

NEW DOG INTRODUCTIONS

There are several different methods for introducing a new dog to your daycare group. Each method has its own advantages and disadvantages. You will need to evaluate your own staff's strengths and weakness to determine which method is best for your daycare. Regardless of the method used, introduce a new dog slowly and carefully. Start by allowing the new dog to get accustomed to a small group of non-reactive dogs. Add more dogs as the new dog becomes more relaxed. A poorly managed introduction can ruin a dog's first experience in daycare and prevent him from adjusting well.

Some daycares set up specific days and times to introduce new dogs to the daycare environment. This is advisable because you can make sure you have extra staff members on hand to assist. I always did introductions in the early morning on a regular day of daycare. The new dog was scheduled to show up during the first two hours of daycare. This provided us with more time to evaluate the dog on the first day because he would stay with us after the introduction.

Other daycares schedule a special evaluation day during the evening or weekend when the daycare is not open. This requires more staffing, time and money, but is another option if you prefer a more limited introduction.

During new dog introductions, watch for stress signals and warning signs in the dogs. Note stiffness, high tail carriage, and flattened ears. Watch the response of the dogs that have been attending your daycare for awhile. Sometimes the daycare dog's reaction can be just as instructive as that of the new dog. For example, if you are using a dog that gets along with all dogs, but he is scared of the new dog, that is good information to consider as you conduct the evaluation.

USING SPECIFIC DOGS

It is not uncommon for a daycare owner to use their own dog for all new dog greetings. I do not encourage this policy. Meeting new dogs on a continual basis is stressful even for the most happy-go-lucky, social dogs. It can burn them out eventually. I prefer to use daycare dogs already attending daycare for my new dog introductions. Because I am using whatever dogs are attending on a particular day, there is wide variation in who is the *first dog* to do the greeting. It is never the same dog over and over again. If you always use the same dog, especially if it is your own dog, keep an eye on the stress level of that dog over time. If the dog begins to show avoidance, does not want to approach new dogs or begins to change his or her initial greeting behaviors, that particular dog may need a break from his greeting job.

GREETING RITUALS

Certain rituals commonly occur when two dogs meet. A variation in these rituals can be the first sign of problems between two dogs.

Dogs usually approach one another sideways rather than head on. They will sniff each other's faces and then the rear ends. Humans often find this sniffing routine offensive and attempt to prevent it from occurring. Do not stop the sniffing; this is normal dog greeting behavior.

If one or both dogs freeze and fail to continue the ritual, redirect them by calling them to you. A halt in the sequence can sometimes indicate fear or aggression is brewing. Try not to pull the dogs away with a leash or collar because this can cause frustration and lead to aggression. Instead, use your voice to encourage them to come to you. After a minute or two, allow the dogs to start over.

Dogs that rudely approach other dogs by bounding on their head without stopping to sniff will often be reprimanded by the other dog. This is to be expected, but still needs to be monitored. It is best not to let two dogs meet if either one is overly hyper or stimulated at the time of the meeting. Give them time to settle down before allowing them to meet.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN DOGS MEET

New dogs' behavior will range from *scared to death* to *ready to play immediately*. Even dogs that have played in other dog parks or daycares may need time to adjust to new surroundings. It is perfectly normal for new dogs to be slow to initiate play. If they prefer to hide for a period of time, allow them to do so – but do not let the other dogs harass them. Often, the new dog just needs time to relax and will come out to play on his own terms once he is feeling a bit more confident.

Be wary of the dogs that have no fear and come in ready to play. These dogs are often seen as the playful pet, perfect for daycare. In reality, these dogs are often over-stimulated and highly aroused. They are more likely to stumble into a fight than the more cautious dog that is taking the time to size up his new friends.

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