

## Introducing a New Cat or Kitten

### Introducing a New Cat to Existing Pets

Adding a new member to your animal family can be a smooth experience, if done properly. As cats can be territorial creatures, if not handled correctly, bringing a new kitty home to meet Fido or Fluffy can be stressful for you and your resident pets. A peaceful relationship between new and existing feline or canine housemates requires a little time, patience and work. The introduction process generally takes a few weeks before the pets are all cohabitating peacefully. At times, though, it can take several weeks. The trick is to do it slowly and cautiously during the introduction process to increase your chances for success – and follow the guidelines below.

1. **Isolate the new cat in a separate room** that is closed off from the other pets (make sure the door is securely shut and doesn't open easily). This smaller, confined area will help the new cat to feel safe and adjust more quickly to his new home. Provide a litter box, scratching post, toys, food, and water in the new cat's room. This separation will also give your current pets time to get used to the new cat's smell and the idea of having a new occupant in the house. During the first week, the only interaction that your new cat and resident cats should have is playing paws under the door.
2. **Swap sleeping blankets** and beds used by the cats so they each have a chance to become accustomed to the other's scent. You can even rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. If there are more than two animals in the house, do the same for each animal.
3. **Slowly introduce kitty to the house.** Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals. Next, after the animals have been returned to their original designated parts of the house, use two doorstops to prop open the dividing door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process over a period of days – supervised, of course.
4. **Put the new cat in his carrier** and let the resident cats come into the cat's room. This will give you an opportunity to observe the interaction among the cats while the new cat is protected in his carrier. Usually with this initial meeting, there will be some hissing and/or posturing. If the interaction seems as though it could lead to aggression, you will need to do this controlled introduction using the carrier a few more times before removing the barriers and allowing the cats to meet face-to-face. If the cats all appear to be curious or simply wary with no outward signs of aggression, then you can open the carrier door and let the new cat walk out into the territory of the resident cats. Do not rush this process. It is very important to the long-term harmony of their relationship that the introduction process proceed at a pace comfortable for each of the cats.

5. **When the time comes** to let the new cat out (do not rush this) and be sure to monitor closely, open the door to see what happens. Most likely your existing cat will hiss and growl, maybe even wail, confirming their worst fears. Unless open fighting breaks out, let them hiss, as cats need to establish hierarchy and territorial rights. Even though the growling is upsetting and sounds bad, it's okay. Reassure your cat verbally and pet him if you can (he may not let you because he's upset so don't take it personally). Jealousy and pouting are normal reactions. Do not yell, scold or punish them for hissing at the newcomer. They may not react like they way you want them to right away, but your cats will come around. When he is nice or at least non-threatening to the new cat, praise your cat lavishly and give them both treats.
6. **Avoid any interactions** between your pets that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce your pets to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect a mild protest from either cat from time to time, but don't allow these behaviors to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start the introduction process once again with a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Remember - cats like routine, not change. Your resident cats' behavior may initially change when you first bring the new cat home. Most common is hissing, growling, hiding or fighting among resident pets. Your current cats may even act differently toward you by displaying aggression or ignoring you all together. With your new cat in his "safe room," the new and resident cats will all have the opportunity to become familiar with each other's scents while safely separated by a door. As they begin to acclimate to each other, the cats will feel less threatened and, with time, the negative behavior should dissipate.

### Cat-to-Dog Introductions

You'll need to be even more careful when introducing a dog and a cat to one another. A dog can seriously injure and even kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing – all it takes is one quick shake to break the cat's neck. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described above to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog. In addition:

1. **Practice Obedience.** If your dog doesn't already know the commands "sit," "down," "come," and "stay," begin working on them right away. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of a strong distraction such as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, work to reinforce these commands in return for a tidbit.

2. **Controlled meeting.** After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door and have been exposed to each other's scents as described above, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on and have him either sit or lie down and stay for treats. Ask another family member or friend to enter the room and quietly sit down next to your new cat, but don't ask them to physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression, or other undesirable behavior.
3. **Let your cat go.** Next, allow your cat some freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "down-stay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps.
4. **Positive reinforcement.** Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught just what is appropriate, and be rewarded for those behaviors, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. 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 toward the cat.

Directly supervise all interactions until you are assured the dog and cat are comfortable around each other. You may want to keep your dog at your side and on-leash 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. And until you're certain your cat will be safe, be sure to keep the two separated when you aren't home.

5. **Take precautions.** It's no surprise that dogs like to eat cat food, so you'll need to keep the cat's food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). It's not uncommon for dogs to eat cat feces as well, and though there are no real health hazards involved, it's probably distasteful to you and it may upset your cat. Of course, attempts to keep your dog out of the litter box by "booby trapping" it will also keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it, for example: behind a baby gate; in a closet with the door propped open just wide enough for your cat; or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.

### **Kittens and Puppies**

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured or killed by a young energetic dog, or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully grown, except for periods of supervised interaction to enable the animals to get to know each other.

Even after the cat is fully grown, she may not be able to be safely left alone with the dog. Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in his place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

*Congratulations on your new furry family member!*

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