

Multiple Dogs: Finding a Place in the Pack!

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I love dogs! Like many dog people who find themselves in the position of adding another dog to the family, I share my life with multiple dogs. It can be a challenge and not a decision to be taken lightly!

While a desire to enjoy twice the companionship has the potential to yield interspecies bliss, it is not without complications. My mantra is: It is a lifestyle, lifelong experience, so I need to choose wisely.”

Transitioning from a 1-dog family to a 2 or multiple dog household requires careful planning, common sense, a reality check (including emotional), financial considerations, and the safety of family members including other family pets!

I would like to share some helpful ideas on picking a good match - addition to the family. I'll focus on some commonly asked questions that are frequently asked by clients for introducing the new member of the household.

Let's explore some of the motives that we all need to consider, and safe ways to integrate a new dog into your home.

The best possible scenario for another dog or dogs is to bring us pleasure and companionship. They make us laugh and can lower our blood pressure.

On the other hand, they can cause damage, grief and take up a lot of our time.

Realistically, training and understanding that even the best-laid plans may need to be tweaked, flexibility is a virtue that needs adopting *before the dog*.

FILLING THE VOID

A common and heart-centered reason presented in counseling sessions is the anticipation of the death of an aging dog. Many prefer integrating a pup into the family to help them fill the void. I've done this myself successfully.

An emotional concern is that the pup will be expected to primarily fill the loss, a big job for a little pup! Then, this pup turns out to be entirely different than the current dog.

The bottom-line is that each puppy-dog is entirely different, even within the same breed. Like having 3-different children, dogs are different too.

Trying to duplicate the first dog or making unfair comparisons, simply won't work! Intuitively & emotionally realizing that this new dog may or may not like your other pets is more realistic, then doing everything possible to make this a goal of integration!

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

Another common reason for adding another dog is to provide companionship. There are several obvious benefits of creating a two-

dog pack, kind of like "Noah's Ark". Busy lifestyles require most owners to be away for 8 or more hours. Another pet can make the isolation more interesting provided both dogs get along, and have a private space for time outs. Having someone come in during the day for exercise and potty breaks is preferable.

Here's a consideration: the addition of a puppy can undermine the mental and physical health of an aging dog. The normal and playful activity of a pup may be annoying or injurious to an older dog. Crate training the puppy and supervising time together realistically, in short sessions, will help!

CHILDREN

It is normal for children to be excited about a new addition, whether a baby brother, sister or pet. It's a good idea to have a family pow-wow explaining what the situation will be like. Everyone can be involved, at an appropriate age-levels, in caring for both the aging dog and the new pup. It is natural for us to want to play and hug the puppy, but the aging dog needs to maintain their status quo.

A Plus: A well-adjusted and trained older dog "in good health" may welcome the antics of a puppy. It will renew their fountain of youth. They will thrive in helping the owners show the pup the ranks of the household. Allow the puppy to safely explore, trying not to intervene. Safety is key, of course, but allowing dogs to meet-greet on their terms

is imperative for good dog-relationships.

Again, the older dog should always be given the same amount of attention and maintain their status quo. The younger dog will undoubtedly try to find their place in the pack. Setting a precedent with you as pack leader, while understanding the natural dynamics of a dog pack, will ease the transition.

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME

These cases give me a pilo-erection! Some people select a second dog because the first dog “didn’t work out”. Unfortunately, there is still a mentality for some that “dogs are disposable”. Well, they are NOT and laws are now being enforced to that degree.

Even in 2008, this is still true. All one has to do is look at the statistics from the Human Society on how many dogs are relinquished yearly. We have networking systems across the USA now, transporting dogs in need of homes. Sure, there are some soul-searching, heart-felt cases where dogs (pets) may need to be given up, but not to the tune of 10 million or more.

This simply doesn’t have to happen. We research before buying a house, groceries, having a baby, a washer & dryer, even bottled water! When it comes to adding a live, different species to our family pack, we need to do the same research on culture, species differences and how we fairly adapt to these differences.

Do your homework before buying an exuberant Yellow Labrador for the kids if you don’t have the time to integrate positive dog-friendly training into daily living.

FILLING THE VOID

Grieving is part of losing pets! Oftentimes, we grieve even more because of the relationship we have shared. Dogs seem to be there for us at times that we need affection, attention, acceptance and appreciation.

Getting another dog is a personal choice, as is when you choose to do it. We all grieve in different ways. It is perfectly fine to get another dog soon after, if you have put the previous pet in a safe place in your heart. This includes having an open mind for a new addition that is not colored by memories of your previous companion.

Until you can do this, then is best to give yourself time to prepare and be ready for this new, exciting addition.

TRY IT AGAIN TO FIX IT!

A second motive is the less than ideal “try it again” dog to fix the second dog. If Cisco is digging holes and barks constantly, a second dog will learn through role modeling, how to dig even bigger holes and bark louder, and now in harmony with the first dog. You will likely amplify your already existing dilemma.

Teaching them where dig, what to chew, how to bark on cue and “shush” takes some work. Dogs relinquished to the bark can’t learn how to

do this either in the yard or in the house.

Shaping, managing and redirecting natural instincts and canine energy will save you from becoming frustrated and stressed out. Like humans, dogs need an appropriate outlet and training.

Adding another dog to fix this dog will only exacerbate the problem. Instead, the solution is to spend time training your current dog, then think about an addition.

HUMANITARIAN

In some cases, the reasons for acquiring a second dog are primarily humanitarian. I do events at shelters, so I know the feeling. There are always dogs that I could easily pick up and take home. However, I pause, take a deep breathe and do a reality check.

We are altruistic and that is a good thing! We want to make a difference. Many dog lovers rescue strays, abused and abandoned animals. This is noble cause if done carefully AND the dogs lives are going to be improved!

SAFETY

The easiest and most dangerous thing to do is to immediately allow the new adoptee the same freedoms accorded the current pet (s). Withhold introduction until you know that the new dog is free of contagious disease. Observe behaviors. Concentrate on integrating the new dog SLOWLY and on NEUTRAL territory.

Let's look at some questions, possible solutions and the most important things for any puppy and/or adult dog:

SOCIALIZATION

Tops on any puppy or dog's agenda for successful integration in the world of humans is SOCIALIZATION!

We want dogs to be people-friendly. There is absolutely no guarantee that dogs will be dog-friendly.

Some dogs have great people skills, but lack dog skills. If you have a pup, seize the opportunity and socialize! I am positive that you will have, at the least, a reasonably reliable, predictable and manageable adult dog. Your dog may not embrace every other dog with a big sloppy kiss, but as a team, you will enjoy a trusting relationship based on awareness, education and control.

A well-socialized dog is more resilient and likely to adjust to living in a pack, human or canine. A well-socialized dog is less fearful of new situations and relies on you for cues before making the next move.

Every dog-to-dog interaction is different depending on the signals that the dogs give to each other. Most often, we humans have missed them, until something happens!

Puppies need to learn how to navigate their way with other pups. They pay close attention to body language cues and Calming Signals® (Turid Rugaas). This needs to happen with as little human

intervention as possible, as long as the dogs are SAFE.

I am not suggesting that you take a new pup or adopted dog to a dog-park and immediately let them run loose. This could be deleterious. Dog Parks and Play Groups are terrific ideas as long as the dogs get to play safely and for short periods of time. No-one can convince ME that all dogs that meet in a park are okay. This is where you, the owner and advocate come in. Look around, be aware and know that you CAN ALWAYS NEUTRALLY TAKE YOUR LEASH, CALMLY WALK OVER AND GET YOUR DOG.

EMOTIONS

For goodness sakes take a deep breath! During interactions with other dogs, the message that we humans give our pups when we pull on leashes or express too much emotion affects the way they respond in similar situations. We can teach them how to respond calmly, playfully or confidently by being calm, playful, neutral or confident in our responses. If we can "breathe" and "let-go", the dogs will sense this.

Play, in my opinion and whether it is in play groups or at a Day Care Center, should be in short, supervised spurts. It's helpful to be available to call the pup back at intervals, and then allow them to "GO PLAY". This teaches them the difference between play and "come with me", while building some anticipation of what will happen next. It gives them a chance to "think" rather than simply react.

FINDING A PLACE IN THE PACK!

In a multiple dog household, dogs need to find their place in two packs simultaneously, one in the human pack and one in the dog pack. They need a leader who sets clear boundaries in both packs.

Families have distinct and very different value systems. Dog packs do too! Well-socialized dogs generally survive and thrive in the pack instinctively. They have canine pack savvy.

Here's an example: Wild canines (wolves) live in close family units for survival just like we humans. Even with this close relationship, the affiliation between individual dogs can break down.

Serious conflicts can arise that can cause the death or banishment of a pack member. Each member must learn how to co-exist peacefully. *A good DVD: Jim and Jamie Dutcher's "Wolves at our Door":* www.livingwithwolves.org. All wolves have an important role for survival of the pack whether they are the so-called Alpha, Beta or Omega (considered the lower end of the hierarchy).

Domesticated dogs spend the first 7 or 8 weeks of life with their canine Mom, the Dam. The human family helps with care, food & shelter. In essence, they begin like a wild dog pack, naturally, but are simultaneously introduced to an alien species ... humans at the same time! At 8 weeks, a puppy is removed and placed in another alien human

home. There is no guarantee that a dog in this environment will learn how to relate to other dogs, but if you allow them to interact normally, as early as possible, your chances of multiple dogs' cohabitating peacefully are increased.

SHOULD I GET ANOTHER DOG? WHAT KIND SHOULD I ADOPT?

Good questions! As a behavioral counselor, I've always believed that people have the answers within. However, we are human and sometimes our heart takes over and we act impulsively. Everyone makes mistakes and hopefully learns from them too.

I believe that most people know intuitively what to do if they take time to quiet the chatter in their minds. Then, the answer will present itself.

Where are you (and the family) at emotionally, financially and stress-wise? Have you just lost a beloved pet? What is your intention in adding a dog to your current lifestyle? Adding dogs to a peaceful situation may add more pleasure. It will also add more work and can upset the apple cart. Are all family members on board and willing to participate in schedules, feeding, exercise and boundaries?

MATCHMAKER: MALE OR FEMALE?

Through experience and in my opinion, I've concluded that gender doesn't make a difference unless you are a breeder. Adding multiple

females that can go into heat and having more than one stud dog hormonally salivating can cause atomic warfare. Responsible breeders are aware of this and do a good job!

A sensible approach is to look at your current dog(s) and living situation, and then decide what a good match would be.

A common assumption that females are more passive than males is a myth. I have lived with multiple dogs for as long as I can remember, and females can fight as much as males if not managed. It truly depends on the situation, the dogs, the goals and the environment.

Trying to match the dog to the activity level, purpose and size of the dog(s) living with you may help.

The fact is that a Yorkie can dominate a Rottie, but the size differential, even in play, should be considered. Problems can arise by owning pets of dissimilar sizes and behavioral tendencies. If you own a Newfie and a Corgi, there is no obvious difference in their physical capabilities except shorter Corgi legs. However, if you bring the dogs to a lake, Newfies, being strong swimmers will poop a Corgi out.

Conversely, a Corgi will out herd a Newfie any day. Currently, I share my life with a Newf, a Leonberger, an American Bulldog, a Greyhound and a Border Terrier, all very different breeds. With careful

integration, socialization, positive training, compassion and courage colored with common sense and awareness, adopted dogs make wonderful companions.

However, I am realistic! I have help and as our dogs change, whether through age or illness, we manage their situation to keep them comfortable, safe and well cared for.

SCREENING DEVICES

Use screening devices when adopting (and this be adopting from a shelter, rescue organization or breeder or pet store). Most rescue organizations do an important job up front finding out as much as they possibly can about dogs they take in, get well, and find good matches for.

Get as much information about the family of origin (history) as possible. Even though the dog is cute, is it a good "match" for you?

Trying not to fall in love and adopt in 10 minutes because you "just knew you were meant to be together" sensible, especially if you have children.

Observe behaviors. Most shelters will welcome you walking the dog. Look for idiosyncrasies and drives, as well as good stuff! Does the dog sit upon request? Does he enjoy chasing balls, playing Frisbee, walking calmly? Is s/he jumping or barking? Does the dog nip at your legs or hands? All of these are behaviors that may be re-shaped, but you will need to make a commitment.

Ask the shelter or rescue organization that time with these dogs to show you the basics like sit, down, stay.

Most dogs, even some who are fearful depending on the levels, are resilient. They can be brought back to life and the light turned on with training and confidence.

When in doubt, explore this because it is important. If you are fearful of a dog, it's probably not a good match unless you have the experience and the time to commit to behavioral change.

Adopted dogs need a calming period when introduced to their new home. Turid Rugaas, author of "Calming Signals" (and DVD) suggests that dogs be given equal amounts of time to integrate. For example: If a dog has been in a shelter for 6-months, then give them that amount of time to adjust to living in new surroundings.

At the very least, give them a few days to transition before expecting too much. Some dogs may bounce right into the routine, but not all.

What we want to avoid is taking dogs home to try them out, then returning them to the shelter. It can be stressful to be dropped off at a shelter, and then transitioned into a new home. Good book: "Successful Dog Adoptions", Sue Sternberg, 2003

I HAVE MULTIPLE DOGS WILL THEY FIGHT?

Good question with no clear answers. Fighting is a nebulous term and seldom

just happens. Cues are visible. We just don't pick up on them or we deny them. Most dogs have already made eye contact and given several body language cues, especially from the "eye."

It can be as simple as a quick squabble between an adolescent and older dog, which should be considered a learning experience. Conversely, it can escalate to a blood bath over food for a dog who is a resource guarder (it's mine all mine).

Observe your dog's interactions including body language, changes in routine, places in the pack, and your contribution or place in their pack as their human leader.

INTERVENTION

Fighting dogs can injure humans and each other. The good news is that most dogs (especially puppies) growl and vocalize, grab each other and don't do any harm at all! This is natural play, which can appear as rough to the human eye.

There are levels of bites. If a fight requires first-aid, stitches and separation, then it is time to have a professional intervene.

If there is doubt, air on the side of caution. Feed or house dogs apart. Honor and protect the older dog that may be losing their place in the pack.

Some dogs *will never* cohabitate comfortably. Other times, we humans misinterpret a quick growlie (communication between dogs), intervene and make

matters worse. Knowing when to intervene or hold back truly is an acquired skill. If you aren't sure ... seek advice and separate the dogs.

If you must intervene in a dog-fight, team work helps! Picking up the rear legs can throw the dogs off-balance long enough to separate them. Some behaviorists say "squirt them." Squirting with what is the consideration. I have seen few dogs get squirted with water and have it matter! It really depends on the dog, so prevention is the better option.

PUPPY BREATH

Puppies and adult dogs usually get along. Puppies acquiesce to adult dogs, looking to them for guidance on role-modeling. Adult dogs smell the same puppy breath that we smell. Most well balanced adult dogs will allow a puppy to get away with a lot until the pup turns into a rambunctious adolescent (4-months & up).

An adolescent (a one year old dog is equivalent to a 15 year old teenager) may challenge the older dog. Most are blustery middle ranking leader wannabees, who, when put in their place quickly, by a "true" leader, will adapt.

CAN I SAGELY ADD A KITTEN TO THE PACK?

Sure! We have two cats and two parrots too. They share the dognappers one minute, then get into a dog & cat chase the next, but no-one is injured. Although comical, all creatures have an escape route and know their

boundaries. Would we leave our greyhound alone in the house with the cats and parrots loose, probably not!

The introduction is the same as with pups: slowly and on neutral territory. Give the cats a safe place by using a baby gate and/or a tree house. Cats need an escape route. Know your dogs. How strong is their prey and chase drives?

TIPS ON INTRODUCING

- ◆ Simulate an association first by gradually and safely introducing your dog to other dogs. Use a stuffed dog or puppet! Observe reactions.
- ◆ Introduce your dogs to several dogs before considering an addition.
- ◆ Use neutral territory. Many dogs are naturally protective of their territory, toys and food.
- ◆ If there is significant difference in age, plan ahead of time for stage of life changes that will occur. Anticipate changes at sexual maturity (approx. 7 to 9 months) and again at social maturity (18 months to 2-years).
- ◆ Have a game plan in advance. Where will s/he sleep? Eat? Will you feed both (all) dogs at once? Same place?
- ◆ Is your first dog possessive of toys, food or you? Then control the toys, food and your affection. The are Life Rewards that you should be in charge of anyway!
- ◆ Disrupting your first dog's lifestyle may add stress to the relationship. Plan to spend some extra time with him or her.

- ◆ Ask your veterinarian to refer you to a professional who can help guide you through the process.
- ◆ Enroll in a positive basic training course to bond with your dog. That's what it's all about: awareness, education, relationship and well-being. Bring your other dog, on alternate weeks, so they won't feel left out.

Enjoy the Journey!