

THAT SECOND (OR THIRD) DOG

We love our dogs. Sometimes we love our dogs so much we think we should get another dog because our first dog is absolutely perfect.

People have a lot of reasons for adding a second dog to an already established dog household: they think their dog is lonely, they think a puppy will make their older dog more lively, they think their dog is SO perfect that the second dog will be just as perfect, and won't that be wonderful?! Some people adopt two puppies at once. We're not going down that rabbit hole today.

When clients ask me about getting a second dog, I often jokingly tell them to ask their current dog how he feels about it. Sometimes I get a quizzical look, and then understanding blooms across their face. If your dog is living like a king in your home, is he the type willing to share? The type who wants to share you, let alone his bed, toys, treats, food, walks, and play time? Not that we let the dogs make life decisions for us but sometimes a lot of heartache is saved if a clear honest look is taken of the resident dog before adding another. Some dogs are better as singles.

If you, and your dog, are ready to add a dog to your home (or maybe foster a dog, [hint, hint](#)) it's best to be prepared.

Understand that there is no "fair". The new dog may need to sleep in a crate. The puppy may be getting more treats because he is getting more training. The younger dog may get more walks than the elderly dog. The new dog may have stricter rules in the beginning, especially if he seems to have never had any rules. One dog may like a bed and the other only wants the cool tile floor. One dog may believe all the tennis balls in the house belong to him. People who worry about everything being perfectly fair are generally wasting their effort.

We are in charge. The only alpha dog that should live in your house is you. Your older dog may not be comfortable "disciplining" your puppy. Several things can happen if you don't intervene: your puppy can turn into a bully: your older dog can finally be pushed far enough to over-correct the puppy, causing injury; and/or your older dog may avoid being near the puppy. This can also apply to a younger dog's behavior if an elder is the newly adopted. You need to be in charge of their behavior towards each other. Letting them "work it out" is dangerous.

You need to be vigilant around food bowls. Supervise them when fed. Pick up bowls when they are finished. There is no reason one dog should be in the other dog's dish. If you train this properly from the start problems will not develop. When giving treats, each dog needs to wait his turn. Take time to train this: they can learn to sit and wait if you are consistent about it.

Think it through. Another dog is a financial responsibility. Vet bills these days are astounding. You will be needing twice as much of almost everything, including time. Do you have time to train, exercise, and socialize another dog, a dog who may not be as perfect as your first dog after all?

If you believe you are ready, often a good match is a dog of the opposite sex and a three year difference in age. Not that there aren't exceptions to all the rules but these are nice guidelines to start with for a successful addition to your household.