

Behavior FAQ: Dogs That Don't Get Along with Other Pets

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Not Getting Along with Family Dogs

Does your dog want to “be the boss” of the other dogs in your family? Is one of your dogs a bully that gets grumpy if the other dog just looks at him wrong? Do your two female dogs get into nasty fights with each other? Do fights erupt that you don't see coming and can't understand?

These are just a few of the many types of problems that can develop between dogs that live together. Traditional wisdom labels all these problems as “dominance problems,” but this is simply not true and is dangerously misleading.

Many fights sound worse than they are, and often neither dog is injured. Lack of injury is a good sign, but you should seek expert help to prevent the problem from escalating. If one dog has already been injured, you may be better off separating them until you can consult with a competent behavior consultant, preferably a certified applied or veterinary behaviorist who can help you.

Supporting one dog's dominance over the other can sometimes be helpful but can also actually cause an increase in conflict, because it is the wrong thing to do. Many dog-dog problems are not about dominance.

Using the right techniques to introduce dogs to one another can prevent some fighting problems. Avoid putting your new dog with your resident one and letting them work it out. For the best outcome, with the least risk to the dogs, carefully manage introductions.

The first step is to manage the problem by not allowing fights to happen. If you can predict what causes a fight (perhaps when one dog has a prized chew toy and the other approaches), you can then avoid those situations. If you can't predict when the dogs will fight, you may need to separate them temporarily. The more the fights occur, the more fear and animosity build up between your dogs and the lower the chances that your dogs can learn to live peaceably together.

You must take steps immediately to ensure the safety of both dogs. This is especially important if you have a big dog–small dog pair, a young adult dog–elderly/frail dog pair or a puppy with an adult dog. If necessary, muzzle one or both dogs if you cannot separate them, but never leave a dog alone while muzzled.

These are potentially serious problems. Not seeking timely help may put one or more of your animals in danger of injury or death.

Not Getting Along with Family Cats

Dogs that haven't been raised with cats usually see them not as friends but as prey. Cats that are unfamiliar with dogs are usually afraid of them. The best chance dogs and cats have of learning

to be friendly with each other is if they are raised with or socialized to each other before 4 months old.

If your dog and cat are having trouble getting along, your dog is probably chasing or threatening your cat. If your cat runs away, this usually excites your dog even more. It's rare to have a cat that can successfully intimidate a dog, though it does happen.

When introducing cats and dogs, the first priority is to ensure the cat's safety. While cats may scratch dogs, they usually don't kill them, but dogs can, and have, killed cats. While you are allowing your dog and cat supervised contact with one another (perhaps your dog is on a leash), to ensure your cat's safety you may need to muzzle your dog. If your dog is muzzled and the introduction goes wrong, this will protect your cat from being bitten. Many problems can be prevented with proper introductions that are done very gradually. Never put a dog and cat together and let them work it out. Instead, keep your dog and cat separated except when you are working on the steps in the introduction process. Introductions must be micromanaged, and there is no set time for how long they take.

When your pets are not getting along, it's important to monitor the quality of life of each one. It's not acceptable for your cat to be in danger or too afraid to come out of the basement or the bedroom for fear of being harassed or harmed by the dog. Your dog should not be constantly on edge or on patrol trying to find the cat.

These situations call for reintroduction programs and providing your cat safe house time with your dog confined or outside in a safe yard. Most, but not all, cats and dogs can live safely and peaceably together. There are cases in which this doesn't happen, and the best choice is to find another home for one of the pets. You should seek professional help, preferably from a certified applied or veterinary behaviorist before deciding your pets can't get along.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](#), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](#) or [Animal Behavior Society](#). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."