Managing Relationships in a Multiple Dog Household

Core to success in competing with any dog is a healthy relationship, whether in canine sports or conformation. Building a strong bond between you and your dog takes time, but the resulting benefits are well worth it. While it may seem near effortless with your first dog, how can you ensure a close bond with the rest of the dogs in your home? With patience, you can build an equally good relationship with all the dogs in your home.

In the past, many households kept only one dog at a time. Recently, though, due to a growing interest in competitive activities, numerous people now keep multiple dogs. Because your first dog receives your near undivided attention, this relationship is typically the strongest. This dog is taught the rules of the house, is trained singly, and has his own areas of the home, toys, and treats that don't have to be shared with another canine. Subsequently acquired dogs often have a somewhat lesser bond with the owner because not as much individual time is spent with those dogs in comparison with the first dog, and the owner is often still spending more time with that dog.

Managing Multiple Dogs

Think back to the time when you got your first dog and the amount of time you invested in training, playtime, and making sure he knew the rules of the house. All of your time and efforts resulted in a lasting and strong relationship to share for the life of this dog. Each dog you get after the first should be allowed to benefit from this same level of attention. Set aside time each day for training and play with only the new dog, and then separate sessions with the first dog. It is still important to maintain your relationship with the first dog to prevent problems from arising.

The new dog will also need to learn the rules of the house directly from you. Household rules should be the same for all dogs to prevent confusion. For example, if your first dog is not allowed on the furniture, the rest of your dogs should be prevented from getting on the furniture as well. When you bring your new dog home, keep him on leash when in the house so you can keep him near you and help guide him into desired

behaviors and prevent him from doing inappropriate ones. Once he shows that he has an understanding of acceptable behavior, you can allow him to be on his own inside. Reward your new dog for good behavior in the house and around the first dog, while continuing to reward your first dog for good behavior in the presence of the new dog. Your new dog can learn through observation of the first dog what behaviors are rewarded in the home.

Since dogs are better able to communicate other dogs than with humans, it is important that you take the time to bond with your new dog to prevent a stronger bond being built between him and your first dog. Taking on an active leadership role in teaching your new dog what is expected of him is necessary to your success in the relationship. If you do not take the time to teach your new dog the rules, your first dog will step into that leadership role and potentially create conflict between the dogs and confusion. Your new dog will not learn all that is expected of him from your first dog, nor will your first dog prevent or solve behavior problems in the new dog.

Establish consistent rules for food, toys, play, and walks to further prevent conflict. Feed the dogs separately so that one dog doesn't attempt to sneak food from the other and potentially trigger a fight. The same should also go for toys. If necessary, give the new dog his food or toys while in a crate or dog proofed room until the dogs can interact appropriately together. When playing together, the new dog should still be on leash so you can closely supervise his behavior. In both situations, the dogs should be observed by you to ensure that each one is properly behaving and so that you can intervene if needed. Playtime should also be under observation by you until you are certain the dogs will get along. Play should be stopped if it becomes too rough for either dog, if one is mouthing the other, or if either dog appears to not enjoy it. As the leader, you should intervene if either dog starts inappropriate behavior. Each dog should be walked separately on leash until good walking habits are established in the new dog to prevent bad habits.

Lasting Relationships for the Pack

In relationships with any number of dogs, it is important that you remain the leader and caregiver among them. A house left to the dogs to run will quickly "go to the dogs" without your intervention. Whether sharing your house with two dogs or twelve, each dog deserves fair, consistent, individualized attention from you to thrive. Not only will your home be more peaceful, but also it will show in whatever you endeavor with your dogs.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

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