



The Right Way to Introduce Dogs

By Coleen O'Brien

As originally published in the Greyhound Adoption Center's Offtrack, Summer Issue 1998

We began dog-testing at the California Adoption Center (now the Greyhound Adoption Center) a while ago after an incident where a greyhound, in a home for only about 24 hours, was taken to a dog park, let off-leash and reportedly attacked another dog, also off-leash. When that greyhound was returned to us, we learned a valuable lesson: You can't assume people know how to introduce dogs.

Basically greyhounds have seen only their own breed up until the time they are adopted. It can be scary to them to see a very large hairy dog approaching, or they can be curious when they spot a small white poodle prancing down the street. After all, doesn't that small white poodle look like a lure from the racetrack?

Your greyhound needs to meet these dogs in order to understand that although they might not look like him, they do smell like dogs. And unless your greyhound meets these dogs properly, he could end up being not too nice to these approaching scary dogs or lures on legs.

I think the right way to introduce dogs is so important—and so simple—that it warrants explaining here. By the way, that greyhound dubbed antisocial, a danger with other dogs, is anything but. The day after she was returned to the kennel, I introduced her *properly* to several dogs who were not greyhounds. She did just fine. Now, in a different home, she continues to do fine.

The key was the introduction. It can be done right. Or it can be done entirely wrong. When it's done wrong, it's the fault of the owner—not the dog. And it can lead to your having a fearful, antisocial dog. When an introduction is done wrong, it can damage all future meetings with new dogs. Greyhounds never forget that first meeting. If it was a bad one, they will assume that all meetings will be bad.

The wrong way to do it.

Dogs coming at each other at the end of six-foot leashes is the wrong way to introduce. I'm sure you can recall being in a situation where suddenly you saw a large dog, maybe a breed you associated with aggressiveness, approaching you quickly while you were walking your greyhound. Without realizing it, you very likely tensed. You immediately sent a signal down the length of the leash to your dog.

That signal said all sorts of things, including the fact that you were unsure, maybe even fearful, and your dog went even further with this information, to the point of becoming



Dogs straining at the end of six-foot leashes is the wrong way to introduce.

fearful himself. And fearfulness in a dog is the precursor to aggression because that's what he needs to protect himself.

Talk the talk and walk the walk.

Let's go back to that situation I mentioned above. You see a dog on leash approaching you. Immediately start talking. Even if the dog is 50 feet away, start talking. Even if you're not going to be meeting that dog, start talking.

Your voice doesn't have to be loud. Just loud enough for your dog to hear. Your reassuring voice will help your dog relax, have confidence in himself and know that meeting another dog is a good thing.

What you say can go something like this, "Here comes a good puppy. What a good dog. Nice dog. He's a friendly dog. Aren't you a good boy? Yes, you are! The words really aren't as important as the tone — and keeping that talk going.

If you're going to be meeting an approaching dog, wrap your leash in your right hand, and use your left hand to hold the choke part of the greyhound safety collar. When the approaching owner is within earshot, ask the person to hold his dog the same way.



Here's a close-up of the correct collar-holding position: Your left hand has a secure grip on the choke portion of the collar; your right hand is holding the slack on the leash.



The right way: Collars held by the choke end, the rest of the leash wrapped in the opposite hand, and dogs sniffing head to butt.

Introduce the dogs head to butt. First one dog gets to sniff the other's back end, and then, reverse it. Head to butt for one dog, followed by head to butt for the other dog. Each dog has the opportunity to sniff the other. And while this is going on, you're talking. "Good dogs. What good dogs." You'll feel your dog relaxing. If you see your

greyhound standing a little taller, arching his neck, maybe even showing his hackles, talk a little more loudly and a little more sweetly. Talk is everything!

Give the dogs enough time to sniff each other. They'll probably go back and forth for a while, sniffing head to butt. Try to maintain three to four feet of leash while the sniffing is going on.



Left: Buddy sniffs Parker. Parker's head is being directed away from any head-to-head communication.

Some handy pointers.

1. Don't stop talking until the dogs are friends. The tone of your voice is much more important than your words. Don't worry that you sound silly saying the same things over and over! Just do it.
2. Always, always introduce dogs on neutral territory. If a friend is to bring over a dog your dog has never met, don't allow the new dog to enter your home or yard. Meet across the street or in a park and go for a walk. Both dogs should be on leash. Continue walking after the initial introduction until you know the dogs are friends. Then you can bring them home.
3. Be careful when the dogs initially meet to direct your dog's head and to have the other dog's owner do the same. You don't want the dogs to have a lot of head-to-head communication. That's assertiveness in dog language. Head to butt is the acceptable, non-assertive way for dogs to talk.

Do right by your dog.

I hope you and your greyhound are getting out, going for walks together. My three greyhounds—Hannah, Pepper and Hawkeye—demand a walk every evening. Hawkeye, who will turn 12 about the time you read this article, is the one out front! We've encountered many dogs on our walks and I've managed to avoid nasty confrontations by introducing the dogs the way I've described.

Walks are an important part of your dog's day. With the knowledge you have now about introducing dogs properly, you should be able to walk confidently and enjoyably with your companion.