

Two Dogs or Not Two Dogs? That is the Question!

Living with multiple dogs can double the pleasure and double the fun but sharing your life with more than one dog is not without its unique considerations and challenges including:

Training time is doubled. When it comes to training, dogs learn better when worked with individually. Whether it's training a fun new trick, loose leash walking or polite visitor greetings, multiple dogs just can't perform well together until they master a behavior by themselves first.



Preventing co-dependence. We want our dogs to get along and enjoy being with each other, but it's possible to create too much of a good thing. Dogs that spend all day-everyday together often become so bonded to each other that they experience extreme stress in the absence of their counterpart. Something as simple as a vet or groomer visit – even choosing to take one dog for a walk and not the other – can become an unnecessarily stressful experience for the dog at home. Magnify this stress ten-fold when one dog passes away.

Owners of multiple dog households can help inoculate their dogs against this type of stress by practicing the following:

- If you practice crate training, make sure each dog has and uses his own crate.
- Practice walking your dogs separately or take them on separate dog-friendly errand-running adventures each week. Leave a wonderful chew bone or stuffed KONG for the dog that stays home.
- Integrate “apart time” into your dogs’ daily routine.

Let's Play! Dogs who live with other dogs have built in play pals! They can help keep each other occupied throughout the day, and their antics can be quite entertaining. However, similar-aged dogs who spend hours on end engaged in rambunctious play are at risk for developing an overly rough and tumble play style that *could* contribute to bully-ish tendencies when out with other dogs. Dogs with regular access to rough play with other dogs are also at a greater risk for developing leash aggression. Because they spend so much time engaged in play, they begin to think they should have equal access to every dog they see and get frustrated when leashed out in public, unable to run and greet fellow canines. Excessive barking and lunging out of frustration is the result, and in extreme cases, that frustration turns into aggression. (Think doggie road rage!)

When managing dog-to-dog play, owners should watch for give and take exchanges between dogs. If one dog is *always* pinning the other to the ground or *always* the one doing the chasing and never letting himself be chased, that dog may be coming on a little too strong for the liking of his playmates and should be taught to redirect some of his energy and focus.

Fraternity, Sorority or Co-Ed Canines? While each household is unique, there are some generalizations to consider when deciding which gender dog to add to your family at any given time. The most obvious consideration in a male/female pairing is the prevention of unwanted, accidental litters. Dogs of the same sex, similar age and the same breed are more likely to undergo a power struggle as they reach maturity. For this reason, sometimes the best pairings are dogs of opposite sex, but all dogs are individuals making it important to evaluate the personality of your existing dog(s), not just the gender, when considering a new canine companion. In addition, training and management go a long way toward creating a harmonious household of dogs regardless of age, breed or sex.

Respect Your Elders! Special consideration should be taken when integrating a puppy into a household with an elderly or ailing dog. Don't allow the puppy to continually pester the older dog or allow an older dog to unnecessarily intimidate and frighten the puppy. Closely manage interactions to ensure that dogs on both ends of the age spectrum have a positive experience with each other. Puppies 14-weeks and younger hold a "puppy license" that often allows them to get away with things that won't fly in the eyes of older dogs as they approach 16-weeks, so be mindful of a potential change in dynamics as the puppy ages.

Cats and Dogs: Peaceful Co-Existence or the Fur Flies? Whether raising a puppy with the resident feline or adding an adult dog to the mix, a little management goes a long way toward fostering a peaceful co-existence. Consider creating a "safe-haven" for the cat by installing a baby gate in one room of the house. This allows the dog and cat to familiarize themselves with each other without the dog being able to engage in a chase. It also prevents unwanted pillaging of the litter box and cat food dish! As the novelty begins to wear off under controlled settings, it will become easier to teach your dog how to properly conduct himself around the cat.

These are just a few of the special considerations to keep in mind when making that decision about whether it will be one or more dogs you keep. More than one pet can add to the pleasure of your life, if you're prepared for it. Not thinking it through 100% can sometimes make more than one dog add up to be an unnecessary and unwanted annoyance for all involved.

For more information on the Association of Pet Dog Trainers,
visit our Web site at www.apdt.com or call 1-800-PET-DOGS (738-3647) or email information@apdt.com.