



Recommendations for Dog Introductions

Introductions with other dogs can be a bit tricky with pit bulls. Some pit bulls simply will not get along with other dogs. Others may only get along with dogs of the opposite sex or may get along with a few, select dogs. There are some pit bulls who have poor greeting behavior but when carefully introduced, may end up doing fine with other dogs. And then there are pit bulls who are very dog-friendly. It is important to recognize what level of tolerance for other dogs that your pit bull has.

When considering introductions, remember that some pit bulls do not enjoy the company of other dogs and it may not be advisable in some situations to introduce dogs at all. Respect each dog's personality and do not push dogs to 'be friends.'

HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR PIT BULL TO ANOTHER DOG

Parallel leash-walking, on neutral territory with two handlers, is a great way to introduce dogs. Neutral territory means an area where neither dog has been or where neither dog resides. An unfamiliar, neutral territory is best to avoid territorial behavior in either dog. Both dogs should be wearing properly fitted collars and be on nylon or leather leashes. Prong collars, choke chains, and Flexi-leads should not be used when introducing pit bulls.

While taking a short walk, allow the dogs to curve around in a natural manner. (This is a strategy encouraged by trainer Turid Rugaas, author of "Calming Signals"). Both handlers should have a firm hold of their leashes, however, they should try to maintain a U-shaped bend in the lead. Taut, tight leashes may communicate tension to the dogs and should be avoided if possible. Avoid face-face, head-on introductions between dogs. Instead, walk parallel to each other, a few feet apart, and alternate which dog is ahead of the other. Also, do not allow a dog to greet another dog if he/she is dragging you towards the other dog or is misbehaving in any way (pulling, jumping, or lunging). Doing so will result in training the dog to misbehave to gain access to other dogs! The dog does not make the decision as to whom he will meet and when. You do!

If the dogs appear to be friendly to each other, allow brief sniffing with one dog perpendicular or "T-shaped" to the other, and then each dog should be called away by the handlers. If either dog stiffens, stands up on its toes, or shows any aggressive posturing, call the dogs away immediately and interrupt the interaction. It is important to interrupt before things go wrong so that you can preserve the possibility of a successful interaction at a later time. It might be necessary to take several walks, in different locations, over time. Multiple introductions in this manner give you a better read for how the dogs will do. Do not rush this process if the introductions seem 'iffy' in any way. **Stop the introduction if either dog is showing signs of fear or aggression.** Body language that indicates fear or aggression can include: raised hackles, stiff posturing, lip curling, growling, air snapping, tail tucked between legs, one dog avoiding the other or wanting to hide behind the handler, lunging, or freezing.

If the leash walking is successful, it may then be appropriate to go to a fenced area and have one dog on leash, and one off. One handler might work obedience with the leashed dog, while letting the other dog roam around, allowing them to get used to each other's presence and scent. Usually in this scenario, the resident dog is loose, and the new dog is leashed. This gives one dog the ability to safely check things out and move away as needed while you maintain control of the other dog. Make

sure the yard or fenced area is free of items that may possibly trigger a fight such as high-value toys, bones, rawhides, etc.

When introducing dogs on leash, make sure that the leashes do not become tangled. Entangled leashes can increase tension and result in a conflict between dogs.

OFF-LEASH PLAY: KEEPING IT SAFE AND FUN!

If the dogs appear to be getting along and your leash walks have been successful, then you might try both dogs off leash. This should **ONLY** be done in a fenced, fully enclosed area. Always make sure that both dogs are wearing appropriately fitted collars and that there are two handlers present in case there is a conflict between dogs. Also keep in mind that pit bull play can be rough and that it is important to periodically interrupt the play before it escalates into a conflict. The handlers can interrupt the play simply by doing some recalls and then releasing the dogs to go play again. What a great opportunity to practice an important obedience skill - the recall - amid distraction!

We recommended having two handlers present when introducing a pit bull dog to another dog. A squirt bottle can be handy to deter inappropriate behavior, however, keep in mind that it will not stop a fight if one ensues. A water squirt bottle can be used as a mild deterrent for mouthiness, mounting, or other inappropriate behaviors. Handlers of pit bull dogs should be prepared if a fight occurs. Please read here for information on how to prevent a fight and how to break one up if it occurs:

<http://www.pbrc.net/breakfight.html>

WHAT IF MY PIT BULL DOESN'T PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS?

Some pit bulls will not play well with other dogs, particularly in an off-leash situation. If you find that your dog gets too aroused during off-leash play, you might limit the time the dogs are off-leash together. For example, if you observe that your dog gets over stimulated after about 15 minutes of playtime, then stop the play after 5 or 10 minutes, before the dog gets over stimulated. Make sure you are praising your dog for appropriate play skills when he demonstrates them. In addition, make sure you select dogs with very good social skills for your pit bull to interact with!

If your dog cannot handle the freedom of off-leash play with the other dog, but did well during the leash-walk, then you may wish to do leash-walks only. Taking a nice walk together with another dog is still socialization!

Another way to socialize your dog is to take an obedience class. If your pit bull does not like other dogs, consider taking a class that is smaller in size. Also, ask the instructor if you can observe a class first to see the training methods used, the type of dogs in the class, and the skill level of the other handlers and their dogs. A beginner class with lots of bouncy, barky dogs may be too much for a reactive pit bull.

Do NOT be discouraged if your pit bull doesn't like other dogs; what is most important is that your pit bull is people-friendly!

INTRODUCING A FOSTER DOG TO RESIDENT DOG

If you are fostering a pit bull and currently have other dogs, it is best to wait until you have had a considerable period of evaluation and observation (at least a few days or even weeks) before doing introductions. Dog introductions can involve several stages of a process, which may be shortened or lengthened depending on the success of the introduction. It is important to take your time with introductions and not rush through them. Do not attempt to introduce dogs if you know very little about the foster dog. As a foster parent, you should never leave dogs loose together when unattended, even for a brief time. The foster dog and resident dogs should always be separated in

different rooms or with crates when there is no one home to supervise them. Even if your foster dog and resident dog get along, it is still important to give each dog individual attention AND individual time away from each other.

Do not introduce a new dog to multiple resident dogs at the same time. Start with your friendliest or least reactive dog and gradually introduce them. Do not try to push introductions with several different dogs in the course of the same day. Crating and separating for several days, even a week, is a good idea. Your resident dog(s) know the dog is there and can see and smell a new dog in the home. Let them acclimate. There are other reasons not to introduce an unfamiliar dog right away, mainly DISEASE! The reason it is recommended to only introduce one dog at a time is that dogs act differently together (pack mentality), and you could potentially set things off on the wrong paw. A pack of multiple dogs greeting a new dog can be overwhelming.

It is recommended to remove high value toys, chew items, and possibly food bowls, from the dogs' access in the foster home. If you are not already schedule-feeding your pets, now is a good time to start. Free-feeding (i.e., always having a full bowl on the floor accessible to the dogs) may encourage guarding behavior or result in a conflict. Instead, feeding may be done in crates, which also helps with crate training. Or you can feed the dogs in separate areas.

Implement obedience into the daily routine, 'sits' for food, water dish filled, at doorways, etc. This helps maintain a routine in the home and improve basic obedience for all dogs in the home. See our "No Free Lunch" training page http://www.pbrc.net/training_nfl.html. Do not allow dogs to crowd or get pushy at doorways...too much opportunity for a conflict in a tight space. Teach your dogs a 'back up' cue and to 'sit' at the door.

You might also consider buying DAP (dog appeasing pheromone) to install in a home with multiple dogs.

ADDITIONAL TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

- Be cognizant of different types of canine behaviors: resource guarding, barrier frustration, same-sex aggression, territorial aggression, etc. Any of these behaviors in either dog can complicate an introduction.
- Brief, repeated introductions over time that end on a positive note are far more beneficial than a long, drawn-out introduction that may become problematic.
- Once you are off on the wrong paw with a bully introduction, it's hard to 'undo' it. Better to go slow and be successful!
- Remember, it's always easier to prevent a fight than to break one up! Never trust a pit bull not to fight. Always supervise and remain relaxed but vigilant.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON DOG INTRODUCTIONS AND DOG AGGRESSION:

<http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/item.php?id=1&topic=40&item=82>
<http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/item.php?id=1&topic=40&item=235>

Note: The suggestions on this webpage are not intended to be a substitute for having a professional trainer assist you with dog introductions. It is impossible for PBRC to address every possible scenario that could arise; this page is for informational purposes only.

