

# HUMANE SOCIETY OF BROWARD COUNTY

## Behavior Modification Handout



### Introducing Your Dog to Other Dogs

Meeting other dogs can be scary sometimes. Taking your time and having a plan will ensure your pet has a safe and enjoyable experience or be able to know when you should avoid interactions with other dogs all together. All dogs are individuals and considering size, age, sex, personality, breed type and play-style will help you to find the right playmate for your pet.

#### Starting Off on the Right Paw / Managing Your Environment

Have a plan! Go into a meet and greet with the knowledge of what to expect and what to do if things go south and how to avoid your dog having an unpleasant experience. Some things to keep in mind:

- **Size** – Dogs that are matched in size will be easier to manage and if things do get a little grumpy an injury will be much less likely. A Chihuahua and a German Shepard that do not get along will not be a fair match up. The Chihuahua could easily be injured even if the GSD is being playful and just gets a little too rough.
- **Age** – Older dogs may not be crazy about playing with a young puppy. Older dogs sometimes suffer from arthritis which can be painful so playing with a rough, energetic puppy may not feel comfortable. Energy levels will also be vastly different depending on age.
- **Sex** – This is not a category where one size fits all situations. The general rule of thumb is female – female combinations may be more volatile and should be closely monitored. While many think male – male combinations will cause trouble, often males will get along well and if they don't it will be loud but with possibly less physicality. Your dog's preference will also depend on temperament and personality.
- **Personality / Temperament** – Personality is what your dog develops through life experiences. Temperament is what your dog is born with. Consider if your dog is outgoing or shy. Taking your time with introductions is important! While you may be familiar with your dog's personality it may be difficult to determine an unknown dogs' traits. Ask questions and don't be afraid to be your dog's advocate.
- **Breed Type** – Certain dogs will have traits that can be expected or predictive if you know the dogs breed type. Cattle dogs like to play chase games and will often nip or "herd" other animals. Boxers play fairly rough and will often use their chest and upper body to engage in physical play. Knowing what to expect and if your dog is going to be comfortable with that type of play will go a long way in ensuring a good match.
- **Play Style** – Some of the same concerns apply to play style as in breed type.

While meeting another dog may not necessarily mean the dogs will end up playing together, a successful greeting can lead to great play partners and forever friends. Play parameters are also a good place to start in ensuring that your dog feels safe.

## **Tips and Hints**

Putting together the plan will help you and your dog to feel more comfortable when meeting other dogs. The worst thing you can do is just rush in with your dog pulling hard at the end of their leash and rush up to another dog. And if you have a dog that may be a little nervous of other dogs that would be the last thing you would want someone else to do to you.

Introductions should be done on neutral grounds. Having your dog meet another dog in his own yard may cause elevated levels of territorial behaviors. Parks (not “dog” parks) or other large open spaces are well suited for dog introductions.

Keep a safe distance. Too close too soon may make your dog feel threatened. Gradually let dogs move closer as they get used to each other. Observe behaviors and look for signs of stress or avoidance: One dog constantly trying to move away and or over aroused barking, any lunging or growling should be recognized as a signal that dogs may not be suited for a meeting.

Avoid head - on greetings. Dogs should slowly and gradually approach in an arch. Nose to rear end greetings which may embarrass us humans are a completely polite doggie hello.

If possible, avoid greetings that will cause either dog to strain heavily on their leash. This will cause body language to communicate a more agitated intention. You want to encourage a relaxed, neutral body position as much as possible. A tight leash can lead to misunderstanding between dogs and cause stress - related aggressive behaviors.

Ensure each person handling the dogs are physically able to manage the dog. Being able to safely and securely hold the leash is extremely important.

When dogs are feeling comfortable and sniffing each other with no grumpy behavior you may let dogs engage freely while leaving leashes attached, let them drag the leash behind them. If things get too rowdy you can scoop up the leash and lead the dogs away from each other. NOTE: Use extreme caution when dogs are on leash. Crossing leashes will cause them to become entangled. This will cause dogs to be closely locked together and can be very frightening for both dogs and will likely lead to a fight and or aggressive, defensive behavior displays. DO NOT let this happen!

Use caution or avoid using toys or having toys around while dogs are meeting each other. This will eliminate the possibility of dogs fighting over resources. If using treats only, deliver small bite size pieces that the dog will consume quickly and deliver treats when dogs are away from each other to avoid competition over food.

Exercise dogs when possible prior to meeting. A tired dog is a happy dog.

### **Avoiding the Pitfalls**

Even with a well put together plan, sometimes things don't go the way you may have hoped. Be prepared to interrupt inappropriate behavior such as mounting, growling, snapping or constant harassment. Be observant and head off any behavior that may lead to an argument. Taking frequent breaks can help to control arousal levels and keep dogs in check, giving them opportunities to calm down in between interactions. If things do dissolve into a conflict it is important to keep safety in mind. Reaching in and separating dogs can lead to injury. Keep tools handy that can assist with interruptions such as:

- Loud noises such as an air horn can distract dogs but may not interrupt an aggressive interaction.
- A spray bottle or water hose can be used to spray dogs. Applying water to the face, mouth and nose area can interfere with breathing and cause dogs to separate.
- Using anything at hand to place between the dogs can create a barrier. You could use a trash can or a folding chair. If you do not have anything specific for this purpose think about looking around prior to identify something you can use.