



Paw Perfect Introductions podcast
Episode One – Introducing a second dog or puppy to your existing dog

Cathy: Hello, I'm Cathy Beer from Pets4Life, and I'm very excited to launch a new podcast series called Paw Perfect Introductions. It's all about helping pet parents successfully introduce a new member to their family. Animal behaviorist Dr Joanne Righetti will be joining me for each episode as we chat about each Paw Perfect Introduction we can think of. Welcome, Jo, to the podcast.

Dr Righetti: Thanks for having me, Cathy. I love the name: Paw Perfect Introductions.

Cathy: Yeah!

Dr Righetti: Hopefully we can make them as perfect as possible.

Cathy: That's right. The name came from Karen Cocks, who won a competition to come up with a name, from the Pets4Life community. So thanks, Karen—great name. I often hear from pet parents that they've decided to get a second dog or puppy to keep their first dog company, or just because they want another dog, so we thought we'll kick off with episode one on how to introduce a new dog or puppy to an existing dog. So, Jo, can we expect to just get a dog and they'll just get along okay?

Dr Righetti: Well, in a lot of cases they do, but we shouldn't just assume that that's going to happen. You know, first impressions count, just as they do in the human world, so they do in the dog world too. So we need to make sure that the first impressions our existing dog has of a newcomer are positive ones.

Cathy: Right, so what do pet parents need to do then to successfully introduce a new dog to their existing dog? What are the steps?

Dr Righetti: Okay, well, if we're getting a new dog, the best thing we can possibly do is to think ahead. So, perhaps not bringing your new dog immediately home to your existing dog. If your new dog is also an adult dog, then the best idea would be to meet somewhere on mutual ground. Now, say for instance, you were adopting at a shelter. The shelter may have a spot that you could actually bring your existing dog to, and you could do some positive introductions there. And if that doesn't happen, you might like to go to a local park, one that your dog doesn't feel like he/she owns, but there's again that mutual ground. And you would have one adult on the end of each dog lead, and you let the dogs view

each other from across the field—from a distance apart. And then you'd gradually move closer together and allow them to have a sniff of each other. And if all is going well, yes, let them all have a play and then you can make your way back to your home from there. Now, if there's going to be a bit of animosity there, you need to figure out what you're going to do about that. Are you going to make it positive? Can you just separate them a little bit? Offer some treats for calm behavior? So it's all about making introductions those first few times as positive as possible.

But it is a little bit different with a puppy, because a puppy wouldn't necessarily be taken out and about with us. We'd be a little bit more cautious about being out in the open with a puppy. We might bring the puppy straight home to a new dog. In that case, we really have to make sure that the puppy is comfortable. So, we might want to just—if somebody could take our dog out for a walk while we bring the puppy home, and we settle that puppy in to one or two rooms so that they get to know you and feel confident in your company, because it's all brand new to a puppy. We just have to be a little more cautious there. And then we're introducing them to the new dog step by step. And if people are in doubt as to how to do that, I'd say keep a lead on each dog, because the last thing you want is one dog to be a bully—one dog to get overenthusiastic about greeting, and scare the other dog. So, regardless of whether it's a puppy or adult, we're trying to monitor those behaviors and not make them scary dogs, and not make them overenthusiastic dogs—just two dogs that are calm when meeting and greeting one another.

Cathy: Still, it helps that the puppy is used to being in a crate—so sometimes the puppy can have its own space. And the older dog might find the puppy a bit annoying, so, just to separate them.

Dr Righetti: All youngsters can be annoying, but then again, so can older dogs too.

<Both laugh>

Cathy: Yeah.

Dr Righetti: So yes, it's about each dog having their own individual space to get away from the other one. Crate training is a great option for puppies and for older dogs. A lot of human dog owners don't like the idea of a crate because they see it like a prison, but think of it as a safety den. Most dogs love a bit of safety. It doesn't need to be a wire, prison-looking option. It can be a soft crate, or a playpen—somewhere that your puppy or the other dog can go and just feel a bit better about themselves. Now, if people really don't like that, or that's just not an option in the budget—whatever reason—you can do it by excluding them from one room to another, or letting them see one another through the glass of a doorway or something. But I think that eventually they are going to have to meet, and you still are going to have to supervise those introductions. So, it is about

perhaps putting a lead on and just monitoring everything that's going on to ensure that everything's as positive as possible. And if that involves your dog's favourite food—each of the dog's favourite food—your own dog's favourite toy, all those things—bring them out to play. This is a point that your existing dog needs to feel as positive as possible towards the newcomer.

Cathy: And how do we know when it's all fine and we can leave them together unsupervised?

Dr Righetti: Well, I guess you try it bit by bit. So you might say, well, they seem to be getting along; I might just nip out and put the kettle on. Or, they're getting along; I'll leave them out in the backyard while I watch them from the window. So, it's about taking little steps and gradually increasing the time that they're apart from you. And until you're absolutely certain—you know, if you've watched them, and they play outside for ten minutes, or half an hour—you might say, well, that half hour, I could be nipping to the shops or going out with a friend for coffee. Don't leave them until you're absolutely certain that they're going to get along! And it's normal for pets to have a couple of altercations, and for things to happen, and don't think that you've failed. Just go back to saying, how can I make this positive for these two furry family members of mine?

Cathy: It's a process that can take a few days or a few weeks, isn't it? We just can't rush these processes.

Dr Righetti: We can't, and we need to go at the dog's pace. We may want to rush it, because that's our human natures, but we really have to go the dog's pace. And I can say that some dogs will take weeks. Some dogs will only take hours. So it really is individual. And if your dog has known a lot of other dogs—perhaps they've had other furry family members—they may be more accepting of the new one coming in. Whereas if your dog's been an only dog for the past ten years, and suddenly here's this interloper, it may take just a little bit more encouragement for your older, existing dog to accept a newcomer.

Cathy: Great advice there, Jo. We'll just look at what we're going to be talking about next time on the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. In episode two, we'll be talking about introducing a cat to a dog, and a kitten to a dog, so, looking forward to chatting with you then.

Dr Righetti: Absolutely. Can't wait.

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