

New Pet Introductions

It is critical to integrate your new pet with your current animals in a slow, cautious, and deliberate way. Because most cats do not like change, please follow the instructions below to help your new pet feel comfortable, safe, and secure in your home.

Cat-to-Cat Introductions

Try to keep your previous pets' schedules close to what they were before the newcomer's arrival. Before bringing a new pet home, check with your veterinarian to be sure all your current pets are healthy. For each cat have a separate little box in different rooms of the house. When introducing your cats, small spats (hissing, growling, posturing) will occur. You shouldn't intervene directly to separate the cats. Instead, make a loud noise or throw a pillow to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down before reintroducing them to each other.

Cat-to-Dog Introductions

You'll need to be even more careful when introducing a dog and a cat to one another. A dog can seriously injure and even kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. So, take these steps when introducing your new cat to your resident dog:

1. Practice Obedience - If your dog doesn't already know the commands "sit," "down," "come," and "stay," begin working on them right away. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform.

2. Set Up Controlled Meetings - After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door. Be sure that they have been exposed to each other's scents before attempting a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on and have him either sit or lie down and stay for treats. Have a second person offer your cat some special pieces of food. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression, or other undesirable behavior.

3. Let Your Cat Go - Next, allow your cat some freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash. Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats, praising him for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps.

4. Use Positive Reinforcement - Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught what is appropriate and be rewarded for those behaviors. 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 redirect aggression toward the cat.

5. Directly Supervise All Interactions Between Your Dog and Cat - You may want to keep your dog at your side and on-leash whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. And until you're certain your cat will be safe, be sure to keep the two separated when you aren't home.

When to Get Help?

If introductions between your animals do not go smoothly, seek professional advice immediately, from a veterinarian or animal-behavior specialist. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve.

