

Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Pets

Cats need to feel safe in their environment to be happy and relaxed, so maximizing their sense of safety will go a long way during introductions. Going slowly will help cats gain trust faster than forcing the situation.

Some cats are more social than others. An eight-year-old cat who has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets. On the other hand, an eight-week-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates might prefer to have a cat or dog companion. Either way, slow and steady introductions are the best way to go for long term success.

Steps for Successful Introductions:

- 1. Confine your new cat** to one room in the house with her litter box at the far end and food, water, toys, scratching post and bed closer to the door. Give food treats to your resident pet and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room. This will help them associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the animals are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process. Make sure neither animal is able to push the door open. Bonus: initial room confinement will also help with litter box training!
- 2. Switch blankets or beds between your new cat and your resident animals** so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. You should do this with each animal in the house.
- 3. Switch Living Areas:** Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animal to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her surroundings without being frightened by the other animals.
- 4. Supervised Meetings:** As long as the animals are calm with the above, try a supervised meeting. Choose a time when your pets are relaxed and keep the meetings short. If you have more than one resident pet, be sure to introduce the newcomer to each resident individually before allowing them to mingle as a group. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Precautions: If one of your pets has an injury or medical problem, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your pets are healthy enough to meet a new pet.

Living with Multiple Cats

Cats love having multiple resources available to them. To increase the chances of a peaceful multi-cat household, give all of your cats' access to plenty of resources: one litter box per cat plus one, food and water in various locations, lots of toys, many safe resting spots, multiple scratching posts and plenty of interactive time with you.

If spats do occur between your cats, don't try to intervene directly. Instead, make a loud noise, gently throw a pillow or towel, or use a squirt bottle with water to separate the cats. Carefully put one in a different room entirely and wait until they are both calm before re-introducing them to each other.

Cat and Dog Introductions

Dogs and Cats can injure each other very easily, even if they're only playing. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never live with a cat. Other dogs may want to chase and play with cats, causing the cat to become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described above to begin slowly introducing your new cat to your resident dog.

In addition:

- 1. Practice Manners:** Teach your dog to sit, lie down, come and stay on cue. High value treats (e.g. string cheese or chicken) can help your dog focus on you when your new cat is around. Have the leash on the dog and be holding it securely as sometimes dogs instinctively go to chase cats and you need to prevent this from happening.
- 2. Control Meetings:** After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, and have been exposed to each other's scents, try a supervised meeting. **Keep your dog on-leash** and use treats to help him sit or lie down and stay. Once your dog is settled, someone else should allow your new cat in to the room. They should quietly sit near the cat, but not physically touch her, and offer her some special treats. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room and the visits should be very short. Don't wait until the dog becomes uncontrollable to leave the room. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog can remain calm in each other's presence.
- 3. Allow your cat freedom:** Once both animals seem to be relaxed, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace. Keep your dog on-leash and in a relaxed "down-stay." Make sure you give your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, just lure with a treat into the down, and praise and reward for staying. If your cat runs away or if either becomes aggressive, go back to the previous steps.
- 4. Continue to supervise all interactions between your dog and cat.** Keep your dog with you **on-leash** whenever your cat has free run of the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you are sure your cat and dog will be safe.

Positive Reinforcement: Your dog should also be taught how to behave appropriately around cats. Be sure to reward your dog for sitting, coming when called, and being calm around the cat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may associate bad things happen when the cat is around and become anxious or show aggression toward the cat. Positive associations work best.

Precautions: Dogs like to eat cat food. You should keep cat food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behavior in dogs. This behavior is probably unfavorable to you and it's also upsetting to your cat to have such an important space as the litter box invaded. Unfortunately, attempts to keep your dog out of the litter box by "booby trapping" will also keep your cat away as well and punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it: depending on your dog and cats agility level you can try behind a baby gate, in a closet with the door anchored open from both sides and just wide enough for your cat, or inside a room with a cat door in the bottom. There are many solutions to this problem so please call for more advice.

Kittens and Dogs

Exercise caution because kittens are so much smaller and therefore in more danger of being injured or killed by a dog.

When to Get Help

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help immediately. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.