

INTRODUCING DOGS

Preparing for the Meeting

The location of meet should be a fully-fenced flat yard with the gates closed.

If there is more than one dog to introduce to the rescue dog, start with the visitor dog that is easier-going on a leash. If any visitor dog(s) has shown any sign of leash reactivity in the past, have someone wait outside with him. This will be less stressful on the rescue dog.

Both rescue dog and visitor dog(s) should be leashed, with leashes attached to their harnesses. (If the leashes are attached to collars, pulling can be more irritating and possibly increase leash reactivity.) Also, use regular 6-foot leashes, not flexis. Flexis just don't give control and can be a real mess if they get tangled! Try to keep the leashes **LOOSE** the whole time. Tighter leash = more, stronger reactivity (greater likelihood of aggression).

Managing the Meeting

Start with the rescue dog in an ex-pen or crate. An open-top wire ex-pen, if available, is best. If not, a wire or canvas-and-mesh crate will do.

Bring the first visitor dog—on leash—into the yard where the rescue dog is in his ex-pen or crate. Let her walk up to the crate and meet the rescue dog through the wire (or mesh). (If the visitor dog wants to explore on her own at first, that's cool. Let the dogs do as they will; that way they'll be more comfortable.) If there are no issues, walk the visitor dog away while foster mom lifts the rescue dog out of the pen and puts him down.

Then let them meet, smell, twist and turn while you do the "leash dance" to keep the leashes LOOSE and untangled. *If they are calm*, you can drop the leashes (but leave them on). Then, observe closely. If all goes well (let's assume it will—we'll go over what to do if it doesn't go well later on), put the rescue dog back in his pen/crate and bring in the next visitor dog, on his leash. The first visitor dog can stay in the yard, but move her away from the rescue dog's pen/crate and keep her on leash.

Repeat what you did with the first visitor dog. Let them meet through the wire/mesh. ***The looser you can keep his leash, the better.*** If all is well, drop the visitor dog's leash and let it drag before getting the rescue dog out of his pen/crate. Now, let them meet without the barrier. You'll have to play by ear whether the rescue dog stays on leash or you drop it when he's out of the crate; it will depend on his reaction. Assuming he is easygoing about things, his leash can drag, too. If everyone is okay together, you can drop the first visitor dog's leash, too. ***Don't try to force the intros*** at any point; let the dogs check each other out, or not.

If all is going well in the yard and you want to take them for a walk together, you can. Don't worry about who's leading, following, or walking together. Just make sure the leashes stay loose and don't tangle! You don't have to do the walk, but it certainly won't hurt if you want to – it gives them more time to get to know one another. After the walk, back to the front yard, and drop the leashes.

Be sure to have some water available in the yard for them. Water can help lower stress levels.

Things to Watch Out For

Panting, lip licking, ears down and back = stress. Give them space from each other.

Stiff body, stiff tail, tail wagging tightly in small increments (back and forth about an inch) = nervous, uncertainty, likely fearful. This could go one of two ways: moving away from the other dog or moving toward the other dog in a threatening way. If you notice this body posture, **do some happy talk** to see if you can coax the one who's nervous/uncertain away with your voice or hand motions. **Don't jerk with the leash**—that can turn nervousness, uncertainty or fear into aggression quickly.

Closed mouth, sides of lips pulled back = getting ready to aggress. See last item and do the same—happy talking to coax the dog away. Don't punish for any sign of potential aggression. We tend to “no, no!” when a dog growls or snarls—that unfortunately increases the aggression. It's human nature, but do your best to *stay relaxed*. If there's a growl or snarl (which likely there will be), **redirect the dogs so they are away from each other and not looking at each other**. In canine language, a stare can be very threatening.

If things start looking bad, try not to get nervous, angry or scared. Calmly talk and walk backward, drawing the dogs with you as you separate them. Redirect their attention toward you or toward smelling something in the yard so they can take their minds off one another. Then one of you hold the rescue dog still while the other walks the visitor dog back and forth a couple of times, perpendicular to the rescue dog **so they are not facing one another**. Then hold the visitor dog still and walk the rescue dog perpendicular to him. Slowly decrease the distance between the two, remembering to always keep the leashes loose.

Happy, waggy body and tail = happy dog. This is good! 😊 If the dogs ignore one another, that's fine, too. Just let them tool around the yard and keep an eye on them. Keep the leashes hooked to the harnesses unless they can get tangled in in something. If you remove the leashes to avoid tangling, keep an eye on them.

Hopefully, things will go very well and all will be good!

You'll get a good idea how the dogs will be with one another outside. There's no need to go in the house. It's best not to introduce any other dogs in the mix.

Arriving Home

When you get home with the rescue dog, let the dogs interact outside for a while before taking them in. When you get in the house, **keep them on leash** and let them interact with one another for a bit before you take off the leashes.

Always feed separately—even if they are fine together, food can sometimes cause arguments.

Don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or concerns! Enjoy your new buddy!