

# Belgian Malinois

By Kerry Gardner

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## How to properly introduce dogs

Introducing your new Malinois dog to the pack is stressful for all involved regardless of how carefully it's done. Because the Mal has a strong defense (fight-or-flight) drive, it's key to reduce stressors as much as possible. Melissa LaMere Dragovich operates a rescue in Minnesota that accepts Malinois dogs and has daily experience with dog introductions. She says it is best to have the new dog remain separated from the other dogs for close to a week before formal introductions are made. She starts by leash walking the new dog past the resident dogs while they are in their kennels to test reactivity.

### Dog reactivity and the human response

Defense drive is influenced by survival and self-preservation instincts, which influence both fight *and* flight behaviors. Dragovich is able to identify these behaviors during a leashed kennel walk. Fight response is seen when the dog shows an inordinate amount of confidence. He may stare down the other dog with his ears and whiskers pointed forward and his tail held straight out from the body. Flight response is earmarked by cowering and a tucked tail or freezing (not going backward or forward). Raised hackles, barking and lunging are common in both fight and flight.

### The introduction

If there isn't much reactivity during the kennel walk, Dragovich will move to the next level in dog introductions. She'll introduce the new dog to one of the resident dogs in the yard with leashes attached but dragging on the ground. She says most dogs will work it out on their own. It could go very smoothly with just a little sniffing and circling and the two may even engage in play. In other cases, it gets very noisy. Experience will tell if, and when, it's time to intervene.

It's generally best to work through the process slowly and methodically, and if there are multiple dogs to be introduced, to stretch the introductions over several days. If a fight breaks out, return the dogs to their kennels and let them cool down. Don't retry the introduction again until the next day. Sometimes it's best to "crate and rotate," meaning that one dog stays in the crate while the other is out for potty or exercise. When finished, rotate which dog is out of the crate. Be careful not to let the crated dog out before the other is secured in his crate.

### What to expect from a Malinois dog

A well-adjusted Mal will not be aggressive toward other dogs or people under normal circumstances. A combination of proper obedience training and socialization is necessary from a young age. This high energy breed also needs both mental and physical exercise daily. “A high percentage of Belgian Malinois dogs show up in rescue,” according to Dragovich, “usually because the owner wasn’t able to devote enough time to keeping the dog busy.” She says even though her own Mals compete in agility, barn hunts and IPO ([Internationale Prüfungs-Ordnung](#)) – formerly known as Schutzhund – they can still be destructive when left to their own devices. “It’s just not a family-friendly breed,” said Dragovich. The Belgian Malinois is best suited for a full-time job in military or police work. “It’s definitely not a dog that can spend eight hours in a kennel, five days a week.”