

## Tips for Managing a Multi-Dog Household

Whether you are an adopter bringing a new dog home to your resident dog, integrating a family member's dog into your home, or a seasoned multi dog manager looking for some tips, we are all interested in how best to ensure peaceful coexistence between our pups. So what are some common factors that contribute to dogs not getting along?

### RESOURCE GUARDING

- ❖ It is a natural behavior for dogs to guard resources from one another. However, it is our job as responsible owners to manage the environment so the dogs don't feel the need to guard. Because dogs can quickly escalate responses to resource guarding, *prevention is your first line of defense*. For more on resource guarding, check out our [Resource Guarding Handout](#).

### TRANSITIONAL STRESS

- ❖ Did you know that after a prolonged shelter stay, it can take 1-2 weeks for a dog to fully rid themselves of the stress hormones they build up in their body? Think about a time when you were stressed that you said or did something you might not normally say or do. Stress can set our dogs up for fearful or defensive interactions when they might otherwise do well. Check out our [Doggie Decompression Handout](#) for tips to relieve stress!

### If bringing home a new dog for the first time:

- Check out our [Dog-to-Dog Intros handout](#) for specific steps to ensure a successful introduction between new and resident dogs.
- Put away valued items (food, toys, chews, bones, Kongs/puzzle toys, food bowls).
- Temporarily remove simultaneous access to tight spaces (hallways, doorways, doggy doors).

### Environmental Management

- **Crate, Gate, and Rotate.** Depending on your dog's needs, you may create a routine that cycles them through various spaces in the home. For example, being in a yard first thing in the morning together might be too much at first, so have the dogs take turns playing outside during their high-energy, excited morning period while the other dog waits in a crate or other contained space.
- **NEVER FEED TOGETHER.** Keep dogs in individual crates, on opposite sides of a baby gate, or in separate rooms during feeding times or when enjoying high-value treats, chews, or toys.
- **Keep it mellow.** Separate dogs during especially exciting times, such as the return home of a family member, the arrival of a guest, or rowdy play between one dog and a family member.

### Once they are sharing space

- **Provide multiple resource options.** Set out several water bowls in different locations so that all dogs have access to a bowl even while other dogs are drinking.
- **Observe body language.** Keep an eye out for guarding behaviors around water bowls, couches, human beds, dog beds, mats, and crates. Try to catch them before they escalate! These include but are not limited to:
  - Freezing, showing the whites of their eyes, lifting a lip, showing teeth, or growling.
  - If you observe these behaviors, call the approaching dog away in as happy a voice as possible. You may need to adjust the environment to prevent these behaviors (removing beds in shared spaces, closing crate doors, etc.)
- **Think like a dog!** Things like petting, sitting on laps, and cuddling are resources that can be guarded from other dogs. Watch carefully during these interactions for signs of discomfort from any of the dogs. If one of your dogs appears to be guarding your attention from the other dog, contact a certified positive-reinforcement trainer to guide you through successful management and training.

## Playtime/Social time

- **Observe play closely.** Dog play should be MUTUAL (both dogs are engaging) and involve taking turns and taking breaks. This means that dogs who enjoy playing chase should enjoy both chasing and being chased, and dogs that enjoy wrestling will sometimes play on top and sometimes play on the bottom. It also means that after a couple minutes of play, they will separate to get a drink of water, lie down in the shade, or busy themselves with some other activity. If dogs aren't taking turns and taking breaks, play tends to escalate, sometimes causing aggravation and the occasional scuffle or fight. You can help the play remain healthy, calm, and consensual by letting them drag leashes while supervised so that you can gently separate them to help them take breaks and give them time to reset.
- **Sharing is caring.** If you are delivering treats, feed treats directly to their mouths *with their faces far from each other*. Two or more noses and only one treat can be a recipe for a disagreement.
- **Let your shy dog set the pace.** Praise and pet your rowdier dog for settling or lying down around the second dog. Temporarily separate them if the more gregarious dog appears to be aggravating to your other dog.

## Leaving Your Dogs Alone Together

- Have separate rooms/areas/crates for your dogs when you are not supervising them.
- If you are concerned about their need for exercise and potty breaks while you are at work...
  - Schedule time to go home during lunch and give them potty breaks.
  - Ask a family member or hire a dog-walker to let them out individually during the middle of the day.
  - Take a few more days off work while you work on potty training and getting the dogs settled together.

## Going Forward/Targeted Training Options

- **Training “wait” at doors.** If your dogs get overly excited in doorways and thresholds, work with a trainer to teach dogs to wait at thresholds and to go through one at a time.
- **Training “stations.”** A trainer can also help you teach your dogs to station, that is, to go to designated spaces like mats, beds, or crates and to relax there until being given further instruction. This is a very practical skill that can facilitate household peace.
- **Keep learning!** Allow your management to evolve as your dogs' needs evolve. While feeding should always be done in separate spaces, if your dogs are not guarding other daily resources from each other, there is no need to keep them separated when those resources are being used. If the dogs are playing well together, taking turns and breaks, and not escalating; there is no need to separate them during play. If the dogs are not redirecting onto each other during exciting times like the return of a family member, they can both greet the family member together.
- **The secret to helping our dogs get along is making sure they aren't forced into situations they can't handle.** Dogs that don't enjoy being together shouldn't have to be together if they don't appear to be enjoying each other because one is fearful and avoidant, because one is persistent and overwhelming, because one feels the need to guard from the other, or any other reason they might not get along, keep them separated. *Time is your ally!*

If you'd like for them to feel more comfortable together and you aren't sure how to go about making that happen, please reach out to the East Bay SPCA or to your local certified, professional, positive-reinforcement trainer.