

Animal Friends Presents

Managing Multi-Pit Bull Households

It used to be commonly thought that pit bulls couldn't live together successfully. We now know that this isn't true. Many pits can and do live successfully with other pit bulls and with other dogs. You simply need to understand the risks and what you need to do in order to keep your dogs safe.

It's important to make sure that any multi-dog household is well-managed, but managing one with more than one pit bull has its own challenges. Why are multi-pit households different than other multi-dog households? Any dog can fight, but pit bulls were bred specifically for their drive, intensity and determination to win any fight they're in, and their strength and agility that make them capable of severely injuring or even destroying other animals. As fans of pit bulls know, determination is one of their most notable traits and they have a tendency to put their hearts and souls into everything they do.

No matter how long you've lived with them and no matter how well you've socialized them, pit bulls should never be trusted not to fight with each other. Regardless of whether your dogs have ever shown aggression toward each other, if you have a multi-pit bull family, you must take action to prevent fights and maintain the safety of your dogs.

Many pit bulls get along well with other pets and may live happily with other dogs without incident. But, you can't assume that this will always be the case. Unfortunately, those of us involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of pit bulls have heard too many stories about dogs who'd been best friends for years—until the day something triggered a fight. Therefore, it's up to you to make good decisions to manage your dogs and to keep them safe when you're not present.

The following are guidelines to helping you live happily in your multi-pit family.

First, ensure that all animals in your house are spayed and neutered. Female dogs in heat and unaltered males tend to be more easily triggered and reactive than those who are altered. And, unfortunately, shelters are full of wonderful pits and pit mixes, so preventing an unwanted litter should be a goal everyone strives for.

Take control of your dogs' behavior. Feed one dog first one day, feed another one first the next. Let one dog out first one day, let another one out first the next day. Take one dog for a ride in the car one day, take another one for a ride in the car the next. And, most importantly, do not permit any inappropriate aggression—do not let them "fight it out." At the first sign of inappropriate aggression, you must step in and take control benevolently. Never get physical or nasty with your dog. Dogs do best with predictable, benevolent and fair leaders. The best advice is to let your dogs figure out their hierarchy on their own without your interference. There's nothing you can do to change a dog's status. Neither should you try to enforce what you perceive to be their hierarchy, because you might not be right. Enforcing a hierarchy that does not exist can cause problems.

Manage your dogs when you can't supervise them. Crate them or keep them in separate rooms. Many pit owners crate one dog and keep the other one out. The next time, the crated dog is loose and the loose one crated. This is referred to as crate and rotate, and is recommended because you never know what might trigger a fight in your absence.

Many pit bull owners who use the crate and rotate philosophy of management feed their dogs in their crates to acclimate them to their crates as well as to manage a potential resource over which dogs can fight. It is also advisable that pits be given bones, stuffed Kongs, pigs' ears, and other high-value resources that might be worth fighting over in their crates.

Monitor your dogs' play. Don't let things escalate. Pits tend to have a low arousal point, and there is such a fine line between over-arousal and aggression that stepping in when you feel your dogs are becoming aroused is an effective way of refereeing their play. Step in and separate them if you sense one is becoming aroused.

Manage valuable resources. Never leave food, bones, toys or anything that one dog might feel is a valuable resource worth guarding laying around. Supervise the chewing of bones and other high value items.

Choose your pack well. Many experts feel that altered pits of the opposite sex have the best opportunity for a happy partnership.

Give each dog individual attention and training. This helps strengthen your bond with each dog and increase your control over that individual dog.

Teach each dog in your household to relax, because excitability and arousal are common triggers for fights. Dogs who live in an excited state are much more likely to have dog aggression problems than dogs who are able to calm down around each other.

Since more pit bulls end up in shelters than any other breed, Animal Friends works extra hard to find loving homes for pits. If we can find a responsible household for multiple pit bulls, that's even better! Adopters simply need to know the facts about safely managing multi-pit families. For more information about pit bulls, visit www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org.