



Important Info for Adopters

A New Pit Bull in the House!

General Guidelines for Introducing Your New Pet into the Family

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Pit bulls! This working breed has been selectively bred to be brave, strong willed and even pushy. As wonderfully charming as they are, their bullish ways can try the patience of any new home. These guidelines are written to give new owners a very basic idea of how to start setting up rules and limits for their pet. While it's in the nature of the breed to constantly nudge and test those limits, pit bulls are also hard wired to be shameless people pleasers. The more opportunities you give your dog to succeed, the sooner he'll know what to do to earn his place as a treasured family member. We wish you a smooth transition and many years of joy and happiness with your new pit bull!

1- IN THE BEGINNING: For at least 4 weeks, keep your new dog confined to the crate or tie down when he's not being exercised, fed or obedience trained. Be strong! Although your dog may do his best to look miserable so you'll let him run free, don't be suckered in before he's ready. You can both look forward to years of fun and freedom in your home once those all-important house rules have been well established.

2 - YOU ARE GOD: Consider the following things privileges and ask your dog to work for each and every reward: Praise, Pats, Treats, Play, and Freedom. He should learn that every great thing that happens to him 1) comes from you 2) after he's done something wonderful to impress you.

NOTE: *Freedom is any new dog's favorite privilege. Make your new friend work hard to earn short periods of freedom in your house. As he shows great house manners, you can give him increased house access. Mild mannered dogs may be able to earn freedom in just a few days, while rowdy, ill-mannered dogs may take weeks or months before they can be trusted enough to make good decisions while loose in the house.*

3 - WORK YOUR DOG OFTEN: Working breeds thrive when they have a job to do. Run your dog through a short list of commands - 'Sit' 'Stay' 'Down' 'Watch Me' - several times a day. Incorporate these commands into play sessions and meal times and repeat them often until he does them "on a dime." Repetition will reinforce the behaviors. Keep it fun! The more

interesting the work sessions are, the quicker your dog will catch on.

TIP: *New dogs will give you the most attention when they're hungry and after they've been exercised. If your dog is too antsy to follow through with a training session, take him on a vigorous walk or run first. Then, keep the training sessions short (5-10 minutes) and make them fun for both of you!*

4 - MEAL TIME = TRAINING TIME: The first few meals should be fed by hand, while reinforcing the 'Sit' and 'Watch Me' command. Your dog will learn quickly that you're in charge of his Universe when he realizes he has to work for each morsel. Even after he knows his commands well, your dog should run through an obedience routine for every meal. Change the repertoire often so the dog learns he has to pay attention and follow distinct directions before getting his food, rather than just follow rote.

5 - PET INTRODUCTIONS: Introduce your new dog to other pets in measured baby steps. Avoid rushed greetings! If either of the dogs is socially mature, first intros should be on neutral turf. Walking both dogs on leash together is a great way to break the ice and help them get used to each other's body language. Some dogs (younger dogs or very well socialized dogs) can play with their housemates almost immediately; others may take weeks or months before they get to this stage. Some may never get to the point where they can play with other pets. That's okay - For them, just being calm, tolerant and well behaved in the presence of other pets is a worthwhile goal.

If you stage it well, a good first intro between mature dogs will be rather uneventful. They might only walk side by side together, or see each other from a distance. The goal is to let the dogs become familiar with each other without giving them the option of making physical contact. If the meeting is boring - You've done well. The dogs can have a little bit more contact over the next few days or weeks. With time, familiarity will lesson the arousal level and pave the way for a smooth relationship.

Before letting dogs have full contact with each other, make sure both are well exercised and well acquainted. Remove all toys and food items. Keep their leashes on and when they seem relaxed, drop the leashes. This moment of faith can be scary, but if you've laid some good groundwork with slooow introductions and good obedience training, your dogs should enjoy having the opportunity to finally interact.

As they sniff each other, keep your voice happy and confident and praise them for showing relaxed body language. If you see their bodies stiffen or the hair on their back puff up ('hackles') call them back to you and try again another day. If the dogs start to play, use your voice to keep things calm and to prevent them from getting too aroused. Fights can break out during those first few play sessions if dogs that don't know each other become offended or defensive.

If a scuffle does break out, you haven't failed! You may have just pushed things too fast. It may be best to lower your expectations and take things slower, or hold off on any more greets and call in a trainer to help you. It's not unusual to have a couple of minor snarfs as dogs get to know each other, but it benefits everybody to keep those to a bare minimum.

As a rule, it's always best to end intro sessions when things are going well. Don't wait until the dogs have played so hard that they become over aroused or so tired that one or both get grumpy. Instead, end the play on a positive note and lavish praise on everybody (including yourself!).

CATS: If you have a cat or small animal in the house, your new dog should learn that he is never allowed to stare at it – EVER! Use a squirt bottle to reinforce this law. You can begin short intro sessions once he loses his intense fascination and can be near the cat without staring or whining. Remember to play it safe and separate all unsupervised pets from each other when you can't be there to monitor their interactions.

6 - ROUTINES: Because animals thrive on routine, keep the schedule of the new dog and the established pets as consistent as possible. It's best to give the *established* pets more love, attention and exercise when the new dog comes into the house so they don't feel displaced. Lavishing the new guy with attention can set up a grudge between the dogs and create a sense of competition that may result in trouble later on down the road.

7 – INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS should be marked with a verbal correction (like, "UH OH!") and quick removal of the privilege (freedom). For example, if your dog tries to get into the garbage, tell him "Uh Oh!" and take him back to his crate or tie down immediately. The crate is not a punishment, but rather, it's the removal of freedom that makes the point. After a while, just the verbal warning will be enough to help your dog make a better decision. Because your dog will want to enjoy more out-time, he'll soon learn how to make better choices and will settle into your household routine and rules.

TIP - *Any overly aggressive display towards another dog in the household should be marked with a scary verbal correction. In our home, any dog that snarfs at another dog is put into a long down stay, is shamed and scolded, then put outside or in their crate (freedom lost!). Pit bulls are softies and generally hate getting into trouble. Although they're genetically inclined to get into scraps with other dogs, many, if not most, can be taught to suppress their instincts to a certain extent and avoid conflict with the help of your firm rules and eagle-eye supervision. Like all dogs, what they do when you're not around may be a different story though. **VERY IMPORTANT!** - Make sure to separate pets from each other when you aren't around to police their interactions.*

8- BED TIME: Your bed is gold. Sharing this sacred space with your pet gives him the idea that he's gained top dog status in the household – A not-

so-healthy notion that can go straight to his head. As a general rule, avoid letting your dog sleep on the bed (and in some cases, on the furniture) for a long time, and then, not until your leadership role is firmly established and he's following ALL your rules. Remove this privilege immediately if you notice that he's blowing off your commands, challenging other pets in the household and/or otherwise acting too big for his britches. In some cases, dogs with dominant personalities should never gain access to their owner's bed.

In our home, Sally the pit bull was not welcome to sleep on the bed for well over a year. She had to show us that she was willing to be a good girl first and do what was expected of her. Years later, if she begins to act up – Off the bed she goes! And like magic, her sassy behavior improves.

TIP: *Enforcing long 'Down Stays' is a great way to remind your dog who's boss. Ask your dog to lie next to you for up to 20 minutes while you're on the computer or watching television, etc. You may have to stand on his leash at first to keep him in his down. Praise him lavishly after giving him the release command.*

9- TUG-O-WAR GAMES: This is a fun game for both you and your dog, but best to avoid until your role as Team Boss is firmly established, and then only after your dog knows the 'OFF!' or 'DROP!' commands well. Your trainer can show you how to teach your dogs a reliable 'Drop' command.

TIP: *Supervise tug-o-war between two dogs carefully so the excitement created by this fun game doesn't escalate into an argument. In many cases, it's best to avoid letting two pit bulls play tug together altogether.*

10 – FIGHT TRIGGERS: To prevent fights, be aware of the types of triggers that can spark tensions between two or more dogs in your household. The presence of prized chew toys, food and even attention from you or your company can send arousal levels up and spark arguments in some dogs. Other common triggers: Play sessions that get too exciting, charging to the door to greet the doorbell or chasing a squirrel in the yard can amp two dogs up to the point where they may clash and redirect on each other. If you see the dogs getting over charged, it's time to step in and make everybody settle down, using a verbal command or a time out in the crate or on tie down.

NOTE: *Pit bulls are one of the many breeds that have been selectively bred to excel in combat with other dogs. While they can and certainly do enjoy the company of other dogs, no amount of training or behavior modification will erase selective breeding. Even the sweetest, calmest pit bulls can and will find conflict with other dogs if they're sufficiently provoked, overly aroused or challenged, especially as they begin to reach maturity. The good news is that dogfights are 100% preventable and thousands of pit bulls owners live successfully with multi-pet homes, including the many members of BAD RAP. The key is to know your dog's limits, develop a good leadership relationship so you can lie out the ground rules and be on your toes to nip any dog-dog arguments in the bud!*

11 – CLASSES: A good, pit bull experienced obedience class can help you learn how to establish a leadership role and communication style with your pet. Consider working towards your Canine Good Citizen Certificate (CGC) to help your dog earn respect from others who may unnecessarily fear the breed.

12 – REPETITION: Since dogs learn from repetition, don't be discouraged if your pit bull misbehaves just when you thought you had the rules all squared away. Most need to have a rule repeated many times before they truly incorporate them into their behavior...and then, because they're pushy pit bulls, they will certainly test you now and again to make sure that same rule still applies! As frustrating as this can be, it demonstrates the intelligence, the tenacity, the humor and the bravado of this mischievous but big hearted animal. ENJOY YOUR NEW COMPANION!

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