

Introducing a Second Dog

An Interview with Pearl Neill, by Loraine Princiotto, SPDR Chow Chow Breed Rep

Tails wagging, rumps in the air, jumping, spinning, running, smiling... it's hard not to feel that life is simply good when you watch dogs happily playing together. The depth of joy they feel in playing with each other is something we can never fully know, no matter how much we love them.

I used to watch our newly-adopted little Chow mix boy on his play dates with the pretty Golden Retriever next door, and feel guilty that we didn't have another dog. Not only did I think I was depriving him of the companionship of his own kind, but also, in doing rescue, I knew how many dogs needed homes. Surely 2 people could handle 2 dogs. And our little Poco loved every dog he met.

And so the day came, after much careful consideration, lengthy discussions, and a detailed plan of compromise, when I arrived home with a very skinny little Chow girl who had the biggest brown eyes I'd ever seen. Thus began a process that is continuing to this day. A process of training and love, patience and jealousy, joy and growth.

It's hard to imagine the impact another dog can have on your family. Not only are there the technical, day to day differences (more poop to scoop, more food, more vet care, more leashes to wrangle on your walks) but, with each individual little canine personality, comes a whole array of possibilities. The addition

of a second dog can either be a wonderful change for the whole pack, or a huge headache. But taking the time to plan, and educating yourself about intercanine behavior, will most likely make the addition of a new dog a smooth and happy event for everyone.

I spoke with a trainer recently about how to successfully integrate a new dog into a home. Here are some of her thoughts.

Temperament

Once you have made the decision to adopt a second dog, the first thing to do is to consider the temperament of the dog that you have, and the temperament of the dog that you are thinking of adopting. You can probably make most relationships work, but if you have dogs whose temperaments match from the get-go, it makes it a whole lot easier. For example, if you have a really high drive, high energy dog, you probably shouldn't adopt a really low energy dog. They might end up driving each other crazy, with, for example, one wanting to play and the other not. A high energy dog paired with a medium energy dog, as an example, might be a really good match.

Age

Consider the ages of the dog, as well. Sometimes the addition of a younger dog to a home with an older dog is a good thing, sometimes not. If I had a dog who

was eleven or twelve, I would probably want to adopt a dog that was 2 or 3, rather than a tiny puppy. But, again, considering that every situation is different, taking the individual dogs into account will help lead you to the right decision. Is your elderly dog ailing, and appreciative of quiet cuddle time? Bringing an energetic pup with lots of needs and demands on your time and attention might not be right or fair to your elderly companion. But, is your middle-aged dog seeming a bit bored? Does he perk up at the park and act like a pup again around other playful dogs? That might be just the right situation to adopt a pup.

Dominance

Another big point to consider is dominance. If you have a very dominant alpha dog, try to avoid getting another very dominant dog. It makes it a lot easier on you and on them if you don't have to deal with two dogs trying to figure out their dominance. A good match for a really dominant dog might be a dog who is more submissive. A very submissive dog can usually handle a moderately dominant dog.

Gender

As for the sex, the individual personality of the dog is much more important than what sex it is. The only time that you have to be really careful is if you have two very dominant females.

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The girls will fight, and they'll fight a lot harder than the boys.

The Introduction Process

When you first meet a dog whom you are considering adopting, it is a good idea to go without your current pet the first time. Look at how the dog reacts to you. If the dog wants to be near you, wants to play, and is generally willing to interact with you, these are good signs. An absence of these behaviors doesn't mean you should reject the dog, though I can't help but think of many Chows I know who, although aloof at first meeting, are wagging their tails furiously and giving kisses within a day or two.

If you think you want to adopt the dog, the next meeting should include your current pet. Always make this next meeting on neutral territory, preferably a secure, fenced area. Have at least two people there, so that you can handle your dog, while the other person handles the potential adoptee.

Have both dogs on leash, and then drop the leashes (while still keeping the dogs attached). Let them sniff each other, and interact naturally. There will be a dominant dog. Watch body language—reading up on canine body language is fascinating and so incredibly helpful in understanding your dog.

If it appears that there might be a bit of a skirmish, don't panic. Use a happy call-off, as an example



of a way to diffuse the situation before it escalates. Having two people there allows you both to call each dog for a cookie. Then, let them go back to interacting again. Unless one of the dogs is very aggressive, it would be pretty rare for them to get into a fight.

It's very important that you drop the leashes during this initial meeting. The mistake that many people make is that, if you hold the leash, you risk making one of the dogs dominant, who might not actually be the dominant dog. This could actually cause a fight.

As hard as it can be to drop the leash, it is the only way to truly read the dogs' body language without interfering. Again, this is all provided that you know something of each dog's temperament. Obviously, if you have a dog who is known to be dog aggressive, things would be handled differently.

Say you have met the dog, fallen in love, your dog has met the adoptee, and you think things have gone well. The next step

might be to either go to a second neutral territory, or, if things have gone very well, take them home.

A good idea for the car ride home is to keep one dog crated in the car. If you are adopting from SPDR, the foster family might be able to bring the dog to your home.

Upon arrival at home, bring both dogs out to the fenced yard first. There usually aren't as many territory issues outside, and they can be off leash safely. Let them get used to each other. When things seem like they are going well, and they are at least tolerating each other, then bring them into the house.

But here is where a lot of people make mistakes. If you already have a dog, your automatic reaction might be to treat that dog as top dog. However, things aren't necessarily going to work out that way. Nine out of ten times, if you have a male, and you bring home a female, the female is going to be alpha.

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That's just the way it is in the dog world. I have 2 males, and when I brought home my foster female, she just took right over. The older male accepted this right away. But the younger male got into a couple of skirmishes with her. The important thing is, I accepted that this was the way it was; the little upstart female was going to be dominant.

Food and Water

As for feeding issues, water is usually not a point of contention. One large water bowl will usually work. If it is going to be an issue, two separate water dishes will usually solve the problem. At dinner time, you have to be a bit more careful. If you know your dog is very food obsessed, put the other dog on a leash, or in his/her crate. Prepare the food. At first, until you figure out which dog is going to be dominant, feed your dog, then put the food in the crate for the new dog. A leash tied to a chair leg works if you don't have a crate, or if the dog is not crate trained.

If your dog finishes first, put her outside until the other dog finishes. In general, don't put the food down and leave. Stay with them so you can supervise and make sure that each dog is eating his/her food. Teaching your dogs to sit and wait politely for their food is always a good idea. Overall, a lot of structure is necessary... especially where food is concerned.

Sleeping Position

For the first few nights, a really good idea is to have the new dog sleep in a crate. If that is not an option, set up a bed for the new dog and attach the dog to a leash. If your dog sleeps in bed with you, for example, set up the new dog's bed at the other side of the room, and attach its leash to a piece of furniture. This will prevent any middle of the night skirmishes over bed position.



Realize that, after a little while, the new dog is going to find his or her own place. As time goes by, you may even find them sharing a couch or sleeping pad together.

Recognition of Alpha

On a day to day basis, it is really important to accept who is the more dominant dog. You will see key things that will be evidence of this: Fluffy will always greet you at the door for pets first, Fluffy will get toys first, Fluffy will go through the door first, etc. You can and should reinforce this

by letting him be first. You're still in control, still making him sit and wait for an okay before going through a door, for example, but you are not trying to treat them equally, or make Fido alpha. You are letting their natural positioning be. If you don't do this, you will be giving the wrong dog a false sense of dominance, which can cause fights.

But, there are also differences, in that different things are important to different dogs. For example, in the house, a female could be more dominant, but outside, the male could be dominant. So, the structure and pack order could be something that is more fluid and changeable, rather than a rigid system where one dog is always top dog, and the other is always second dog.

Training

One thing you tend to find when expanding your pack is that you don't spend as much training time with the second dog as you did with the first. So, remember to set aside time for training. Work with both, but work with them separately. Do three 15 minute sessions per day for each dog. It really is impossible to work efficiently with more than one dog at a time. While working with each dog, take it to a separate area (ie outside). Then, you can really focus on THAT dog and get the best work done.

In sum, if you get two dogs with the right personalities for each other, I think it can be easier than having one dog. They

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entertain each other. They have someone to be with. Getting another dog can change your relationship with the first dog, but it can change it for the better. My relationship with Brynn has changed, so I don't have as intense a relationship, but he and Breeze get along so well. But, the neatest thing in the world to see is how two dogs bond. And your relationship grows with it.

A lot of people get a dog, and, when they reach 3 or 4 years old and have settled down, they think of getting a puppy. There can then be some unrealistic expectations in this kind of situation.

Your second dog will never have the same personality as your first. You will never ever get the same dog. Dogs are a product of their environment, but they also have their own personalities. It's what makes them wonderful. And rescue dogs give you the opportunity to grow with them. It's a feeling of satisfaction to see them blossom.

About the Author & Interviewee:

Lorraine Princiotta is SPDR's Chow Chow Breed Rep. Pearl Neill is a trainer, and competes with her 3 rescued Border Collies in Flyball and Agility. She has put an Obedience title on one of her Border Collies, and does private training and behavior work. She has loved and been involved with dogs all her life.

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