

Making Dog Friends

Now that we are out and about more, especially with new puppies or adopted dogs who have been staying in with us through the pandemic, let's make sure we do all the right things when introducing them to other dogs.

When out walking and intentionally introducing your dog to someone's dog, always make sure you have the person's attention and permission. Puppies and adolescent dogs who run up and pounce or bounce on adult dogs run the risk of initiating a bad reaction from the other dog, up to and including teeth, being pinned, or starting a fight. If they don't get a bad reaction and are allowed to badger the other dog they may learn to greet all dogs like this and turn into bullies themselves. It does not take many repetitions of bad behavior for your dog to think it's acceptable.

I call proper greetings on leash "The Dance of the Dogs". People need to approach with dogs on a loose leash to prevent building tension. The dogs should sniff gently and, with luck, turn to the "Doggie Handshake" where the dogs are both nose to the other's rear end. All of this should happen in the course of 3 – 5 seconds and then the people should gently back the dogs away from each other. The dancing part is the people staying on the exterior of the sniffing dogs to avoid leashes becoming entangled. This can be repeated two or three more times after a short break as long as the greeting is staying calm and friendly.

When this is done with a strange dog on the street, it's then time to tip your hat, say "Thank you" and move on, considering this a successful interaction and being willing to do it again the next time you bump into these folks.

If you are making friends with a relative's/neighbor's/friend's dog, someone your dog may spend more time with, possibly off leash in your house or yard, I still go through the same steps but after the initial greeting the dogs and people would immediately walk together. After a short while do another greeting or two, as long as everything is friendly and under control.

If the greeting gets a bit exciting try not to over-react. It's most important to put space between the two dogs to allow them to settle and decide whether it's worth another try. Sometimes taking that short walk together helps the dogs become more accustomed to each other.

If one of the two dogs pulls away or makes no movement toward the other dog, **DO NOT** force him to move closer. You can try walking together in this instance also but be aware that your dog will not like every other dog on the planet and you need to accept that. If a dog seems non-affiliative in the greeting, it doesn't necessarily mean he's not interested; some dogs may take a little more time. Make sure everyone stays calm, this is the best advice anyone can give when introducing strange dogs to each other.

