

Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat

Although you're excited to expand your family with the addition of a new dog, there are a number of steps to ensure a successful transition into a home with a cat. The key to a successful cat-dog introduction is to expose them to one another gradually under controlled conditions. You will want to avoid creating situations where the dog's prey-drive instinct is activated and the cat feels the need to run away. If your dog has previously lived with a cat, and your new cat has previously had positive experiences with dogs, they may progress quickly to tolerating one another. However, the introduction should be a very gradual process. The timeline of this process will greatly depend on the comfort level of both your dog and cat.



Safety tips:

While preparing your new dog to meet your cat there are a number of things you can do to ensure both safety and control during introductions. It is suggested that adopters follow these tips from day 1 of bringing your new dog home.

Leash your dog

Making sure that your dog is on a leash within the house will give you the opportunity to control his/her space and safely intervene in times of conflict or undesirable behaviour.

Train your dog

There are a number of benefits to teaching your dog basic obedience. Teaching your dog commands like 'sit', 'stay', 'leave it', 'off' and 'watch me' will all prove useful during controlled introductions with your resident cat.

Provide your cat with escape routes

Making introductions controlled, safe and non-confrontational is key to limiting the stress of your cat. Give him/her plenty of places to hide and escape that the dog will not have access to. Many cats feel safer when at high vantage points; so, give him/her high perches where he/she can safely observe your new dog.

Crate-train your dog

Creating boundaries in the home will limit your dog's ability to make poor decisions. Crate-training is the foundation for teaching your dog what spaces are yours and theirs. It also provides them with a space to become calm and to learn house-manners. It is not suggested that adopters use the crate as a space for active introductions between your new dog and cat.

Create and enforce boundaries

Before and even after your dog and cat are peacefully co-existing, make sure that the cat's food bowl and litter box are out of the dogs reach. Keep the cat from approaching the dog when the dog is eating or chewing on a bone.



Progressive Introductions

The following are suggested steps for integrating your new dog into a home with a cat. Remember that these steps are progressive, so go on to the next step only when you feel your dog and cat have “mastered” the previous one. Not every dog or cat will fit into this mold, so if you have any concerns or questions about transitioning your dog into a home with a cat, please contact our behavior department before proceeding with canine/feline introductions. The following steps should be used in conjunction with the aforementioned safety tips.

1. Indirect exposure is always the first place to start with introductions as it limits confrontation and stress for both animals. Starting on day 1, confine your cat to his/ her own room. After bringing the dog home, confine the dog in a crate or separate, dog-proofed room. Allow the cat to explore the rest of the house. Then put the cat back in his/ her own room so the dog has the opportunity to become familiar with the cat’s scent and vice versa.
2. Only begin this step once your dog is settled into its routine and it reliably knows its commands. Crack open the door to the cat’s room a couple of inches and allow the (leashed) dog to sniff and see through the opening for 30 seconds. Reward the dog for appropriate behaviour. Repeat this step a couple more times during the day. Continue to give the cat the opportunity to explore the house when the dog is securely confined out of sight. Some cats will not appreciate having their space restricted to a bedroom for introductions. If that is the case, you may find yourself modifying these steps to limit your cat’s stress level.
3. If the dog appears to be calm and responsive after repeating step 2 a number of times, you can move to this step. Increase the “viewing intervals” by short increments until the dog can watch the cat quietly for a few minutes. Reward respectful and calm behaviour. If your cat remains hidden, do not try to coax them out of their space and instead reward any confident behaviour.
4. Depending on your dog, you may not progress to this step for many weeks or months. Please speak with your adoption agent or our trainers to find out when is the right time. Allow the dog to view the cat with the door completely open, with a baby gate still in place, for a few minutes at a time. If the dog is tolerating and respecting the cat, bring your dog into another room while it is tethered to you with a long lead. Call the dog to you and play a game with him/ her. Then ignore both animals (but keep attuned to them!) and engage in some other activity. Reward your dog and cat whenever they display respectful, calm behavior.
5. Eventually work up to leaving the door to the cat’s room open, with the baby gate still up, whenever you are home. Always close the door when you are not present! Some pet owners will always need to keep the dog and cat separated when they are not around to supervise, but others will find that after a couple months’ probation, the dog and the cat are okay together by themselves. If you have reached this step, congratulations! Remember to reinforce the safety tips as mentioned on the previous page to ensure your new pup and resident cat interact with each other in controlled, stress-free settings.

