

Living Peaceably in a Multi-Dog Home

Having more than one dog can be great fun, provided you're a good manager and your dogs are well matched. More than one can be very demanding, too. Your dogs will need you to be the best playground monitor you can be to ensure that everybody succeeds. Below are some important tips for making it work.

The Golden Rules of Multi-Dog Management:

- Select your pets carefully. Some dog pairs have great chemistry while others are Jerry Springer material - Nothing but conflict and strife.
- Maintain a strong leadership role so the dogs respect your house rules.
- Especially while dogs are getting to know each other, separate before you leave the house.
- Know the most common fight triggers and work to prevent them.
- Know how to break up a fight, then promise yourself you'll never let them get into anything bigger than a spat.
- Involve everyone in the household in multi-dog management.
- Understand that dog dynamics can and do shift along with life changes.
- Give your dogs individual attention to strengthen bonds.
- Proper intros between new dogs are KEY. Here's a helpful [Step-by-Step](#).



Choose well; Good Chemistry is Key

Dogs are like people; Some hit it off and some just aren't meant to be together. When choosing a new friend for your existing dog, be prepared to look at numerous dogs and let your current pet give you his or her opinion. It can be helpful to consider mature dogs rather than a puppy. Dog social pups can lose some of their dog tolerance as they mature, shifting household dynamics in painful ways. But adults can give you a much better read on their limits with other dogs and how the overall chemistry between your pets will work out for years to come. Rescue groups that foster dogs at home with other pets can be a great resource for well socialized prospects. Same-sex pairings generally need careful matching. Plenty of same sex housemate dogs do great together, but boy/girl matches tend to have better long term success.



Know Your Dog's Limits!

Dog Tolerance Levels vary in dogs. Some are highly social, and some won't take gruff from any dog. In our experience, most properly socialized pit bulls fall somewhere in the middle. Finding a friend for your dog requires that you know his particulars, including whether or not he has a 'short fuse' or a 'long fuse' during high arousal, and, what pushes his buttons.

NOTE: It can be harder for dogs with short fuses to succeed in multi-dog homes. In some cases, it's better for everybody if he stays an only dog. That's A-Okay - Some of the happiest dogs around are those that have their people all to themselves!

Be The Job Boss

Your current dog(s) should be nicely trained before bringing a new dog home. This will set the tone for a smooth transition and help the dogs know what you expect from them. Trained dogs can also serve as mentors for newer dogs and teach them good manners. Your leadership role will be very important if your dogs decide to co-conspire to misbehave or have an argument. If your current dog doesn't listen to you now, you can count on having TWO badly behaved dogs - No fun! A good training class plus lots of practice can help you instill better manners in a month's time. Work all of your dogs together at least twice a day; Mealtime is a good time to do short sessions.

IMPORTANT: Practice calling your dogs out of play when they're having a good wrestling session. If they won't break their play and come to you when called, grab them out. Make sure to have delicious treats ready when they do come to you. Work on this repeatedly until they respond. Practice a longer **Down Stay**, then praise and release them back to their play session. This exercise will help you enormously as you manage your dogs. They should always - ALWAYS! - respond to your voice, even when they're wound up.

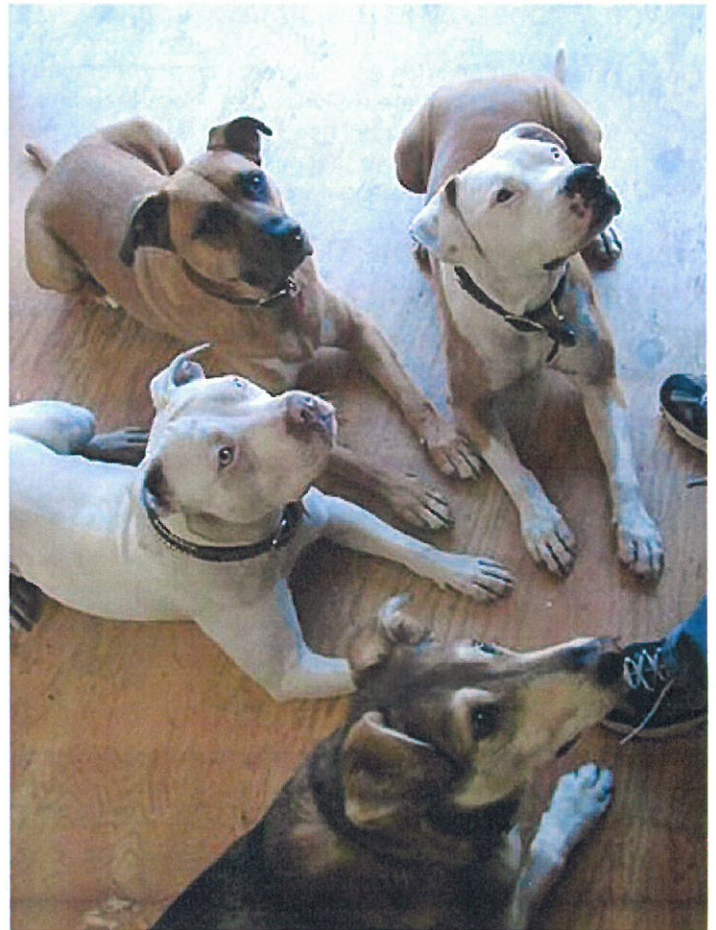
Photo Left: These four housemate dogs listen closely for direction. Their good manners come from reinforcing house rules and from working each dog a few minutes every day, especially at meal time.

MORE TIPS (In PDF Form) for "Introducing a A New Dog into the House."

Separate Dogs before Leaving the House

This is one of the hardest things for new multi-dog owners to accept: Dogs can be the best of friends BUT they may still find something, someday, that will cause an argument. When you're home, a small spat can often be stopped fast with a loud shout. But if you're not home, this same argument can escalate, drag on and cause injury. Avoid this terrible possibility by getting your dogs accustomed to being separated during 'down time' in a crate or on a tie-down, first while you're home and then while you're away. You can rotate dogs so one is out while the other is contained. Or, let one dog sleep in your closed bedroom for the day while the other gets the sofa. Dogs are creatures of habit, so once you let them get used to this routine they'll accept it as perfectly normal. Remember to exercise the dogs before you confine them so they can rest and enjoy a chew toy while you're away. By following this standard protocol employed by owners of many dog breeds including and especially the terrier breeds, you can leave the house knowing that you've done everything possible to ensure the well being of your pets.

Right: Happy George is confined during times when he can't be supervised with the other dogs. This system keeps him out of mischief and helps enforce good house manners.



Are Pit Bulls Unique?

We've seen negative attention directed at pit bulls for the normal canine trait of dog-dog aggression. In some cases, those who dislike the breed have used it to condemn them and even to justify breed specific legislation, including bans. The fact is, dog-dog aggression is a very common behavior with numerous breeds including and especially the working dogs. To compare, the recommendations we offer on this page are mirrored in websites that deal with most of the terriers including Jack Russell Terriers, as well as the Akitas, Huskies, Boxers, Ridgebacks, Australian Cattle Dogs, Shar Peis, German Shepherds, Dobermans, Chows, Tosa Inus, Rottweilers and many others. In every breed, in every situation, management is key!

Avoiding Conflict by Knowing Fight Triggers

It's a fact of life that all multi-homes live with: Dogs of every breed can and do scrap with housemate dogs. To prevent smaller, harmless arguments from escalating into full scale battles, responsible homes need to stay on top of things. Dog owners should become dedicated students of dog body language and be diligent about preventing the types of triggers that can spark tensions. We don't allow our dogs to lord over each other in dominance displays or to "work things out" - Ever! While it's natural for dog groups to develop a noticeable pecking order, this hierarchy should never take the place of your role as Head Boss and Keeper of the Peace. Body language signs that can signal trouble: Raised hackles, hard stares, stiffening of the body, low growls.

Right: Grrrrr. Simon's hard stare and low growl is meant to keep other dogs away from his prize toy. Signals like this can set dogs off into a fight if they aren't familiar with each other or if they have ongoing conflicts that go on unchecked by their owners.

COMMON FIGHT TRIGGERS: The presence of prized chew toys, food and even attention from you or your company can send arousal levels up and spark conflicts in some dogs. Don't overlook the chicken bones in the trash or the piece of kibble that rolled just out of reach under the counter. Additionally, play sessions and tug games that get too exciting can cause problems. Charging to the door to greet the doorbell or chasing a squirrel in the yard can amp two dogs up to the point where they may clash and redirect on each other. If you see your dogs getting overly aroused, and especially, if they stop listening to you, it's time to step in and make everybody settle down, using a verbal command or a time out in the crate or on tie down.



In some cases, when household fights escalate and increase in severity, families are forced to either re-home one of their dogs or divide their home into sections and rotate dogs so they can be permanently separated. This can be a stressful way to live! As with everything, prevention is so much better than cure.

Excitement is a Trigger! -- This ball game got everybody wound up and, as a result, the dog on the left redirected onto the dog that slammed into her. (A loud HEY! ended the problem.) Redirected aggression is one of the most common fight triggers in multi-dog homes. To keep the peace, be ready to intervene when play or chase games get too exciting, especially when mature dogs are involved.



** Learn how to create and enjoy **HEALTHY PLAY SESSIONS** **

Breaking up Fights

The best way to deal with fights is to commit to prevention: Management, Management! But if something slips past you and a scuffle breaks out, it can help to shout a VERY loud, "NO!"

If that doesn't work, your dogs have gone too far and your next best move may be the hardest to accomplish: Take a deep breath and force yourself to count to five. This gives you time to think about your options rather than react impulsively. Some fights can be stopped quickly by grabbing the dogs' back legs and pulling them out, some will end with the use of the hose, in some cases you can throw a blanket over one of the dogs to surprise them into stopping. In cases where a dog has grabbed on and won't let go, a break stick will end the fight quickly and with minimal injury to either pet. PBRC is a great resource for ordering a **Break Stick**.

LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE: If your dogs have a spat, don't kick yourself. Instead, use it as a learning experience to help prevent a repeat performance. Ask yourself: What contributed to the scuffle and what little signs should have told me that I needed to intervene earlier? Have my dogs been getting enough exercise? Is my female in heat? (Another good reason to spay; less dog-dog conflict!) Am I spoiling one of the dogs and setting up a grudge? Did somebody raise the stakes during a wrestle session? Did the new toy make somebody too possessive? By understanding what might've caused a problem, you can change the way you do things with the dogs and nip most issues in the bud before they escalate. If you just aren't sure of what might have contributed, talk with a trainer who's experienced with bull breeds to see if they can shed some light.

When Dogs Fight

It's fine to scold your dog(s) just after a scuffle and let them know that their behavior was unacceptable. Pit bulls are softies and generally hate displeasing their people. Although the terriers can have shorter fuses with other dogs, many - if not most - can enjoy known dog friends and avoid conflict with the help of your guidance and supervision. After an argument, it's time for more structure in the home to remind your dogs who calls the shots: **The NILF Program**

What dogs do when you're not around may be a different story though. We recommend separating pets from each other when you aren't there to police their interactions, especially when a new pet has joined the household.

Photo: Amy is hearing about her foster dad's displeasure after a sassy show of dog aggression. She's come a long way since this photo was taken.

All Hands on Deck for Across the Board Management

Your friends and family - and even the neighbors that like to pop over to say 'Hi' - should all be made aware of your dogs' limits and any potential dog-dog issues they may have. Everyone should share in the responsibility of keeping the peace, including: picking up prized toys and monitoring the dogs when they get rowdy. In our home, we have to remind friends not to

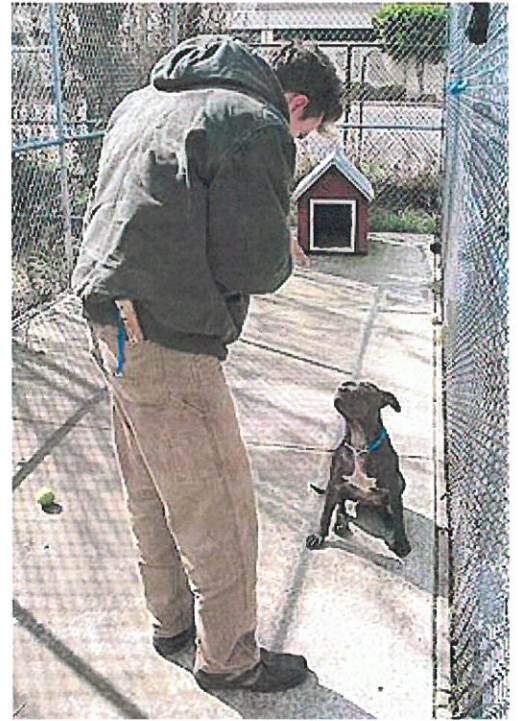
throw a ball for our husky-mix because he's willing fight any dog that tries for the same toy. That takes a lot of reminding! Unfortunately, we receive too many emails from homes that experience dogfights while their pets are in the care of somebody different (pet sitter, friend, etc). So often, managing your dogs involves managing the people who interact with them, and making sure everyone is on board with your rules and wishes.

Be Aware of Changing Dynamics that Come with Life Changes

Dynamics between pets can and do shift as young dogs mature into adulthood and later, when a senior dog begins to decline in health. Be very aware of any smaller frictions that may crop up between your pets so you can get on top of things immediately and ensure that transitions go smoothly. A former BAD RAP adopter reported that her younger dog started picking fights just as her older dog was getting feeble in her legs. Another home noticed new frictions between her pets after moving to a new home. Shifts in the pecking order after life changes are common with all breeds, and requires your diligent monitoring and good leadership.

Give Your Dogs 'Special Time' Apart from the Others

Multi-dog households benefit greatly when each dog has a strong bond with his owner. To deepen your bond with each of your dogs, take time out for individual attention away from everybody else. A ten minute tug session, a ride in the car when you go on an errand, a quick walk around the block that's outside of his normal routine - These things can help each of your dogs feel more connected to you and improve their listening skills when they're with the other dog(s).



The Rewards of having multi-dogs are obvious. When you've chosen carefully and have committed to common sense management, the potential for conflict is minimized and you can truly enjoy your pets. The dogs enjoy the benefit of extra socialization, mental stimulation, fun play sessions, and - the ultimate drug for so many pit bulls - more shared body heat at the end of they day. Enjoy your beautiful pets!