



Managing a Multi-Dog Household



While the joy of dog ownership grows with each new “family” member you add, the challenges of managing the household can also increase. If you want to get a companion for your single dog—potentially a good idea if you are gone for much of the day—this can work well if your dog is well-behaved. However, if his behaviour is less than exemplary, you will in most cases simply end up with two naughty dogs! Read on for tips from Bark Busters for choosing and integrating new dogs into your existing family.

Selecting Your Second Dog

Temperament

Select a breed and temperament (personality) that will complement your resident dog. Remember, temperament has nothing to do with a dog’s size, breed or upbringing—temperament is something innate in a dog. If you have an energetic dog, choose a second dog that is also energetic, so the two can keep up with each other. If you have an older or laid-back dog, avoid getting an exuberant puppy or a very active breed.

Gender

Selecting the right gender can make a big difference in ensuring household harmony. Generally, dogs of the opposite sex make the best pairing for pets. Depending on the individual dogs, two males will also generally get along. However, two females is the most likely combination to result in disharmony. Whatever the gender, spay/neuter your dogs. A desexed dog is generally more easygoing with both humans and other dogs.

Managing the New Dog in Your Home

- Establish boundaries. Use baby gates and close off rooms while all the pets acclimate to the new situation and get used to one another. Allow the resident dog to roam the house, while confining the new dog behind a barrier at first.
- Never leave new dogs unattended. When dogs are getting acquainted, the situation can change suddenly.
- Create separate areas for each dog’s eating/sleeping activities. This helps keep the resident dog from feeling his territory is being threatened. Keep the dogs confined in separate areas of your home any time you can’t watch them.
- Supervise doggie playtime to prevent the dogs from getting overexcited. If one dog begins to bully or growl at the other, interrupt their play and separate them for a few minutes. Praise them when they are playing well together.
- Eye contact can be a preamble for more aggressive action. If one dog begins to stare at another, command the staring dog to sit or lie down, to break his concentrated gaze.

Feeding Time

Sharing is not a canine trait and food-guarding is instinctive.

Take extra care to be wary around your dogs at feeding time, as bad feeding habits can lead to fights.

- Do not allow the dogs to steal from one another's bowls, and pick up the food bowls after the dogs have eaten.
- To avoid mealtime issues, feed the dogs in separate rooms or in their crates. Feeding separately also discourages dogs from gulping food down too quickly.
- Old and ailing dogs in particular should be allowed to eat in peace.

Toys and Other “High-value” Items

Being fair-minded and treating all dogs equally will go a long way toward ensuring a harmonious household.

- Have duplicates of toys—including brain-stimulating puzzle toys like KONG® products or the Buster Cube®—dog beds, food dishes, etc., to decrease occurrences of resource-guarding behaviour.
- Give “high-value” toys—ones the dogs really covet, such as bones or furry squeaky toys—only when the dogs are alone, such as in their crates.

Crates

A crate (or pet carrier) provides a natural safe haven for a dog, no matter how many are in your household.

- Use separate crates in the same area or room. Be sure each dog has his own crate and bedding.
- If you need to set up boundaries, direct the dogs to go to their crates, even if it is only one dog that is acting naughty or anxious.

Avoiding Sibling Rivalry

Sibling rivalry can be sporadic or extreme. Problems usually occur between two dogs of the same sex, two littermates or between dogs of similar strength of temperament.

Sibling rivalry often starts because the owner has not shown the dogs enough leadership in a canine way. The dogs think they need to compete for top position in the pack. Make the dogs feel cared for individually so that they will not want to compete with each other. Be sure each dog gets equal helpings of love, affection, exercise and training.

Remember to devote ample time to each dog individually for both training and play. If one dog is much older or less energetic than the other, be sure you give him time and space to himself.

Be mindful of your dogs' body language. Staring, in particular, can be a trigger that will start a fight. Diffuse the situation by sending both dogs to their crates.

We have dogs because we enjoy their antics and companionship. But if the dogs don't get along, this creates tension, disharmony and safety concerns. It's well-worth your efforts to learn to manage your multiple dogs' behaviours when they live under one roof.

