Guidelines for supervising puppy play

It is tremendously helpful for your puppy to be comfortable with other dogs. Dog on dog play time is also good exercise. Here are several things to keep in mind in order to keep your puppy safe during play time:

* Play should always be **off lead** and in a **safely enclosed area** (fully fenced yard is best).
* It is best to have one person per pup for safe supervision.
* Keep in mind the size of the puppies. It is best to pair pups of similar size.
* No chasing in circles. If this starts, gently stop and then redirect the pups. Toss a ball or ask for a sit (with lots of praise, etc).
* Keep a careful eye on arousal (hair up on back). Dog experts tell us that arousal always leads to aggression. **Do not correct** a puppy who is aroused. Just gently stop the play, redirect the puppies’ attention, and give them a chance to settle down. If necessary, pick your puppy up and move away from the other dog(s).
* If a pup becomes frightened, cheerfully redirect his attention (calmly walk him away from the other pup – **just change the subject, do NOT comfort** the puppy). Take a “no big deal” approach to the situation. He’ll quickly forget about it if you don’t get excited.
* It’s a great idea to interact every once in a while with the other puppy(s). The more people a puppy gets comfortable with the better.
* Do not allow any vocalization. If a pup growls, give him a firm but gentle scruff and a “no”
* Puppy play must be “even.” If two pups are play wrestling and exchanging places (first one on top, then the other) it’s fine. If one stays on top all the time, stop the play and redirect. You can gently restrain the more aggressive puppy and see what the other pup does. If he doesn’t reinitiate play, the message is clear that he was not enjoying the play. It is best to stop altogether.
* Encourage puppies to play with toys, rather than biting on each other. Toss out lots of soft toys for them to focus on.
* A bit of wrestling should never be more than two pups at a time. Interrupt and redirect whenever a “free for all” gets going.

\*\*\*\*\*Always use your judgment when supervising puppy play. The goal is for puppies to build confidence and learn good doggie manners, but we must always be vigilant to avoid a pup having a negative experience. When in doubt, err on the side of caution.