

MANAGING YOUR MULTI-DOG HOUSEHOLD



Are you thinking of introducing another dog to your home?

Multi-dog households can be a lot
of fun, but can be a challenge too!

Dogs are individuals with their own personality, preferences and needs

Your dogs will likely enjoy different activities, respond to situations differently, and have different exercise and enrichment needs. It is also not guaranteed that they will become best friends!

Managing expectations realistically is key. Being aware of potential issues and knowing how to manage and prevent them, will set you and your dogs up for success.

This leaflet provides useful tips to help you create a happy multi-dog household!

Challenges

Adding another dog to your household can be challenging, not only financially, but also in terms of safety and time.

Each dog likely has different physical, training, enrichment and emotional needs. In some cases this means the guardian has double the work, especially if the dog's don't enjoy activities together. And even if their personalities and needs are similar, they will still need individual attention.

Many dogs struggle being near each other in the presence of food or other valuable resources, or in exciting or frustrating situations. This means guardians need to actively supervise and manage more than they would have previously, to ensure safe interactions.

The management, supervision, individual training and attention costs a lot of time and energy from the guardian!

Recognising problem behaviour

Learning about canine body language is important for any dog guardian, but especially when you have multiple dogs.

Understanding canine communication helps you spot tension between your dogs. Being aware of the subtle signs, such as lip licking or averting gaze, that indicate dogs may be uncomfortable with a situation, allows you to intervene and manage before they show bigger behaviours such as growling or lunging.

Learning about triggers helps you identify what specific situations your dogs struggle with, that way you can prevent these from occurring or focus your training on coping with these situations.

There are many books available on canine communication, but if your dogs are already struggling, please get in touch!

strategies to manage common challenges in multi-dog households and ensure canine welfare

1:1 time and training

Individual walks, training and enrichment allows you to meet your individual dogs' welfare needs. For example, your dogs likely have different exercise and enrichment needs, this can be due to age, size or temperament. They likely have a different level of training too, and the presence of another dog can be too distracting when teaching new skills. Another benefit of 1:1 time is that it strengthens your relationship!

Group activities and training

Some skills do need to be practiced as a group too! For example: Having to wait whilst the other dog gets to participate in activities, gets a treat or attention; Loose leash walking together; And being able to settle and relax around the other dog. Doing activities both dogs enjoy together can help them get used to getting along. Do make sure to prevent introducing valuables in these activities, such as toys or food, as that may create conflict.

Managing food

Conflict over food occurs frequently in multi-dog households. Dogs may aggressively guard their food, try to steal food from each other, hide their food or ingest it very rapidly. To prevent this from occurring:

- **Feed them out of sight of each other**
Whether it's their daily food, chew, or food toys
- **Remove food bowls or chews**
When the dogs are no longer actively engaged with the food (item), remove it!
- **Don't allow stealing**
Even if dogs seem unbothered by their possessions being stolen, it's best to stay safe



Moving beyond management

Often management can be reduced over time. But if training proves difficult or management is not enough: It's time to get professional help! There are many strategies to modify problem behaviour and help your dogs get along, but which ones are effective depend on your individual dogs and situation. [Get in touch for tailored advice from qualified canine behaviourist.](#)

Managing other valuables

Not only food can give rise to conflict, but other valuable items can do so too. These can be toys, furniture or even attention from guardians. The following skills and management tips can help prevent conflict:

- Teach a cue for permission to get on furniture
- Teach a 'All done' cue to stop interaction and attention
- Provide plenty of attention to all dogs individually
- Set up training session where one dog is trained or played with, whilst the other(s) wait. Remember that waiting is a skill to reward too!
- Remove toys after playing with them to avoid conflict

Separate dogs when alone

Even if the dogs get along great, always separate them when you leave the house. Space indoors is limited and full of items they might potentially guard. Some dogs struggle being alone, their anxiety or frustration can lead to coping mechanisms which can create conflict between the dogs. Getting another dog to 'cure' the first dog's separation anxiety is often not a solution!

Create safe spaces

Ensure each dog has their own safe space, somewhere they are not disturbed by you or the other dog, and they can choose to interact or be left alone.

- Give them their own bed and/or crate

Managing crowded spaces

Conflict frequently occurs when dogs can't escape or avoid each other, especially high arousal situations such as excitement or frustration. Doorways, but also being outside on leash or being in the car together are situations that may cause tension. Managing these situations through separation, such as crates in the car, or teaching skills such as waiting or being calm before leaving the house can help avoid problems.

