



Want another dog? Multi-dog households

Multi-dog households are increasingly common. The average number of dogs in dog-owning households is now 1.3 in the UK and 1.4 in Northern Ireland (2017 data: source PFMA).

But having more than one dog in the home brings its own set of problems and issues. A second dog, just like having more than one child, means at least twice the time, effort, energy and cost of one.

My good friend Sarah Bartlett, author of *“Another Pup? A comprehensive guide to adding to or becoming a multi-dog household”* says, “I don’t know of any perfectly-behaved multi-dog households and I’m not sure they exist. Having multiple dogs and preventing them from becoming a pack of wild dogs who you happen to live with and provide food for is very hard work. The more you have, the harder work it is to get it right and keep it that way.”

A common reason for getting another dog is “because my first dog is lonely and I think my first dog will be happier with another dog to keep it company when I’m out.” And this is also the worst reason. **Dogs don’t need other dogs for company.** That’s what owners are for and what dogs have been bred for – to be man’s best friend.

If you don’t have time for your current dog(s), you’ll never find time for more.

There’s also no guarantee that the new dog you’ve decided you like and your current dog will want to live with each other. We all meet people we sometimes instantly dislike, for no particular reason, but we will tolerate and be polite to the majority of people we meet – however we wouldn’t want to live with most of them. Dogs are the same. They may be happy meeting another dog out and about but it’s a very different thing to have to live with one in your house.

A second dog will naturally look to the first dog for help and guidance as to how it should live in this new life and frequently it never learns our human language. There is a risk they won’t bond well with you, too.

You might think the new dog will learn good manners from your existing dog. But usually the opposite happens. Niggles that you’ve lived with become bigger problems as each dog encourages the other to practice all sorts of normal dog behaviours you usually don’t want.

And it’s impossible to train two dogs at the same time.

If you really want another dog, even after reading all the above, please read the points below to make sure you have a few problems as possible.

Key points

You should never, ever introduce more than one dog at a time and certainly not two puppies at once.

Going from one dog to two is hard enough but going from two to three is the biggest jump – it changes everything.



if your current dog is not perfect, don't get another. Any behaviour niggles the existing dog has will get worse and become more of a problem if you get a second dog.

Using the "rule of four" formula will give you the best chance of ending up with a harmonious group. The more differences between the dogs the better:

- a minimum four-year age gap,
- the opposite sex is best,
- different breed or breed type, and
- different functional characters (For a detailed description of the common functional characters: leader, enforcer, quality control, follower and onlooker, as well as the rarer types, provider and peace-keeper, see Sarah Bartlett's book: *Another Pup? A comprehensive guide to adding to or becoming a multi-dog household*, available from Amazon.)

Be prepared

There are two vital things to do if you already have another dog or dogs:

1. Prevent your new pup pestering your older dog(s). They should play with you instead.
2. Treat your new pup as if he was your only dog – play and walk with him separately and make sure he has time on his own, too.

Finally, if it goes wrong and the dogs just can't get on together, you have only three options, none of which are good and all of which will cause you angst and heartache:

- keep both dogs but keep them separated for the rest of their lives. This requires an incredible and almost impossible level of management, care and time as you'll need to do everything twice over
- rehome one or both dogs – to rescue, a friend or a family member
- euthanase one dog. An horrific and difficult decision to have to make.