

Introducing a New Dog to a Cat

Inter-species introductions follow the same basic rules of adoption as same species, i.e., choose a dog that is younger and of the opposite sex of your cat. It would be best to choose smaller also but only an eight-week old puppy would fulfill this requirement. A puppy is a more acceptable choice to an existing cat for two reasons. Most puppies have not had a chance to discover how much fun it is to chase a cat. The second reason is that a puppy is less threatening than a full grown dog. If an adult dog has been socialized to cats, or if your cat has had a good relationship with dogs, the job of introducing them will be that much easier.

There are several things to consider before introducing a new dog to your existing cat. You must protect their health by making sure vaccinations for both are up-to-date and each is free of worms and fleas. Cats are very territorial and do not appreciate any change in their environment. Therefore, no matter what, this will be a stressful situation for your cat. Be sure your cat is mentally and physically healthy before introducing her to a dog. Ask a friend to bring the dog to your home. Be sure the dog is on a leash and under control at the time of arrival. Your friend can then turn the dog and leash over to you. If your cat does not run and hide, let her make the first advances toward the new dog. If the dog displays any inappropriate aggressive behavior toward the cat, he should be quickly and firmly corrected with a slight jerk on the leash and a verbal "NO." This is the beginning of your assertion as this dog's leader and, as leader you will not permit him to chase the cat. After they get to know each other, friendly games of chase are acceptable.

After an hour or so of this controlled introduction, release your dog with leash still attached and let them come together. It is the dog's natural instinct to chase, so be prepared to grab the dragging leash and assert your leadership. Be warned! Your cat may go on the offensive. Be prepared to protect your dog's eyes or nose from scratches. Chances are very good that your cat is going to retreat to high ground and survey this new creature from a safe height while your dog explores the house. Your dog will adjust fine. Your cat will be under some stress and may take several weeks to act as she did before this newcomer arrived. Talk to your cat, give her lots of hugs and great food treats. Be understanding, and forgiving, if she sprays a time or two or if she jumps up on something normally off-limits. She will get used to the idea of having a dog around, and chances are very good that they will become best friends.

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Step 1

Let the dog and cat smell each other's bedding or other items before doing an in person introduction. You can also put the dog and the cat on separate sides of a door for a period of time so that they can get used to each other's smell before being in the same room together. Put a baby gate up with the door closed and gradually open the door a little for short periods of time so that the dog and cat can see each other.

Step 2

Master basic training with your dog. Proper dog training will make the introduction much smoother and safer.

Step 3

Give your dog a "sit" or "down" command and a "stay" command. Reinforce this with treats or other rewards. With a dog in a collar and leash, have another person enter the room with the cat and quietly sit with the cat on the other side of the room. Repeat this step until both the dog and the cat are tolerating each other's presence without signs of fear or aggression.

Step 4

Move the dog and the cat closer together. The dog should still be on a leash and the cat can be held quietly or placed in a crate or carrier. Reward the dog for remaining in a "stay" position and put him back into the position if he moves. If the cat seems scared, increase the distance between them.

Step 5

Stop any of the dog's attempts to bark at or chase the cat. This is easiest if you leave the training collar and leash on the dog for their initial times together unrestrained. Praise the dog and give her treats when she is calm and obedient in the cat's presence.

Step 6

Keep the dog and the cat separated when they are not being supervised. Some animals will eventually be able to be left alone together, but the cat should always have a place to go to get away from the dog.

Step 7

Feed the pets in separate areas which will ensure that they are each getting the food designed for them and that there are no issues with food. If possible, put the cat's food and litter box in either an elevated place away from the dog or in a separate room that the dog can't get into. A baby gate can be placed in a doorway so that the cat can enter but the dog cannot.