

Introductions between cats and dogs



Bringing home a new pet should be a family decision, and that includes any pets currently living with you! Pets have different personalities just like people and though many pets learn to get along just fine with their new furry friends, it's always best to introduce them carefully. The following tips will help introductions go smoothly.

- Set up a safe space for your cat ahead of time with her food, water, litter box, and a comfy place to sleep where the dog can't go. Eventually you can put a baby gate up with enough space for the cat, but not the dog, to run underneath, or put up a board with a small hole cut in it in a doorway so the cat can come and go as she pleases. Having a safe space to escape to can help your cat feel more comfortable around your dog.
- Prepare to keep your dog and cat separated for at least 1-2 weeks. Set up a safe space for each of them, such as a small room for your cat and a small room or crate for your dog. Allow one pet freedom in the house at a time, while the other pet stays in his safe space.
- During this time, you can swap scents between your pets by giving them each a towel to lie on and then switching them after a few days. Placing these towels under their food bowls when you switch them can help to create positive association with the scent of the other pet.
- After 1-2 weeks, if you haven't seen any signs of trouble such as overexcitement, barking, growling, hissing, or an inability to be distracted from the other pet's space, you can allow the dog and cat to see each other for short periods of time so they can slowly get used to each other. Don't let them get close enough to touch yet. You can start out with them on opposite sides of a baby gate. Give both the dog and the cat treats when they are around each other. Do this for another 1-2 weeks, or until both pets remain calm when they see each other.
- Now you are ready for the first face-to-face meeting. Plan carefully to keep everyone safe. Give your cat a safe place to perch up high, or put her behind a baby gate. Keep your dog on leash so you can better control his movement. This will make the cat less likely to run, which will make the dog less likely to chase her.
- Reward your dog with treats and praise for calm behavior around the cat, such as lying down, sitting, or making eye contact with you. Calm sniffing is okay as long as the cat does not object. Redirect with treats or toys any exuberant attempts to get to the cat.
- Reward your cat with treats and praise for calm behavior around your dog. If your cat is scared, allow her to move away from the dog. Never hold your cat and allow the dog to sniff her. Redirect any unprovoked acts of aggression from your cat.
- After several controlled greetings, you can begin to allow your pets more freedom around each other. You may want to keep your dog's leash on in the house when you are home for a while so you can step on it if he starts to chase the cat. And make sure your pets each have a safe space to get away from each other when they want some alone time.

- Be patient. Dogs and cats are not naturally friends, but they can learn to tolerate each other and even become good friends if you take it slowly and make interactions pleasant for both parties.
- Separate your pets any time you are not around to supervise. Even a dog who gets along well with cats can have his prey drive triggered if the cat runs. He may hurt the cat without meaning to.