

Many dogs and cats get along very well, especially if they've grown up with each other or have prior experience living with the other species. When bringing a new dog home to meet your resident cat, or bringing a new cat into your home to meet your dog, there are a few steps you can follow to make those introductions as successful as possible. First impressions are important, so you'll want to set up introductions carefully so that both animals feel safe and have a pleasant experience getting acquainted with one another. Always remember that we have a Behavior Helpline (734-662-5545) to assist with any questions or concerns during this process.

Before introducing your new family members look around your home and make sure that there are safe places for a cat to hide where a dog can't go. Baby gates work well to create safe spaces, as do cat trees and other cat-safe perches that are out of a dog's reach. When bringing a new dog home, make sure your cat knows how to use these spaces, you can tempt her to them with cat nip or special treats if necessary. Once your cat is familiar with all of her new escape routes, you're ready to bring your new canine friend home. When bringing a new cat home, you'll want to be ready with these things once she's set to meet her new canine companion.

Bringing a new cat home:

- When bringing a new cat home, confine your cat in a room with her food, water and litter box (please see our article, "Bringing Your New Cat Home", for information on how to make your new cat comfortable in her new home). Please make sure that your new cat is nicely settled in before you begin introducing her to her new canine friend.
- You can start to introduce your new cat and your dog by the doorway to her room. Fill your pockets with treats that your dog loves, and treats that your cat will love as well. Keep the door open but block it with a baby gate. Walk your dog slowly, on leash, by the doorway several times each day for a couple of days. Praise and treat him for calm behavior, and then give your cat a treat as well. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats. If your dog is overly excited by the cat or fixates on the cat, distract him and get his attention focused on you. Get your dog's attention by asking him to do basic obedience skills, like Sit and Down. Use delicious treats to reward him for his obedience in the presence of something as tempting and distracting as your new cat. Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate to get closer to the dog or to retreat if she wants to. Reward her any time she approaches the baby gate by giving her treats.
- Let your new cat set the pace. If she chooses to run and hide under the furniture when you and your dog walk by, let her. It simply means your introductions will take longer—maybe weeks longer. Taking things slow will help to avoid a bad first impression. Keep in mind that cats can take months to form relationships with other animals. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting her into a crate or carrier or restricting her movement in any way.

- If your cat doesn't seem afraid of your dog as you pass by the doorway of her room, or if she even tries to jump over the gate, you can introduce them in your living room or other large room. Make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. She should have the freedom and room to retreat, run and hide, slip beneath a piece of furniture where the dog can't follow or jump up on something higher than the dog.
- Keep your dog with you on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold onto it in case your dog decides to try to chase your cat. Use your recall and "leave it" exercises if your dog starts nosing or following your cat and she seems perturbed. When you ask your dog to come to you or leave your cat alone and he responds, be sure to give him a very special treat.

Bringing a new dog home:

The process will be much the same, but you won't be confining your cat to a smaller room, it's important that she have the run of her home as she normally does. Changing her environment too much could cause undue stress to her and make the process more difficult.

- For the first introduction, have your new dog on a leash and allow your cat to freely roam the area. Follow all above steps: treats and positive reinforcement for both pets, using basic commands when possible and taking things slow will all aid in safe introductions.
- Initially, if you're not present or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of the house. This could mean using a dog crate for your dog, or having a safe, comfortable space for your cat to relax in without worrying about the new dog in the home when you can't be there.
- If your dog seems friendly or cautious, not much intervention on your part is required except to praise and reward your dog for his good manners.
- Interrupt any chasing, barking or agitated behavior from your dog by redirecting his attention to another activity or ask him to do some easy obedience skills for food rewards. Avoid scolding, yelling or jerking on your dog's leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your dog and cat to learn a pleasant association with each other's presence. You don't want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and bad things happen when the cat or dog is around.
- Be careful to keep an eye on your cat as well as your dog. Be sure your cat's nails are trimmed so that she doesn't hurt your dog if she corrects him.
- Your dog shouldn't have access to your cat's litter box. If he does, it will be highly stressful to your cat, and your dog may eat the feces and litter.
- To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding your cat on a high surface, like a window sill, dresser, shelf or cat tree furniture.