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Living with Multiple Dogs – Part 3: Well, Hello!

Liz Catalano | Sun, 09/18/2011 - 20:15



Well, we did it! My husband and I decided to add another member to our canine family, bringing our number back up to five. Unfortunately, we lost "our girl", a Weimaraner named Laila, last November after a long battle with cancer. Despite still sharing our home with four male dogs, the house seemed so quiet without her. Eight months after her passing, we had settled into an easy, comfortable, if not slightly boring, routine.

We agreed that we needed something to perk us all up and bring a new energy into our lives. A puppy would do just that! So, we immediately went to the Australian Shepherd Rescue Placement Helpline

(ARPH) website to see what dogs were available. The first dog listed was a four-month old puppy, who was deaf. Since we already had two deaf Aussies that were the light of our lives, the decision was not a difficult one. We filled out the application and within four days, were on our way to meet and adopt our new baby!

When we met her we knew everything that we had been told about her was true. She was friendly and calm, outgoing and confident. She liked to play but was very respectful with older dogs. She would be a perfect fit for our family! Normally, I would always recommend that the new dog meet the resident dogs prior to a placement, but in this case, I knew enough about my dogs, their preferences and their habits to know that this was a match made in heaven. So, off we went, puppy in our arms and joy in our hearts! All that was left to do, were the introductions, we couldn't wait!

No matter how excited you or your dogs are, it is important to do the introductions correctly and slowly. If you already have multiple dogs, then let them greet the newcomer individually and give them plenty of time to get used to each other before introducing the next one. In our case, we have multiple dogs and a large fenced property. We selected a fenced, but lesser used portion of the yard (neutral territory that no dog had claimed) for them to meet for the first time.

We based the order of introductions on which dog was the best at making friends and saved the more difficult ones for last. Each dog came out with a leash dragging so that we could quickly interrupt any inappropriate behaviors. We praised them as each dog greeted the puppy. There was initial curiosity with each introduction, but once the pair lost interest in each other, we brought out the next dog. When all the dogs had been properly introduced and had a chance to interact or play and then calm down, we moved inside. The puppy was allowed to wander about (with supervision of course!) and investigate her new surroundings.

When making your introductions, choose a neutral territory, preferably fenced. Ball fields, tennis courts or someone else's backyard are good solutions. If you can't find a fenced area, then use long-lines so that the dogs can greet easily but can't run off. You will have to take care and work the long-lines so that they don't become entangled. If you live in an area where open space is at a premium, then taking the dogs on a walk together is the perfect substitute. This is also a good option for people who have dogs that aren't always thrilled meeting other dogs.

Start with the dogs at a distance from each other, maybe on opposite sides of the street and walking forward in the same direction. Gradually, decrease the space between them until the dogs are walking comfortably next to each other. Allow them to mutually sniff objects along the way. Then, allow them to sniff each other. Be certain to keep your leashes very, very loose. Again, when the dogs are calm you can move inside.

I'm happy to report that all our introductions went well. It has been 6 weeks since Lorien joined our family and it seems as if she has always been a part of it. She brought us the joy we were hoping for along with a LOT of energy! And they all lived happily ever after.....

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Wow, five dogs! Bless your hearts for all those rescues and congratulations on your newest addition.

Four days ago we adopted calico kitty #3 from a shelter. Your methods described above are similar to what we've been using to introduce the new kitty, including leashing our male dog who was a bit too interested for the meet and greet. With lots of treats and positive reinforcement, he is pretty much ignoring the kitty now and especially when he's well exercised. The kitty is very brave, outgoing and curious, not frightened of the dogs at all (she came from an active family, cat/dog household). In fact, the quickest friendship was between her and our female dog. I know four days is not long to introduce a kitty, but this one was ready to join the fray the day we brought her home. The other two cats are very curious, with hissing on the part of our alpha calico (we call her the epitome of why people don't like cats). The new kitty hisses right back. We are keeping them separated for the most part at this point.

So we are now a family of 7, including our 5 indoor critters. Kitties are indoor-only and dogs think they are. We had the first rain in awhile and you'd think there was acid on the ground when the dogs discovered it had rained and they had to go out in the morning to potty. With 3 litter boxes in the house, perhaps we can teach the dogs to use those. Of course, rain doesn't seem to matter much when it's time for a hike!

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