

Dog Foster (DF) INTRODUCING A RESIDENT DOG TO A SHELTER DOG



When introducing two dogs to each other, first impressions matter. How the dogs interact in their first few encounters can set the tone for how their relationship develops, so we suggest following these steps to set their relationship up for success.



Setting Up the Interaction for Success

Use a harness, instead of a slip leash or collar only, to reduce tension around your dog's neck. This can be helpful in encouraging a relaxed interaction when meeting a new dog.

Bring along plenty of high value treats, such as hot dogs or cheese, **to reward good behavior** from your dog. Those behaviors could include a loose leash, looking back at you (especially after looking at the other dog), and relaxed body language (such soft eyes & ears, loose body, neutral tail position). Help your dog be successful!

Starting the Introduction Off on the Right Paw



Start the introduction with plenty of space between the dogs - at least 20-30 feet. Outdoors is best. Areas with grass and other places to sniff are great for providing natural distractions during the introduction, but parking lots with cars (for visual blocking) work too. Provide lots of treats when first beginning the introduction, so your dog learns that good things happen when meeting new dogs.

Let the dogs get comfortable in whatever area they're in. This may mean exploring the environment or just sniffing the ground. We want to see other behaviors besides making a beeline to meet the other dog. **If the dogs are barking or straining on-leash**, both handlers can increase the distance between their dogs and more often reward their dogs for good behavior. **There's no harm in going slow.**

Parallel Walking Together

If both dogs are loose and comfortable, start a staggered parallel walk. Provide at least 15 feet between the dogs and have the more relaxed dog ahead and the less comfortable dog behind. This will help the less comfortable dog close the distance at his/her own pace. Again, this isn't a march-to-meet but a casual walk that happens to include another dog. If there is pulling on the leash, slow down & increase how often you're rewarding.

As both dogs relax, gradually decrease the distance and staggering between the dogs.

Make sure you're still rewarding your dog for relaxed behavior, and the resident dog is also comfortable. Coach the owner if they're uncertain about their dog's behavior. You may even need to create distance with the shelter dog if the other dog is stressed, and the owner hasn't recognized it yet.

Your goal for both dogs is to be comfortable and interested in interacting, often displayed by loose or wiggly body language. If that's not the case, use distance to decrease tension. **Concerning body language that would require more space** includes hackles up, hard staring, forward body posture, and ears forward with a high "alert" tail. If one or both of the dogs are repeatedly barking, lunging, or growling at each other, end the interaction & find a more suitable match.



Movement is key when you're parallel walking. Don't remain still or standing, especially if your leash is tight or one or both dogs are staring at each other. This may increase tension and lead to frustration or discomfort with one or both of the dogs.

As the dogs continue to take treats & check in, close the distance between them. With this decrease in distance, increase how often you're rewarding. Do quick drivebys where the dogs sniff each other's sides or behinds. Keep leashes loose & interactions short, calling the dogs away with happy noises after just a few seconds and rewarding when the dogs shift their focus to

the handler and walk away from each other.

As these initial positive interactions go well, continue to increase the amount of time the dogs are spending in these “happy hellos.” The dogs should continue to display loose, relaxed movement while walking alongside each other and their handlers. The goal is not a full-on play session at this point - these are just quick, “getting-to-know-you” greetings.



Fence Greetings & Interactions

Continue your **walk towards an enclosed yard, having one dog enter the yard, and allowing them to greet through the fence.** Handlers should still be holding leashes, but make sure there is no tension on the leash. Keep interactions short and sweet (just a few seconds), and reward your dog generously for relaxed behavior and coming away from the fence. Repeat a few times.

If both dogs are comfortable at the fence, have the other dog enter the play yard and allow both dogs to greet each other casually with the handlers keeping the dogs on loose leashes in the center of the yard. **You need to be moving as much as your dog to keep the leashes loose!**

If both dogs are enjoying the interaction and continue coming back for more, drop the leashes. Call the dogs back often to give the dogs a break, even if they look like they don't want one. **They can always go back for more!** During these interactions, we want to see **good back-and-forth action**, that give-and-take of chasing or wrestling that makes for healthy dog interactions. Look for **activity changes**, like running, then stopping to take a water or sniff break. The dogs should be able to turn it on and then turn it off. If there is a size difference between dogs, it's best to see that one of the dogs changing its interaction style to match the other.. If you notice the energy level escalating, this is a good time for the dogs take a break and reconvene after both dogs have settled.



If either dog is attempting to walk away or avoid the other dog, don't force the interaction. Remember, your shelter dog and/or the resident dog may not have had much recent experience with one-on-one interaction and could be a bit rusty. You can provide

breaks by picking up the leads and using high-pitched noises or clapping to move the dogs away from each other. During these breaks, check-in with your dog and see if they want to continue or are happy ending the interaction here.

Throughout this introduction process, continue monitoring both dogs. **Their comfort level can change quickly, and these first encounters can leave strong impressions & influence future interactions.**

At Home: Advice for Harmonious Fostering & Post-Adoption

When bringing your resident and shelter dog home, they should **travel separately in the car**. This can be accomplished by using crates (or at least one for one of the dogs), car harnesses, a front-and-backseat barrier, or riding in two cars.

Set the dogs up for success once you arrive home by beginning in neutral spaces before moving to your yard and finally indoors. **Have a friend or family member assist you in taking the dogs for a walk together around the neighborhood.** This allows them to continue getting to know each other away from the shelter while engaged in an activity. Continue rewarding the dogs for relaxed behavior in the presence of the other dog.



If the dogs remain comfortable with each other, **bring them into your backyard** for more opportunity to interact off-leash. If there are toys or bones in the backyard, pick these up before the dogs enter to avoid any potential conflicts. Remember, this is still the “getting to know you” phase, and we want to see that back-and-forth action that were mentioned before.

As these interactions enter spaces that are familiar to the resident dog, watch for changes in behavior. Look for stiffening, staring, barking, growling, or lunging around preferred locations, items, or people. Instead, we want to see less tension as the dogs (particularly the resident) settle into the home.

Once the dogs have had the opportunity to interact and possibly release some energy, bring the dogs inside. As with the backyard, make sure any items, such as toys, food bowls, even beds, are put away to avoid conflict. Bring the dogs into the most open space in your home, so they have plenty of room to move around and get comfortable.



Continue monitoring the dogs' interactions, **giving the shelter dog and resident dog plenty of breaks from one another**, even if they're really enjoying each other's company. Remember, they'll happily come back together if they're liking each other's company! Interactions breaks are as simple as putting the dogs in separate rooms, using a baby gate, or crate if the dogs are okay with confinement.

Remember to always feed the dogs separately. Anything that one dog receives, such as a bed or attention, make sure the other does as well. If you need to leave the house for any duration of time or cannot supervise the dogs, separate them to avoid any potential conflicts where you would not be able to intervene or determine why the conflict occurred.