

[The Durango Herald](#)

Introducing a new dog to the family pack

Article Last Updated: Thursday, April 14, 2011 10:51pm

Spring is a time when many dog lovers begin to think about adding a new dog to the family.

In the excitement of finding that perfect addition, it's easy to forget that dogs don't always mesh quickly or easily.

But with a bit of planning, you can lay the foundation for a smooth introduction.

This article will help you with steps to take before the new dog arrives, tips for handling the introduction and strategies for dealing with problems, should they occur.

Before the new puppy or adult dog arrives:

- Remove all items that are of value to your resident dog for the first few weeks. Things like rawhides, toys or bones can cause issues if the resident dog is not accustomed to sharing. This will ensure that fights over possessions will be kept to a minimum. As the dogs become comfortable with the change to the pack structure, you can slowly reintroduce these items under supervision.

- Let your resident dog become familiar with any new items such as dog beds or feeding bowls that will be introduced with the new dog. Don't leave them in place permanently yet since your resident dog most likely will assume that they are his. Adding an old towel that the new dog has slept on can help prepare the introduction.

- Maintain the resident dog's routine both before and after the new dog arrives. Adding the new family member can be upsetting enough without changing the routine your dog is used to.

Tips for the first few meetings:

- Find a neutral location, like a park or friend's yard, for the initial introduction. This will minimize the chance that the resident dog will view the newcomer as an intruder to his territory. Once the new dog is in your home, keep the dogs separated unless you are there to supervise and ensure that interactions are positive.

- It's important that the first few meetings are brief. Exposing the dogs to each other gradually will allow them to accept the major changes in their lives.

■ Consider it your job, in the critical first few days, to insure that good things happen when the dogs are together. Feed them together (under supervision), take walks together and practice playing calmly together at first.

■ Don't allow the dogs to compete for resources such as food or your attention.

■ Be sure to divide the attention given to the dogs equally. Lavishing attention on the new guy, to the exclusion of your resident dog, can cause tension.

When problems occur:

■ Don't panic when spats occur. Adding stress by yelling or overreacting can make a bad situation worse. Calmly, but firmly, separate the dogs for a "timeout."

Do your best to identify the cause of the upset and remove anything that might have contributed to the incident. Keep the dogs separated for a bit, and then reintroduce them under supervision so that you can monitor for signs of problems.

■ Don't create an artificial hierarchy. Simply stated, you are the leader, your dogs are equals to each other. Don't try to decide which dog is "alpha." Being with the family the longest or being the oldest doesn't make a dog an alpha. Being the most willing to fight doesn't either. Set fair and consistent ground rules for the dogs to follow. Your leadership goes a long way toward maintaining order in the pack.

■ If the issues between the dogs seem out of control, get help. Ask your veterinarian for a referral to a qualified professional who can help you address the issues.

By following these common-sense tips, you can facilitate a smooth transition.

Reach Julie Winkelman (CPDT, CDT) at alphacanineacademy.com.