

# How to Introduce a New Puppy to an Older Dog



## Introducing Puppies to Older Dogs

Introducing a new puppy to an older dog is not a simple task. Just having the puppy trot into the home and letting the two meet and greet (while keeping fingers crossed) won't work. A proper introduction takes time and finesse if you want to heighten the chances for success and make the whole process smoother.

Let's face it: Getting a new puppy is often a very exciting time and it's easy to forget that our resident dogs may not be as excited as we are. We often assume that dogs are social animals, and as such, we expect them to accept any other dogs into the home as readily as we do. Not so fast . . .

In this article the following topics will be covered:

- Four factors that can help heighten the chances for success
- Understanding how your resident dog may truly feel about your newest addition

- The risks associated with suppressing your dog's means of communication
- Body language denoting tension among dogs
- The key element for a good intro that will give you a headstart in the process
- The importance of boundaries and safe zones to prevent your older dog from getting too overwhelmed
- The acclimatization process and how to minimize hard feelings and what to expect
- How to minimize the chances for squabbles
- Overcoming resource guarding hurdles
- The best combinations of older dogs and puppies
- Concluding facts and disclaimers

## Combos for Success

In general, these are the most compatible combinations: puppy and older dog of opposite sex; puppy and older dog who isn't too old; puppy and older dog of similar size (once puppy is adult); puppy and older dog with similar play styles.



## Understand Your Older Dog's Feelings

If you have owned an older dog for quite some time and he has a history of being "the only dog," it may be difficult for him to come to terms with a new addition. Don't expect him to wear a party hat and blow a horn the day the puppy arrives home. This doesn't mean you have made a bad choice, it just means that your older dog will likely need some time to "assimilate and digest" the novelty.

When you own an older dog for some time and he has a history of being the "only dog," he has been enjoying some unique perks along the way such as getting all the attention and not having to share toys with anybody.

It takes quite some adjustment for these dogs to get used to all the changes and shifts in routines associated with a new addition. On top of this, consider that your older dog has aged, and if [he is already a senior](#), he may no longer be as interested as he was in the past in rambunctious play.

Even if your dog has a history of liking other dogs and has impeccable social skills, expect some mixed feelings, just as it happens with children when they gain a new brother or sister. While your dog may have done well in the past in meeting new dogs at daycare or at the dog park, consider that these are short-lived encounters compared to the long-term, perpetual presence of a new dog sharing the home.

Understanding your dog's feelings is important so that you are prepared in advance on what to expect. It, therefore, won't come much as a surprise that moment when your older dog growls or snarls at the newest addition. In such a case, the older dog should never be admonished for manifesting his feelings.

## Avoid Punishing Your Dog's Growl

Why should punishing a dog for growling be avoided at all costs? Firstly because we want our dogs to manifest their emotions. As dog trainer [Pat Miller](#) states "a growl is something to be greatly treasured." We want our dogs to communicate to us and other dogs when they feel uneasy about a situation because a growl is ultimately a warning.

Punishing a dog for growling may lead to a dog who bites without warning. The dog has learned that it's not safe to communicate and will suppress this important piece of information. This is like living with a ticking time bomb that you'll never know when it will blow.

On top of this, it's important to consider that a growl is often a sign of stress. For an older dog set in his routines, any change in his environment (such as the intrusion of a new puppy) will likely cause stress to some extent. Perhaps he's fearful, perceives an invasion of space or threats to his resources.

If you admonish your dog for growling, you are adding stress to an already stressful situation. This, of course, is counterproductive. If dogs could talk, perhaps they would say something along these lines: "Not only is this pesky puppy in my home but now my owner is also acting in an unpredictable way when the puppy is around me. This just can't be good."

So, what should we do if the older dog happens to growl at the puppy? We should acknowledge it and take a mental note of what evoked the growling. Was the puppy close to the older dog's toys? Was he getting too close to his bowl when he was eating? Was he acting too hyper for the older dog's taste?

When we first introduce a new puppy to an older dog, we want to really minimize the chances of putting the older dog into situations that cause tension to build up.

## Possible Signs of Tension/Anxiety in Dogs

These signs indicate that your dog/dogs are uncomfortable and there is a need for intervention to prevent aggressive displays.

- Tense mouth
- White of the eyes showing

- Yawning
- One paw raised
- Dog licking his chops
- Excess licking of paws
- Scrolling the fur
- Direct stare
- Turning the head away
- Tail between legs
- Ears back
- Panting
- Refusing food



## Introduce on Neutral Grounds

When introducing a new puppy to an older dog, it is always best to introduce on neutral grounds. This is a key element that helps prevent the onset of surprise (and shock!) that comes with just planting a new puppy inside the home without no warning. Introducing on neutral grounds requires that you enlist the aid of a helper.

Neutral grounds means just that, a place where the dogs have no strong emotional attachments and not much history. Normally, dogs should meet on a walk or at a park, but with young puppies this option isn't feasible due to the risks of infectious diseases in young puppies who haven't finished

their series of shots. Suitable meeting grounds for young puppies may include the breeder's home, the shelter where the puppy is kept, or a friend's home (with no history of owning sick puppies in the past year) with a large fenced yard.

Ideally, you should exercise your older dog prior to the introduction so that he is in a more relaxed state. If your dog is already stressed from noises or other things in his environment, he may be more likely to react in negative way.

## Start With "Scent Acquaintances"

It is best to begin all "acquaintances" through scent before the dogs visually see each other. If the puppy is still at the breeder or at the shelter, it helps to bring home a blanket that has the puppy's scent and let your dog get used to it. At the same time, the puppy can be provided with a blanket that has your older dog's scent on it.

If this is not feasible, then on the big introduction day, allow the older dog to sniff areas frequented by the puppy and vice-versa first before they get to see each other. Ideally, there should be interest and relaxed body language.

Once the older dog seems relaxed, he can be introduced to the new puppy. This is best done off leash if your dog has a history of getting along with other dogs. Happy talk and praise can help reduce some initial tension.

Ideally, both dogs should sniff each other and then perhaps engage in some play. Even if the dogs meet and then ignore each other or go on to other activities, that is fine. If multiple visits are possible, it is best to make the introductions short and sweet over the course of several days until the dogs seem better acquainted.

If you must take the puppy home, have a crate for the puppy and keep it as far as you can from your older dog once in the car. In the car, you can use calming aids described in the acclimatization process section.

## Provide Boundaries and "Safe Zones"

Once home, you still want to keep the puppy and older dog in separate areas for a good part of the day. This is for safety and for the sake of allowing the older dog to get gradually acclimated to the new puppy.

As mentioned, adult and older dogs (especially dogs over the age of five) may no longer be interested in engaging in rambunctious play as they used to in the past. Some older dogs may even suffer from orthopedic problems and the last thing they want to endure is being pestered by a puppy with poor social skills and too much energy.

It's important for the older dog to have a "safe zone" to retreat without being constantly pestered by an energetic puppy. If the older dog is interested in play, but not of the overly rambunctious type, it's best to allow play only once the puppy has already been exercised so that he's not bouncing off the walls.

Things can get particularly stressful for older dogs who haven't been socialized much with puppies in the past or who simply haven't been around puppies for quite some time. Hence, the importance of establishing some boundaries.

Boundary-wise, there are several options. You can use a baby gate, x-pen or a room to allow safe separation and allow your resident dog time to relax and unwind from the overstimulation. Depending on several factors these may be temporary or permanent solutions.

It is wise to erect baby gates and x-pens several days prior to the puppy's arrival so that the older doesn't get upset from all these sudden changes.

Boundaries allow dogs the ability to hear and see each other without physical contact. When not within their boundary enclosures, in the first few days, both dogs can be kept together in a fenced backyard while being supervised very closely for signs of tension.

Once the dogs seem very comfortable around one another, they can share some time indoors, but indoors requires more caution considering that some locations or tight passages may lead to noisy squabbles or even fights.



*Well-adjusted older dogs often teach puppies better social manners.*

## Minimize the Chances for Squabbles

During the introductory period, it's important to minimize the chances for squabbles. This means keeping toys out of the way, feeding dogs at a distance or in separate areas, not allowing the puppy to steal your older dog's favorite sleeping spot, not giving attention to the puppy when the older dog can see or hear all the fuss.

This is because we don't want to add more stress to an already stressful situation and cause the puppy to assume negative connotations: "Not only is this puppy invading my home but he is also trying to steal my toys and is getting more attention than me!"

If your older dog has a history of guarding food, toys, sleeping areas or certain locations from you or other people in your family, this is beyond the scope of this article. Consult with a dog behavior professional using humane, force-free behavior modification methods.

If your dog has a history of guarding food, toys, sleeping areas or certain locations from other dogs, you will need to practice caution. If the guarding is severe, you may need to consult with a professional and/or rethink about the new addition.

Mild resource guarding is fairly normal among dogs as long as these criteria are met: it's ritualized (just noisy and nobody gets hurt), both dogs have a good history of bite inhibition, each dog respects the other dog's claimed belongings (giving distance as the other dog makes his point) and don't show signs of tension or stress (they don't get to the point of being overly worried or traumatized).

Also, some food for thought: there are chances the new puppy may too be a resource guarder, so it's important to monitor all interactions. If your older dog or puppy shows trouble signs of resource guarding during the introduction, play it safe and consult with a professional.

Note: It's quite normal for an adult dog to "put the puppy in his place," when the pup engages in some rude behaviors. Puppies are socially illiterate and often learn better social etiquette from adult dogs. These adult dog "lectures" should be mostly ritualized (more noise than anything) and shouldn't traumatize the puppy.

Although adult dogs often grant puppies a [puppy license](#), owners must be wary of older dogs who are intolerant and stressed by rowdy puppy behaviors. Because it may be challenging at times to tell if the older dog is really engaging in harmless discipline or if there is something more serious going on, the intervention of a behavior specialist may be required.



## Monitor Closely During the Acclimation Process

Some time is needed for the older dog to habituate to the new puppy. Each dog is different, and therefore it's best to work at the dog's pace. Generally, it takes more time for older dogs to acclimate

to young puppies compared to adult or younger dogs. It may take weeks or even months for both dogs to be comfortable around each other. Make sure you maintain your older dog's regular routine.

If your older dog appears tense or has a history of anxiety with changes, it may be a good idea to invest in some [calming aids](#) such as DAP collar or DAP diffusers and Rescue Remedy. These products work best if introduced days prior to the new puppy's arrival so that they have time to become effective. Relaxing music such as Through Dog's Ear can help too.

As the days go by, there should be less tension among the dogs. If the older dog initially showed signs of stress such as growling when the puppy moved or vocalized, these episodes should be reducing with time. Feeding your older dog treats or kibble every time he hears the puppy move or vocalize when behind the baby gate or other barrier may speed up the acclimatization process as he associates the puppy with good things.

As the dogs get more comfortable with each other, it is possible to introduce resources such as toys starting with toys that aren't perceived as very valuable in dogs with no history of resource guarding.

Lower value food like kibble can be presented as well having the dogs sit side-by-side and taking turns in feeding one dog first and then the other and vice-versa. If one dog notices you have treats and shows up, teach him that he won't be fed until the other shows up too. Call the other dog if distracted. This helps form positive associations.

As the puppy matures and all vaccines are given and the vet deems it safe, both dogs can be walked, but it is best to have one handler for each dog so that the puppy can learn polite leash manners. If one dog is reactive towards something, the other dog will likely learn to react too so in these cases it is best to walk the dogs separately.

## If Worse Comes to Worse

As seen, there are several strategies that can help pave the path towards smoother introductions, but it's best to be prepared for the worst case scenario.

If at any time you notice worrisome signs or your older dog is getting more stressed rather than less, consult with a professional. It is best to nip problems in the bud rather than waiting for things to get worse and reach a breaking point where things may no longer be manageable. In worse case scenarios, you may have to re-home the puppy. Although heart-breaking, this is a better option than having two dogs live in a world of tension and misery.

## A Safety Reminder

This article is not to be used as a substitute for a hands-on behavioral assessment. If your adult dog shows worrisome behaviors towards your new puppy, intervene immediately to stop the interaction, keep both parties separated and consult with a behavior professional to play it safe.