

Pet Introductions

Introducing your New Dog to a Resident Cat

If you plan to bring a dog into a home with a resident cat, your best bet is, in most cases, a very young puppy, one too little to accomplish much barking or chasing of the cat. Although most cats recognize that an 8 week-old puppy isn't much of a threat, you will need to monitor their time together at first to guard against injury such as a slash across the puppy's eyes. It is possible to combine unfamiliar adult dogs and adult cats, but it may take a lot of work and time; it all depends on the personalities of the dog and cat. The following routine will maximize your chances for success in introducing a new dog to your cat:

(1) Before you attempt a face-to-face meeting, keep the animals separated and first let them get used to the smell of the other and be aware the other's presence in a non-threatening manner. Feed them closer and closer on opposite sides of the closed door separating their areas until they can eat calmly right next to the door. Hopefully, they will begin to associate the presence of the other animal with good things like eating. It would also be a good idea to begin teaching (or reviewing) some basic obedience commands ("sit," "down," "stay") to your new dog in preparation for the face-to-face meetings.

(2) Keep the first face-to-face meetings short and both animals controlled. One person should be with the leashed dog, commanding him to "sit" or "down" while the other person holds the cat on his/her lap on the other side of the room. If the dog behaves aggressively, he should be distracted by pulling on the lead or giving a command. Both animals should be praised and rewarded with special tidbits of food for calm behavior. Reward for good behavior is far better than punishment because you want the dog to associate pleasant things with the cat's presence. Gradually bring the two closer until they have the chance to investigate each other face-to-face. The behavior of the animals will tell you whether this will take one or many short sessions.

(3) If the cat and dog seem happy together in the controlled situation, the next step is to allow them loose in the room together, but be certain that the cat has an escape route or a safe place to hide in case the dog becomes excited. Keep them separated when you are gone until you are sure that they can get along. If this step does not go well, go back and spend more time on the earlier introductory stages.

Always be cautious and concerned for the safety of your cat and dog when introducing adult animals, even if they have previously had an amicable relationship with an individual of the other species.

Introducing a New Cat to a Resident Cat

Many people who adopt a cat from the Animal Humane Society enjoy their feline companion so much that they return later with the idea of adding a second cat. But they often ask the questions, "How is Daisy going to react?" and "Is this going to work?" The answer is "Probably, but it's not always easy to predict how a cat will react; you won't know for sure until you try." Unlike canines, most felines do not by nature live in social groups, but there are millions of homes where two or more cats live in reasonable

harmony. Here are some tips that should increase your chances for establishing a peaceful multi-cat home:

SELECTING YOUR SECOND CAT

(1) Don't worry too much about the sex of the cats involved. (We are assuming that you are a responsible pet owner whose pets are spayed/neutered...or will be at the appropriate age.) Although we have seen articles that recommend choosing an opposite-sex animal, the advice of many experts on feline behavior and the Society's experience in thousands of second cat placements indicate that the sex of the animals makes very little difference. Age and temperament are the most important factors.

(2) The typical adult household cat will accept a new kitten much more easily than he will accept a new adult cat. Cats are by nature very territorial, and your cat thinks he owns your house, right? So he is likely to bitterly resent an adult feline intruder and may attack or retreat under the bed in a ferocious sulk. Almost certainly he will feel far less threatened by a relatively helpless 8 week old kitten. In fact, some cats, even middle-aged neutered males who have never seen a kitten, will seem to take great pleasure in fussing over and grooming a new baby. You will, of course, want to monitor your cat's behavior with the newcomer until you're sure he will not harm the kitten. Put them in separate rooms when you're not there to watch.

(3) If you watch a group of kittens you will soon see that they display personality differences at a very early age. Is there a special kind of kitten you should select for your second pet? If you are able to choose from a group of kittens, look for one that's grooming or playing happily with the others or sleeping comfortably in a whole pile of kittens. Any reasonably confident adult cat should be able to deal with such a kitten. Avoid any kitten that's hissing, growling or engaged in serious battle with his mates; let such feisty trouble makers be someone else's "only child."

(4) What if you just fell in love with one of the adult cats at the shelter or just don't want to go through the swinging-from-the-drapes kitten stage? Can you successfully introduce another adult cat into your household? Probably, but it's going to take a lot longer for both pets to get comfortable, and there is a possibility that the two may merely learn to co-exist rather than becoming friends. Success in adding a cat depends largely on the personality of your present cat: if he's easy-going and mild mannered and the new adult you select is also pretty laid back, you may have relatively little trouble if you introduce them slowly and correctly.

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO A RESIDENT CAT

Now that you've picked out a terrific second kitten or cat, how do you go about introducing him to your current pet? Don't make the mistake of just tossing them together and hoping they will work it out. A gradual, common-sense introduction for the two may be crucial in a good final adjustment. Here are some tips on doing it the right way:

(1) When you bring your new cat home, confine him to one room (not a tiny bathroom--something larger and more comfortable) with his own litterbox, bed, food, and water. At the next meal, place the two cats' bowls on either side of the door to that room. The aim is for the cats to smell and know the other cat is there while they are doing something they like and come to associate the other cat's presence with the enjoyable activity.

Gradually move the bowls closer, and when they can eat calmly directly on either side of the door, open the door a little so they can also see each other as they eat.

(2) Once the new cat seems comfortable in his new surroundings and is eating and using his litterbox, let him have the run of the house while the resident cat is secluded in another room. This gives the new kid a chance to get used to the smell of the resident cat and explore this unfamiliar place without the extra strain of being harassed by the resident cat. Some animal behaviorists also suggest exchanging the cats' sleeping blankets or putting the other cat's blanket under the food dishes as a way of getting the cats used to each other.

(3) Monitor the cats' first actual encounter closely and limit the time they spend together at first. Some display of fearful or aggressive behavior (crouching, hissing, ears back) is to be expected, but you want to avoid letting them establish a pattern of aggressive or fearful behavior, which may be difficult to change. If these behaviors intensify, go back to the earlier gradual steps. If an actual fight breaks out, throw a pillow or a glass of water at them or make a loud noise to distract and separate the combatants. Don't try again until they are calmed down.

Be sensitive to what a big change this is for your resident cat. Even if you think he's being obnoxious and unreasonable, give him the security of his usual routine and his own special time with you.

There are a few cats who simply will not tolerate living with any other cat, but most people give up too soon. Even the least stressful situation...introducing a kitten to a good-natured resident cat...can take 2-4 weeks for full adjustment. If you're dealing with two adult cats, make that 4 weeks or more. Don't give up on an adjustment which has progressed to dirty looks and occasional hisses; but, on the other hand, if you've given it your best shot for weeks and the two are still intent on doing bodily harm to each other, then perhaps it's best to give up.

Introducing a New Cat to a Resident Dog

Many dog owners ask about adding a cat to their household. It would have been a lot easier to raise a dog and a cat together and avoid most of the potential problems, but, no, it's not too late. And a cat can provide good companionship and relief from boredom for a lonely dog...and vice versa.

It's probably best not to get a tiny, newly weaned kitten if your dog has not lived with a cat before; the chances of injury are too great. No matter how carefully you introduce the two, a sudden, unexpected snap from a dog can do serious damage to a tiny kitten. Hopefully, there won't be any skirmishes between the two, but your best bet is probably an older kitten, say 5 or 6 months old. A kitten that age is fast enough to get out of the way or defend himself should something unforeseen happen, yet he is likely to be flexible enough to consider making friends with the dog.

Here are some tips on introducing your new cat to your dog:

(1) Before you bring the new feline home, make sure your dog knows the basic commands of "sit," "down," and "stay." Either brush up on his obedience training or teach him now.

(2) Use the same eating-on-two-sides-of-a-door technique as described earlier in this leaflet until both are eating calmly right next to the door.

(3) Keep the first face-to-face introductions short and controlled. One person should be with the leashed dog, commanding him to "sit" or "down" and "stay" while the other person brings the cat into the room and holds him on his/her lap (or in a carrier if it's hard to keep him controlled). The dog should be reprimanded for breaking the "stay" command, and both should be praised and rewarded with special bits of food for remaining calm. Gradually bring the two closer until they have the chance to investigate each other face to face. The behavior of the animals will determine whether this takes one or many short sessions. Remember to reward the dog for proper behavior so he will not associate the cat only with punishment.

(4) When the cat is first allowed to move freely around the room, keep the dog on leash to maintain control should he become excited and want to chase the cat. Also be sure that the cat has a place to hide or an escape route. If this step doesn't go well, go back and spend more time on the earlier introductory stages. Until you are sure they are doing well together, separate them when you are gone.

(5) Adding a cat to a household with a dog is almost certain to bring up some problems with feeding and perhaps the litterbox as well: most dogs find cat food quite tasty and would be glad to eat it instead of their own food, and some dogs will also eat cat feces from the litterbox. Possible solutions to these problems would include feeding the cat on a table or counter, placing the food and litterbox in a room made inaccessible to the dog by a baby gate, or placing the litterbox in a closet which is anchored open from both sides just wide enough for the cat (hardware stores usually carry large hook-and-eye devices which will hold a door in place).