



## Fostering

### Drive in the Slow Lane for Dog/Dog Intros

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From the Bad Rap Blog: [badrap-blog.blogspot.com](http://badrap-blog.blogspot.com)



Fa-Fa-Frida went full adoption this weekend. This is one of those adoptions that has us all smiling like bliss ninnies. She was one tough broad when she came into the Oakland Animal Services...Full of the devil when it came to other dogs. Of course we loved her. Looovved her.

It took some doing, but we finally worked out an agreement with Frida, "You stop spitting obscenities at other dogs and we'll do our best to find you a new home." She thought that was a fine idea, so we spent the next several weeks begging up rides for her to Pit Ed class, helping her develop good self

control during arousal work (ie, flirt pole work) and writing extensive notes after every shift at the shelter. Week by week, she got over her leash-funk and became a true ambassadog.

Once her leash-manners were on-track, longtime BR dog handler Yvette Stahr brought up the idea of bringing her home for foster, maybe even foster-to-adopt. Us: "Hmm. Let's try it." **The thing was**, Yvette and her husband Steve had another dog-selective dog at home, so how they went about the intros would be beyond crucial to how this worked out.

It worked. They did such a text-book solid job of managing the intros that I asked Yvette to give us a play-by-play as part of our series on fostering. I hope this is helpful to others.

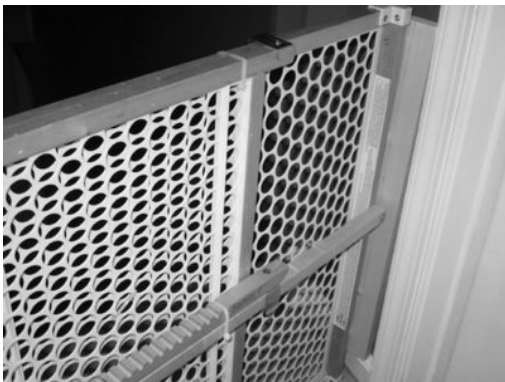


## Six Steps to Smooth Sailing

"Our mantra for the introduction was **"we can't go too slow,"** even though at times, it was hard not to rush things. However, since making this work was really important to both of us, we just kept reminding ourselves and each other that it takes longer to undo something done wrong than to do it right the first time.



Frida was on the **NILIF program** from the moment she walked in the door. (*NILF = **Nothing in Life is Free*** ) We wanted to make sure she understood that we were in control of her life now so she would look to us for leadership in any dicey situations. I really believe that this was a big key to our success.



### **First Step:**

We started out with Frida crated in our home office away from our dog Nick, baby gate in the door. (NOTE: It's important to make sure neither dog is willing/able to scale the baby gate and do a non-kosher intro.)

The office is right off the kitchen/family room and in eyesight of the family room sofa so we could talk to her and praise Nick when he would look into the room calmly. It also gave Frida the opportunity to see that Nick was a valued part of the pack. We walked them together every morning but kept distance between them at all times to avoid any face-to-face issues. We would rotate who walked in front and also walked them side by side (but with one of us between them). Lots of praise for being calm and friendly. Anytime the dogs looked at each other with low slow tail wags, they got effusive praise.

### **Step 2:**

Frida in the office, out of the crate, but with the baby gate up. We monitored this VERY carefully and spent a lot of time at the doorway petting both dogs and telling them how good they were. We also treated each dog at the doorway (after putting them both in sits) and told them how good they were. During this time we ONLY gave treats when both dogs were present and being good. This is

the step we spent the most time on. It was the easiest to control and the easiest to reward for correct behavior. The one snark we had at the gate was quelled quickly and loudly – both dogs were reprimanded and sent to time-outs behind closed doors alone. Everything else we did really built on the positive associations the dogs got during this time. We waited until we had reliable, consistent happy tail wags at the gate and no snarks before we moved on. We continued with the walks, allowing them to be closer, but still avoiding direct contact.



### Step 3:

Frida on a tie-down but enclosed by an Xpen. This part actually went quite quickly for us due to the solid work done before. (*Note: Frida learned to accept crate and tie-down confinement as part of her Ambassadors training at Oakland Animal Services*). Lots of praise and treats for good behavior and continued walks.



### Step 4:

We moved on to Frida in the Xpen, but no tie-down. We took our time with this step since the next one would have them out together with no barrier and we wanted to make sure we had a solid base. We kept a very close eye on body language and quashed any posturing by either dog and praised appropriate behavior. Continued with the walks and allowed some contact

(butt sniffing, but no face-to-face).

### Step 5:

Frida on a tie-down, but no Xpen. What trouble we had was during this part. Nick was overexcited and rude. He tried to hump her. He tried to stand with his head over her neck. He was so excited he had no idea whether to shit or go blind. Frida was good as gold and would wait for us to correct him with no reaction on her own (except to look to us). Our corrections of Nick were swift, loud and scary and he learned quickly. Allowed much freer contact during walks.

## Sixth Step:

Now comes the embarrassing confession: Nick and Frida's first off-leash meet was an accident. We had been doing the tie-down no Xpen for several days and it had been going very well.



We had Frida on a tie down on the patio and had gone inside briefly when we heard a loud bark. We rushed back outside to find Frida had pulled the tie-down loose. Since both dogs were behaving (I think the bark was from excitement – they had been trying to play for a couple of days) we just went with the situation. It all went smoothly with just a few corrections (Mr. Humpy Boy mostly) and lots of recalls when play got a little too exciting. I truly believe that the long, slow introduction process is what saved us from a potentially bad situation caused by our own inexperience with tie-downs (now we know to check our equipment each time we use it).

The time from when Frida came home with us to her being out with Nick with no restrictions (but only when we're home) was about 3 weeks. While it was hard at times to put off integrating Frida into our lives fully - that sad little face was hard to resist - the success we've enjoyed using the slow intro method is undeniable. At no point in time did we feel like we faced with a situation we couldn't handle. Because each stage builds on the previous one and we didn't move on to the next until we felt the dogs were solid, it was a series of successful and positive steps for us and the dogs." - Yvette Stahr

**Moral of the story:** When introducing mature dogs, **SLOW IS GOLD.**