

# Wilmette Pet Center

*"the place for people who love pets"*

## Introducing a new dog to your pack

Have one of our [foster puppies](#) tempted you? Have you seen the perfect older dog at a rescue group, and are thinking of adding a new member to your pack? It's a great idea, and you're not alone. Over 40% of households in the US with dogs have more than one. It gives your dog someone to play with, helps with their socialization and keeps them active and happy. Dogs are huge pack animals, so they feel the more the merrier!



But introducing a new dog to the group can be tricky. You never want to just toss them together and let them work it out. That can lead to a lot of stress, fighting, and can permanently create fears in your dogs. It's up to you, as alpha of the pack, to integrate this new member properly.



Contrary to what you may have heard, there is no real evidence that certain pairings work better than others. Some people believe that a female dog should have a male for a new companion, or that two males work better than two female dogs. While there are a few breeds of dogs that are more female dominant, for the most part it all comes down to the dog's individual personalities.

Regardless of the ages, in this article, your resident dog is going to be the "old" dog, and the dog coming into the home is the "new" dog. And while there are dozens of ways trainers introduce new dogs, these are the steps we find that works the best.

### To start with:

Remove all sources of possible contention. Things like toys, treats, beds, and food/water dishes are items that can cause territorial fights. Be sure to pick them all up and remove them during introduction times. Over the next few weeks, toys and chews can slowly be introduced back to both dogs – and always keep an eye out for any possessive behaviors over toys and food.

Use the crate. Crating your new puppy (or even your older, new dog) keeps them safe and under control (check out our crate care sheet [here](#).) You



want to keep the dogs separated in the beginning when they are getting to know each other. If you use a crate for your existing dog, place them in separate corners of the same room. This lets them see and smell each other while keeping them safely confined.

Go slow. Introductions take time, so move onto the next step when they are ready. Rushing introductions, especially with puppies, can install a life-long fear of other dogs. If the dogs ignore each other at first, or if one dog seems reluctant to interact with the other, that's okay. Give both dogs time to get comfortable. They'll interact when they're ready.

### The steps:

Meet the new dog somewhere new. If you're adopting one of our Adopt-A-Pet fosters, the adoption counselor will require you bring your older dog to meet the new one at the store. This helps reduce any territorial tendencies and is the start of proper introductions.

Take them for a walk. This works best with two people; keep the dogs on the outside of the two of you so there is some distance between them. Don't go on the normal route you take your older dog; they can still feel territorial about this route, so choose somewhere new to walk. Keep the leashes loose, so that they don't feel pressure at their throats or like they are being choked.

At home, keep them separate. Let your new dog roam a small room to help spread his scent. Put the new pup in his crate, and then bring your older dog in the room. Let them run around and smell out this new pack member. Do this a couple of times a day, every day, until your older dog is no longer intensely smelling out the new dog.

Once the older dog seems to be accepting of the new dog, give them increasingly longer periods of time together. Reward good interactions with positive reinforcement (using treats here could be problematic, as it can lead to possessiveness and fights.) Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hair standing up on one dog's back, teeth-baring, deep growls, a stiff-legged gait, or a prolonged stare. If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly getting each dog interested in something else.



When puppies meet older dogs, they can be full of energy and a source of annoyance for your older dog. Keep in mind their energy levels, and be sure to give your older dog their own quiet time.

With puppies, your older dog is usually going to be the dominant one. With older dogs, they will need to work out who is in charge. If your older dog is fine with the newer dog taking the lead, work with it. Always support the lead dog by giving them everything first: attention, food, and treats. When you come home, greet the leader first, not paying any attention to the newer dog. Give them their dinner first (after you've had yours first; after all, alphas get to eat first.), then put down a dish for the newer dog.

Never force two dogs that are not getting along. If there are any problems, contact a trusted dog trainer, like our friends at [Bark Busters](#). They'll work with your whole family to help integrate the newest member of the pack.

Introducing a new member to the pack can be tricky, but it's not hard. Most dogs still have that instinctive pack mentality, and having other four legged siblings who really speak their language will help keep them healthy and happy!