued as to how or why this belief gets established.

If you drill down deeper into it, the less ‘tolerant’ dogs in question may have other problems rooted in a need for greater social control. Like resource guarding – which includes guarding access to an owner from other dogs, or even other people. Or the dog just getting used to imposing their own agenda of needs on an owner, and getting an owner to comply, for fear of the behavioural fallout that might ensue if the dog does not always get their own way.

So this can tend to be the greater issue here, as opposed to simply the presence of a newer dog in the home. Also, the less social tolerance collies are more actively taught, or encouraged to develop, from puppyhood onwards, the less and less they can end up with.

Some dogs simply need more time to adjust to the presence of a new puppy or dog, and cannot adapt more quickly to change.

WHICH SEX?

Often people will be recommended to get a bitch next if they have a male dog, and vice versa, to maximise the chance of them getting on. And there is much truth in this. However, I still go back to my earlier point that it is usually the right balance of canine characters, rather than the actual sex of dogs, that holds the key to the forging of successful new canine relationships. And dogs are often better than you think at finding a way to get on eventually, even if at first this never seemed possible. The key as ever is patience, and letting your dogs know that you will protect and safeguard the physical and psychological welfare of all of them as individuals, whenever that need should arise.

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