



## Peace in a Multi-Dog Household

Having more than one dog can be a lot of fun, but it's also a lot of work! Here are some pointers to managing a multi-dog household.

### Choosing the Right Match

Dogs are like people; some hit it off right away and some just aren't meant to be together. When choosing a new pal for your existing dog, be prepared to look at numerous dogs and let your current pet give you his or her opinion. Elderly dogs can get annoyed with young, boisterous pups but two super active adolescents might be over stimulating for each other- find a mix that works for both dogs. Knowing your dogs play style and preference can help you pick an appropriate match. A dog that likes to chase may not tolerate a dog that prefers to neck-wrestle. We prefer opposite sex pairings and avoid dogs from the same litter. There are same-sex and same-litter pairs that make it work, but the long-term odds are in your favor with male/female pals or dogs from different litters.

### Ensure Ample Engagement, Enrichment and Exercise

Ensuring that both dogs get ample exercise is key to a successful multi-dog household. Dogs that live with one another and play together often get bored quickly. Even after an intense play session, they may not have expended their energy. Solo walks, doggie play dates, separate games of fetch and training time can better bust your dog's energy, rather than relying on them to wear each other out. Each dog may have different needs, if you've got a large difference in age or preference of fun, offer enrichment and exercise at each dog's speed.

### Train, Train, Train!

Work with each dog, individually, on training. Some great commands to teach are leave it, drop it, off, go to your mat/place, back up, and of course the basic manners- sit, down, stay, wait. By properly training each dog, you can ask for specific behaviors that lead to success for all dogs involved. This can come in handy in multiple areas. Does one dog guard his bed? Teach them "Off" so that he voluntarily vacates his spot when another dog is nearby. Does one dog charge your guests? Teach them a good sit/stay at the door so both dogs do not begin jumping on your guests for attention.

Training separately is the best way to avoid frustration for you and for the dogs. However, once each dog has learned the behavior separately, they should be able to practice it around their housemate. Plus, doing so will be good practice for you too and more realistic for when guests are over.

**Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation**

Walnut Creek, CA • (925) 256-1273 • (800) 567-1273 • [arlife.org/resource-and-referral-center](http://arlife.org/resource-and-referral-center)



## **Each Dog Gets Down Time — Alone!**

Even dogs that are the best of friends do better with separate alone time. This allows them to fully relax without any pressure from the other dog and also helps avoid codependence. We suggest separate rooms or separate crates for down time. Some dogs might benefit from a mere 15 minutes alone while some pairs may need much more time alone. A great time for this is when you are gone from the house and cannot supervise their interactions.

## **Know Common Fight Triggers and Work to Prevent Them**

Dogs, like people, do not always get along, even if they are best of friends. Some dogs have shorter fuses overall while others are known to spark over certain things. High value food items, toys and people are common fight triggers. By learning each dog's preferences, you can work to prevent small squabbles from turning into larger ones. If you see your dogs getting overly excited, it's time to step in and give everyone a break. This is why having a solid recall response for both dogs is so important. Being able to call them to you from a distance allows you to relieve tension and create space between them when needed.

Family, friends and even neighbors should be aware of fight triggers so they can avoid them. Unknowing guests often up the excitement level in the entire house, which is stressful for everyone. Mix that with the well-meaning guest and table scraps and there may be an incident. This can be better avoided by managing your dogs so that your guests don't need to. If your dogs may argue over food, put them away while the dinner guests are present. If one dog can be a bit pushy for attention, let them each have their own time to greet the guests so that you aren't managing their interactions, welcoming your guests *and* preparing dinner — you only have so many hands!

Spend some time learning about dog communication skills so you can better catch the warning signals that dogs use to diffuse tension or warn each other. This way you'll notice that intense eye contact or mild freeze before any growling or snapping erupts. Knowing their signals will help you to know what upsets or agitates each of them and help you better prevent things. Allowing our dogs to just "work it out" often leads to a degraded trust relationship between them and with us, so they are more likely to have further issues. It's our job to help them feel safe and heard, so step in if one is being overwhelmed and coach and support them to better communication and a better relationship.

## **Management — The Ultimate Key to Success**

Having two (or more) dogs in your house means double (or triple) the love, snuggles and kisses. The key to enjoying these benefits is management. Give your dogs time solo time with you, give them time to themselves and know their triggers. When everyone understands each other's needs, there can be peace in your home. If you're noticing any tension building, it's best to go back to management basics and bring in a trainer to help you assess what might be going on between them.

**Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation**

Walnut Creek, CA • (925) 256-1273 • (800) 567-1273 • [arlife.org/resource-and-referral-center](http://arlife.org/resource-and-referral-center)