

Letting Dogs Meet: The Three Second Rule

As a dog owner, I'm sure you have been in the situation where your dog had to meet another dog he didn't know. If you haven't yet, you will.

Whether you're having a friend and their dog over for a BBQ or you happen to run across a new dog on a hike, there are some fundamental things you should do and be aware of to properly manage dog greetings.

Remember, just because your dog may typically be happy-go-lucky, doesn't mean that all dogs are easy to get along with and it doesn't guarantee that the chemistry will be good between your dog and the new dog right from the start. If you happen to stumble across a dog out in the world and you don't feel comfortable with having your dog meet him, that's ok. You can politely excuse yourself from the greeting by saying that your dog is in training and you need to keep him focused.

Know your dog. If your dog has a history of biting or aggression, your situation is beyond the scope of this blog. Consult a dog training professional to help your dog with his particular needs.

Before you let your dogs meet, both owners need to agree to let the dogs engage. When I say *agree*, I mean *be comfortable with*. Don't allow yourself to be talked into a meeting you don't feel good about and don't try to convince someone else if they don't seem at ease with the idea. It's a perfectly reasonable question to ask the other owner if their dog is dog friendly. If you are both comfortable with allowing the two dogs to meet, you should make sure everyone is calm (humans and dogs) and do so with a loose leash. Be sure to have an exit strategy. Don't allow their leashes to become a tangled mess potentially locking you in a game of Leash Twister Madness.

The Three Second Rule:

- Three seconds is the maximum amount of time the initial greeting should last. When I say three seconds, it's one alligator, two alligator, three and walk away. Number three does not get an alligator. I've seen it time and again where dogs loose it on the third alligator. Now, if there's barking or growling that happens before that, walk away sooner. We don't want it to escalate.



- When you're walking away after number three, give the dogs a second to forget about one another. Once both dogs have been distracted, you can bring them back for another meeting assuming the first one went well.
- Keep your eyes peeled and be fully present (Don't be texting while a dog meeting is taking place.)
- Eye to eye greetings are a recipe for disaster. If there is a stare down going on, don't allow them to meet.
- Tails tell a tale. If tails are stiff, tucked or only the tip is wagging like a rattle snake, this is a sign that you either need to disengage before the three seconds are up or really watch closely for those initial three seconds.
- If one dog is positioning his head over the top of the other dog's head, walk away.
- If their jaws are tight and they're not breathing, walk away.
- What you want is a relaxed posture with loose wagging tails and relaxed jaws.
- It is common and good for dogs to sniff each other's butts. Believe me, they think that our hand-shaking ritual is weird too. That being said, even if the initial greeting is good, the three second rule still applies for the one out the gate.
- Last but not least, the three second rule is particularly important for the first greeting, but a very good practice for all dog greetings, even for dogs that already know each other. Give them their three alligators, walk away and if all goes well, take it from there. There will most likely come a time when you can eliminate the three second rule but it's always a good idea to work up to it.

Facilitating a proper greeting lays the foundation for your dog to have strong relationships not only with other dogs, but with you, their owner, as well. It is another opportunity for your dog to know that you've got things under control which builds trust.

Socializing with dogs and people helps to keep them balanced and fulfilled, so by no means do I want to discourage you from having your dog acquire new playmates. All I ask is that you set yourself up for success by having your eyes wide open and your attention on the dog.

As with any of these tips, if you have questions or are nervous, get a professional involved. It's always better to be safe than sorry.

--Chad Culp, Certified Dog Trainer and Canine Nutrition Consultant

http://www.thrivingcanine.com/letting_dogs_meet_the_three_second_rule