

Introducing Cats and Dogs

There is no sure-fire way to ensure every dog will get along with every cat since all animals are individuals, but there are things we can do to help the species have a fair shot at making friends. The key to ensuring the best possible outcome is to introduce your new cat to your home and to existing pets slowly and carefully. Here are a few guidelines and tips to follow when introducing the two species.

1. Give everyone a safe space: Start your cat and dog off in separate areas where your cat and dog can feel comfortable and safe without the other animal. Make sure the safe spaces are secure so the dog and cat can't accidentally escape and run into each other before they're ready to meet.

2. Start slow: Allow your cat and dog to get used to the presence of the other animal in a non-threatening way. Try scent swapping or feeding them on either side of a door so they can become accustomed to the other's scent and sounds without overstimulation from a direct meeting. Plus, positive associations with the most powerful stimuli of all: food!

3. Keep your dog focused: Brush up on your dog's training cues, and if they get too fixated or excited about the presence of the cat, allow your dog brief viewings of the cat and then refocus them with a treat or toy and verbal praise. Continuing these short visual introductions and refocusing your dog on other things can help desensitize them to the novelty of the cat. Continue this process for a few days to weeks, keeping the animals separated in between training exercises, until the cat and the dog give relaxed body language around one another and the dog can easily pay attention to you with the cat in view.

4. Controlled meetings: After they've become comfortable with each other on opposite sides of a door, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Baby gates are a great way to start the visual introduction, but you can also let the animals meet loose in a room. Put a leash on your dog, and using treats, have your dog either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly sit down with your new cat on opposite sides of the room. Repeat this process until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear or aggression.

5. Let your cat go: Next, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a sit- or down-stay. Meanwhile, offer your dog treats and praise for calm behavior.

6. Positive reinforcement: Reward your dog for staying calm and presenting desirable behaviors when 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 redirect aggression towards the cat.

7. Offer options: Do not force the cat and dog to interact. Allow the cat to approach or avoid the dog and offer places where the cat can observe the dog from a safe distance, such as on a cat tree or shelf.

8. Supervise: You may want to keep your dog on-leash and with you 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. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.

Note that some dogs have a strong, instinctive prey drive and cannot be safely housed with small animals. Other dogs may have a deep rooted fear of cats that will require gradual counterconditioning.

Additional online resources for cat-dog introductions:

- [Best Friends: How to Introduce Dogs to Cats](#)
- [Video: Arizona Humane Society-Introduce a Cat to a Dog](#)
- [Paws Article: Tips for Introducing Your New Cat to Your Dog](#)

