

Introducing Dogs to Cats

Whether you already have a dog and are considering getting a cat, or vice versa, it is very important to think through the best way to introduce them, and the best way to get them used to safely sharing a home together. Making sure you have a well-devised plan is the key to safety for all involved. Below are suggested steps we recommend taking.

STEP 1: SEPARATE THE ANIMALS

To allow time for the newcomer to adjust to you and their new situation, confine them to their own private space for the first day or two. Then, over the course of a few more days, rotate which animal has freedom and which is confined to allow each animal plenty of time to investigate the other one's scent. This will mean confining the cat to a safe space with a securely closed door while the dog investigates the other portions of the house, and it will mean confining the dog to a room or crate while the cat roams in the same way. It's important to have the crates and spaces set up and ready for this before adoption.

When no one is home, the pets must be separated so that unsupervised interactions are not possible.

Once the dog has gotten used to the scent and seems to have lost interest in looking for the cat AND once the cat is calm (eating and using the litter box normally), proceed to *STEP 2*. The time spent in *STEP 1* will vary for each set of animals and should not be rushed.

Sometimes, a secure baby gate can be a good barrier between rooms and a natural progression between STEP 1 and STEP 2. A baby gate can allow the pets to feel like there is a solid barrier there but still have a level of visibility. It also allows a cat a safe place to jump over and escape when he/she feels threatened by a dog.

STEP 2: MAKE LEASHED INTRODUCTIONS

Allow both animals to be in the same room at the same time, but keep the dog securely leashed and make sure there are many places where the cat can safely get away from the dog. Jumping onto tall furniture can feel safer for a cat than being forced to hide underneath furniture, but having a variety of hiding spots is ideal.

Continue with this type of introduction until the dog is calm and ignores the cat. Make sure the cat is calm, eating, and using the litter box normally during this phase. If there is any fear or aggression displayed on either animal's part, stay at *STEP 2* longer or go back to *STEP 1*.

Continue indefinitely until both the dog and cat seem happy and relaxed around each other.

Again, when no one is home, the dog or cat should be securely confined to separate areas so unsupervised interactions are not possible.

STEP 3: ALLOW UNSUPERVISED INTERACTIONS

Unsupervised time together can occur after the cat and dog have been supervised around each other for a significant period of time with no signs of trouble. It can take several months before it is safe to move to this step, and this step should be closely monitored and supervised for a long period of time. Only after there has been great success at this step for a period of several months should animals be left alone unsupervised. For the greatest safety measure, confine animals separately from one another indefinitely at times when they are not being supervised or when home alone.

TRAINING TIPS AND WARNING SIGNS

If the dog stares at the cat or the door separating the cat, try to distract him and get him to look away with treats, a happy voice, or by gently guiding the dog away on a leash. Once the dog is away from the cat, try offering a treat. If he takes it, repeat this process over several days until he no longer seems to be focused on the cat or door.

If the dog remains overly focused after a few days of efforts to distract him, this may be a dangerous match. If this happens with a new dog that you are introducing to your cat, you may want to try another dog or consider seeking help from a professional trainer. If this behavior is exhibited by your dog when you try to introduce a new cat, your dog may not be able to safely coexist with cats without professional guidance.

The following are signs that the match may not be safe: dog obsessively digs at the separation barrier, does not take his eyes off the cat or the door, completely ignores you when called, whimpers at the door constantly, chatters teeth when seeing cat, lunges or increases interest obsessively when there is movement from the room where the cat is housed or when the cat is in sight.

If at any time the dog lunges toward, growls, snaps at, or shows any aggression toward a calm, quiet, still cat, this match will likely not work out. The same holds true if a cat consistently attacks a calm, quiet dog. If a dog attempts to aggressively chase, pin, pick up, or otherwise "manhandle" any cat, it is best to consider NOT having both pets.

If the cat stops eating, drinking, using the litter box or visiting with family members, he/she is not adjusting easily. In some cases, a shy cat may come around and eventually be ok, but this should be carefully monitored. You might want to consider finding a pair that works better together or contacting a professional animal behaviorist for advice.