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Feeling Outnumbered?

How to Manage and Enjoy Your Multi-dog Household

SECOND EDITION

PMC

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A young man was out running with his four American Eskimos when he passed another man pushing his twin daughters in a stroller with two Golden Retrievers walking along side. The two men looked at each other in a moment of mutual admiration and understanding before the father quipped, "I am quite certain that four of a kind beats two pair!"

INTRODUCTION

Those of us who have more than one dog are in a special club of sorts whose members know certain inalienable truths. For example, we know that two dogs are more than twice as much work as one, and that three dogs are as much work as we'd expected seven to be. But we also noticed that the love multiplies faster than the work, and that more really can be merrier. In fact, many of us cannot imagine having only one dog—how empty the house (and the car and the yard and the heart) would be.

This booklet is about maximizing the joys of living with more than one dog. It offers specific, practical ideas to help you enjoy your dogs even more. Whether you are looking for some tips for creating a bit of order out of the canine chaos in your home, or trying to manage tension between two or more dogs, this booklet can help. Some sections in this booklet deserve to be books all by themselves, and we encourage you to read elsewhere in more depth about any issue that seems especially important to your situation. (Check the recommendations at the end of this booklet.) Think of this booklet as a concise and basic guide book—the “Cliff Notes” to multi-dog-dom.

Our approach to managing multi-dog households departs from the old advice of determining which dog is alpha and supporting that dog's position by feeding first, petting first, and so on. Instead, we teach all of our dogs to be polite, patient, and respectful, and we tolerate no fighting or “working it out.” We teach specific activities to groups of dogs to encourage harmony in multi-dog households.

The viewpoints and techniques we describe have helped many of our clients, and we hope they will help you as well, no matter what's going on in your pack. Many of us just need to tone down the chaos that ensues when several dogs greet visitors. Others may need to manage escalating tension between two or three dogs. (Keep in mind, however, that if your dogs are at risk of being seriously aggressive with each other, we urge you to consult a qualified dog trainer or behaviorist. No small booklet can treat a potentially life-threatening problem and it is best to get professional help in both evaluating the situation and in treating it.)

Many multi-dog problems do not involve serious aggression, but are about dogs who are unruly and just need to learn to be more polite. So often, the pushiest dogs get what they want, and they get it first and fastest. This situation promotes a society in which each individual has everything to gain by being pushy and everything to lose by being patient. If your dogs learn that they can "win" in life by being pushy and competitive, then you will have dogs who may not be much fun to be around. On the other hand, if your dogs learn that being patient and polite leads to toys, food and fun, then life at your house will most likely become much more pleasant. In some cases this strategy can help avoid the potential of serious aggression problems between dogs in your home.

This booklet focuses on teaching your dogs to be polite and patient rather than pushy and demanding. The ideas and real life strategies are not meant to be an instant cure for all troubles, but are offered to help you and your dogs have more fun living together in one house.