

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO YOUR PETS

If your new cat is going to be a companion to your existing cat(s) or dog(s), you should expect it to take some time before they are used to each other. It can be a matter of days, weeks or even months, depending on the personalities of the animals involved. While there is no foolproof way to make animals become friends, we advise that you play it safe and introduce the new kitty to your house slowly in order to prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing. Here are some suggestions on how best to introduce your new kitty to your pets.

### Introducing a New Cat to Other Cats

You'll want to avoid any interactions between the cats that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If these responses are allowed to become habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce the animals to each other so gradually that neither cat becomes afraid or aggressive.

**Upon coming home, the new cat should be isolated from the other cats in the house.** The first step to integrating the cats is to get them used to each other's scent while avoiding eye contact.

- You can put the new cat's carrier in the room with your existing cats and let them discover it on their own.
- Another tip is to put something on either side of a closed door that will attract the cats, such as food or a catnip toy. This will help start things out right by associating something enjoyable with each other's presence.
- You may also introduce scent by switching sleeping blankets between the new cat and the resident cats, or by putting the other cat's blanket underneath the food dishes.

Once the new cat is using its box and eating regularly while confined, let it have free time in the house while confining the other cats. This switch provides another way for the cats to experience each other's scent without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with its new surroundings without being frightened by other animals.

The next step is to allow your cats to see each other without full body contact. Try setting up a baby gate or other barrier in a doorway between the cats, or firmly prop the door open a couple inches with doorstops (taking care that neither cat can fit its head through the opening and that the door is secure and won't slam shut). You'll want to supervise this at first until the cats are relatively calm in each other's presence, with a minimum of hissing, posturing and growling.

Once they are ready, you can let the cats meet each other. Take your existing cats into a different part of your home, and then leave the door open to the newcomer's room. Let the newcomer explore and encounter your existing cat on his own terms. You should expect some hissing, spitting and growling. Be prepared with a glass of water. If a fight breaks out, do NOT interfere directly. Instead, throw water on the cats, clap your hands and shout, bang a pot with a spoon or throw a blanket over each cat separately, wrapping the blanket around the cat before picking him up. Separate the cats until they have calmed down. It may be best to leave the cats separated when you are not home until you are sure they are getting along well. To be safe, you should trim their nails prior to the first face-to-face encounter.



Even after you have allowed them to meet, you should continue to feed them separately and maintain separate litter boxes until they are comfortable sharing space together. Successful introductions require time and patience. Don't expect things to be perfect overnight. Based on our years of introducing cats if you take it slowly, rarely is there a fight. After a few weeks they should start to be friends.

## Introducing a New Cat to a Resident Dog

Do NOT assume that your dog will like your new cat just because he loved your old cat. This is a different animal to him and they have to get to know each other.



Dogs and cats that have not experienced each other will require some extra time to become accustomed to each other. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats are usually afraid and defensive. You can use any of the techniques described in “Introducing a new cat to other cats.” In addition: If your dog does not already know the commands “sit,” “down,” “come,” and “stay,” you should begin working on them. Little tidbits of food increase your dog’s motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows the commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit.

After the animals have become comfortable eating on either side of the door, and have been exposed to each other’s scents as described in the previous section, you can attempt a face-to-face. Put your dog’s leash on, and command him to either “sit” or “down” and “stay,” using food tidbits. Have another family member enter the room and quietly sit down with the cat on his or her lap. The cat should also be offered some special tidbits.

- At first, the cat and dog should be on OPPOSITE sides of the room. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other without fear, aggression, or other uncontrollable behavior.
- Next, move the animals a little closer together, with the dog still on a leash and the cat gently held in a lap. If the cat does not like to be held, you can use a wire crate or carrier instead. If the dog gets up from its “stay” position, it should be firmly repositioned, and praised and rewarded for obeying the “stay” command. If the cat becomes frightened, increase the distance between the animals and progress more slowly. Eventually, the animals should be brought close enough together to allow them to investigate each other.

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with the cat is unacceptable behavior, your dog must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so (e.g. sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a tidbit). If your dog is always punished whenever the cat is around, and never has “good things” happen in the cat’s presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.

You may want to keep your dog on a leash and with you when the 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 the dog and cat separated when you aren’t home until you are certain they will both be safe.



Eventually we hope all of your pets will become good friends.

**Precautions:** Dogs like to eat cat food because it is very high in protein, and therefore very tasty. Keep cat food out of the dog’s reach (in a closet, on a high shelf, etc.). Some dogs like to eat cat feces; although there are no health hazards to the dog from this habit, it is usually distasteful to the owners, especially if the dog kisses them in the face afterwards. The best solution to this is to place the litter box where the dog cannot access it such as behind a baby gate or in a closet with the door anchored open (from both sides) just wide enough for the cat. Another solution is a litter box furniture cover that the dog can’t get his head into; see examples on the litter box page. Companies also make furniture specifically for feeding cats that dogs can’t get into. Do a search on the internet and be sure the entry hole is big enough if you have a big cat. Always feed your dog **alone**. **Cats should not eat dog food as it may cause dietary deficiencies.**