

Introducing the Foster to Your Dog

You've decided to foster. Loving, responsible foster homes are the meat and potatoes of GRR. Without them, well, this whole wonderful process of saving the lives of these dogs just would not exist. Most, although not all, fosters, currently have another dog(s) in their homes. The integration of a new dog into the home, whether it's a foster or a permanent situation, needs to be handled with the least amount of stress on the humans and both the resident and incoming dogs.

We've chosen to have and/or foster Golden Retrievers for many reasons, but one of the reasons which we hear the most is because we love the breed, and part of loving this breed is the temperament which is the kind, gentle, loving temperament each and every Golden is purported to possess at birth. Golden Retrievers are one of the top breeds to own. They guide the blind, are known to love, protect and cherish children, save lives, provide comfort to the sick, and more. They are practically saints!

So, you get a Golden to foster, bring him/her home and it just doesn't go as planned. Not going as planned can range from growling, showing of teeth to an all out dog fight with injuries to dogs and/or humans.

The best plan for introductions gone awry is a preventive plan. A plan requires each of us who is considering being a foster take into account these three issues which will play a huge part in the foster's success: 1. knowledge about your own dog(s) 2. knowledge of what you're willing to do and 3. being aware of the possible state of mind of the foster.

- The first on the list is knowing your own dog. We love our dogs and we love them as we love our human family. In fact, we consider our dog(s) part of the family. We know our dog like to carry items around in his mouth. We know he steals (and we think it's kind of cute) from the other dog or cat, but they don't mind. We love playing ball. All the dogs have their toys where they can get them. Your dog has full access to the house and yard, just like the rest of the family! We take our dog on walks, meet other dogs at the dog park or on walks and of course, since we have Golden Retrievers, unless the other dog is not friendly, we've never had a problem. The resident dog gets along with others in the home and seems to get along with other dogs, although few of those dogs come into the home.
- Secondly, know yourself. What are you willing to do? Having a foster in the home may mean putting away all the toys and/or not playing with all the dogs together, not feeding all the dogs together, not taking the foster to the dog park, having to separate dogs, having to watch behavior of not only your dogs, but the foster.
- Lastly, you are bringing in a dog that, more than likely, has lived in a neglected state, emotionally and/or physically. A few of the incoming dogs have come from loving, gentle homes, but the majority come in scared, unsocialized, untrained and/or starved for attention/love, food and medical care. Abandonment and trust issues abound. This dog may have come from a shelter or the streets, both of which can be very scary, so your foster may also be frightened. He doesn't know you are kind, loving and want to provide - at least not yet.

Keep in mind these three variables and then determine your plan. There is no textbook or one way, to introduce dogs, but, there are some guidelines which will help ensure a positive introduction between dogs. I always err on side of safety. I want a calm, peaceful introduction. Whenever I introduce dogs, I always think about what I would do if it doesn't go well. What is plan B? The following are dog to dog introduction guidelines:

- Put all the toys, bones and food away when you bring the dogs together. Dogs may not even want the toys - until someone else does. We do not know what the new dog considers valuable, if anything. I have seen dogs be happy, loving and content with one another until a toy, food, bone or ball is brought out, and it all quickly changes.

- I advise not opening the door and bringing the dog into your home with your dog(s) standing excitedly in the doorway. On rare occasion I have seen and heard people claim this is how they always bring in a new dog. What I usually hear is the surprise of an individual who had used this method previously, but encountered a situation where it did not go well.

Doorways/gates are the site of many dog/human injuries. People and dogs are excited and dogs (yes, even Golden Retrievers) well, no news here...they're territorial. Sometimes the incoming victim doesn't have a chance. Thresholds are important (especially when someone "owns" the threshold) and places where there can be excitement regarding meeting new people/dogs. Neutral territory is actually the best meeting place. Avoid just opening a gate or door to the home and letting a new dog come in to resident dog(s). Avoid this method totally, no matter who touts its success. They just got lucky.

- If at all possible take the new dog and the resident dog(s) on a walk, first thing, before the new dog comes into the home. It is more neutral than the home territory. At first one person will have the dog on their left and the other person will have the dog on his right. There will be two humans in the center and a dog on each end. The distance you are apart depends on the behavior of the dog(s). It is possible you are on opposite sides of the street. You might also be much closer depending on the dog's behaviors. At first, the new dog and the resident dog(s) are NOT walking side by side. The dogs are not to "meet up" at this point which means the dogs are not behind or out in front checking one another. If this goes well, you can bring the dog(s) closer. If you have more than one resident dog you can do this in shifts. If you have multiple dogs take the dog you think will be the most resistant to a new dog.
- You will start with the dogs walking in the same direction but with the humans between the dogs. If the dogs are calm, start shifting the dogs so they are walking together. At this point the humans will be on the ends and the dogs will be in the middle. You may need to increase your distance as you bring them closer to one another. Your goal is have them walking side by side in a calm manner.
- If the walk is going well and dogs are walking together you may decide to take a short break and let the dogs meet. If you do this the leash must be loose to facilitate the calm, side to side greeting. No tight leashes, no dogs meeting nose to nose. Friendly dogs greet side to side, not face to face, pulling forward.
- You also need to be calm. If you are nervous and/or fearful that will be communicated to the dog. He'll think he needs to be that way too, since you know best. He'll feel there is danger and the danger is that other dog. I cannot stress this enough. Your energy is important.
- What you do not want is a dog pulling forward on a leash rushing up to greet another dog. The dogs are not calm but excited and you've created a situation where the dogs are giving signals of aggression, even though that may not be on their initial agenda.
- What is most important here is to stay calm and not rush it. You may need to do several walks before the new dog can meet yours. It can vary and what is most important is that you AND the dogs are calm. If you have several dogs, sometimes just two or three dogs sniffing on one dog is too much for the newcomer and many times dogs who live

together team up in an altercation. I would suggest meeting one dog at a time. Then bring in two, then three and so on.

- Also be aware dogs greet side to side, sniffing one another up and down. There is always a freeze. The duration can vary but they do freeze and then it can go either way. They may engage in an altercation, they may play or they may even ignore one another.
- There is much information on the behavior of dogs who are friendly with other dogs and who are not. Be aware that wagging tails are not always happy tails. Tails tell us so much. The non-verbal behaviors of dogs meeting are important for you to know. Dogs who are friendly with other dogs have a loose body, relaxed mouth, tail is mid to low and if tail swings, it's not fast and furious. The nonverbal cues of dogs meeting is a book unto itself and we still continue to learn the non-verbal cues of a dog who is meeting another for the first time.
- Dogs are extremely aware of space and distance. The foster may not be ready to mix with the new dogs. Too much space too quickly can cause many a headache. For the first few day or even weeks, I crate or baby gate (don't let the dogs jump or knock the gate down) the incoming dog.
- When the dogs become calm I do let them meet through the gate. I use this in conjunction with the walk. I allow no, none, zip, growling, showing of teeth on either the resident or the incoming dog. If I have a dog (no matter if it's mine or the newbie) who is growling, I bring them only to the point where they are not growling and I decrease the distance at each meeting. They will finally relax. It may take time but do not rush it. Do not let your dogs rush the gate or grate all at once. That can be scary for the incoming dog.
- When the dogs become calm in the presence of the new dog I introduce the dogs, one at a time starting with the most resistant to meeting new dogs in my group. The resident dog who is the most resistant must accept the new dog. Again, if you have multiple dogs, do not let them rush the newcomer. Where you introduce them varies. Some like a large room. Many like it outdoors. What you do need is some space. I successfully used a large room in my home. Others have successfully used their backyards.
- Many times I leave a leash on each dog but let the leashes drop from my hand. I have another person besides myself present as I always prepare for it not going well. Let them sniff and check one another. There will be a moment where they freeze and then they either play, ignore or engage in negative behavior. Their being together may initially be only for a short time. Try to end the dogs time together on a positive note. Each time they come together the time can increase. Only bring them together when you and the dogs are calm. I cannot emphasize enough how much your feelings and state of mind influences this meeting. If you are afraid or nervous it will affect how your dog(s) view the newcomer.
- Exercise, exercise, exercise. Good food, routine and an outlet for energy facilitates this process for all the dogs.
- Also, be aware that a meeting that appears to go well does not mean these dogs have bonded and they will be compatible. Like humans, dogs can have disagreements later. Many times a dog is quiet, withdrawn (or even the opposite, wild and crazy) but they are watching (dogs are masters at non-verbals, it is their language). As time passes they reveal more and more of their true self. As with any multiple dog household you must always watch for signs of bullying, targeting, possessiveness and triggers which seem to set any of the dogs into a negative state.
- You will need to judge whether or not the incoming dog and the resident dogs need breaks. Sometimes it is too much on either the resident dogs or the new dog to be together 24/7. I would advise never leave them together if not at home.

These guidelines have been successful not only for myself but for others. Also, know, you may have a foster or even your own dog who may not ever integrate with a new dog. It might get better, but never enough to put them together. These dogs are the exceptions and you can work with GRR on steps to take.

The timeframe for introducing dogs can be an hour or minutes, a day, several days or even weeks but taking some time to integrate and introduce dogs saves time, heartache and possibly a dog's life.

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