

# ON-LEASH DOG INTRODUCTIONS

Off-leash, well-socialized dogs usually get acquainted with ease, without squabbles or fights. Two off-leash dogs expertly interpret each other's body language and assess each other's intentions and personality, with the freedom to move closer or farther away according to their comfort level.

Dogs on leashes, however, are often more tense and prone to aggression. There are a few reasons for this: (1) Dogs are often restrained by their owners on a tight leash, which puts pressure on their neck and airways and adds to any tension they might be feeling; (2) Straining on a tight leash tends to make a dog rise up and look bigger, leading the other dog to misinterpret the dog's intentions and sometimes provoking defensiveness; (3) Because their movements are tightly constrained by the leash, dogs can't use their natural social skills of moving away if one dog feels anxious or threatened or moving toward if they feel friendly. They're stuck in close proximity as their owners hold them on tight leashes and forget to observe their dogs' behavior and body language.

## Guidelines

Here are some key tips for keeping on-leash dog introductions safe and pleasant for you and your dogs!

- The ideal starting point is parallel walking. Exploring territory side-by-side (avoiding face-to-face confrontation) comes naturally to dogs and gives them something else to focus on besides each other. It helps them gradually calm down and get used to each other first.
- Next, practice quick hellos and quick goodbyes, always keeping leashes loose and praising your dog for friendly behavior. Let the dogs give each other short sniffs at first, before gently pulling the dogs apart and walking several yards away. Do several of these approaches and sniffs, gradually allowing more sniffing, from two seconds to five seconds, and so on. Finally, allow the dogs to circle and sniff each other's rears if they're inclined, while you and the other owner practice the "leash dance," exchanging the leashes to keep them untangled and moving with your dogs to keep their leashes loose.
- Learn to recognize
  - **Signs of good greetings:** Curved approaches and bodies, circling, sniffing, paw lifts, muzzle licking, averted soft or blinking eyes, relaxed ears or ears back, tails relaxed and/or wagging
  - **Signs of tension or fear:** Avoiding eye contact, turning head or body to side, grinning, rolling over to expose genitals, yawning, panting, lip licking, tail tucking, crouching



- **Signs of a defensive dog:** Tail down, ears back, dilated pupils, hackles up, crouching, leaning away from threat, avoiding eye contact, growling, lunging, snapping or biting
- **Signs of an offensive dog:** Tail up, ears up, stiff straight-legged stance, hackles up, baring teeth, moving toward threat, direct eye contact, growling, lunging, snapping or biting.
- **Signs of potential conflict:** Lack of consent to inspection (being sniffed), stiff body and deliberate movements, prolonged eye contact, weight forward, tail high and stiff, hackles up, threats.

Realize that threats are valid communication between animals. Their goal is to warn an individual to stop what they are doing. Don't punish your dog's threats, but do put distance between the dogs. Punishment will only make your dog feel worse about the other dog.