

Cat & Dog Introductions

Whether you already have a dog and are considering getting a cat, or have a cat and want to add a dog, it is very important to think about their first introduction. We want to set them up for success, and that means planning ahead, taking your time, and having a little patience.

Knowing What to Expect

When introducing a new dog into your house, remember that dogs can hurt or even kill a cat very easily, even if they are only trying to play with the cat. Some dogs have a very high prey drive and should never be left alone with your cat.

A proper introduction takes at least a month to ensure everyone's safety. Some cats will take months before they actually feel comfortable being near a dog since they are prey animals and dogs are considered predators. Others may never be entirely comfortable; the lasting relationship depends on each animal's personality.



Step 1: Separation

Create a Cat-Only Safe Zone

This safe zone should be a room that your cat can feel happy, relaxed, and safe in. A closed bedroom or large bathroom with scratching posts, toys, food, water, and a litter box are great options.

It's important that this room remain a dog-free zone for the first few months so that your cat always has a safe place to go. (It also ensures your dog isn't getting into cat food or poop.)

Rotate Each Animal's Free Time

Over the first 3-4 days, keep one animal safely confined and let the other roam around the house to get used to each other's smell and presence. If you're bringing home a new dog, try crate training to help him comfortably spend some time in the crate while the cat explores the dog's smell.

TIP: During this time, if the dog obsessively digs at the separation barrier (door, crate, baby gate) or barks at the cat for more than a day or two, professional training is likely needed.

Remember, when no one is home, the dog or cat must always be securely confined. If using a crate for the dog, clip carabiners around the door(s) so that the dog cannot break out of the crate.

Once the dog is calm and not acting obsessed with the cat, and the cat is calm, eating, and using the litter box normally, you can proceed to the next step.



Step 2: Leashed Introductions

The first time you introduce the cat and dog, keep it short—around 10 minutes. Keep the dog on a leash, with you holding on securely, and let the cat walk around and come as close to the dog as she wants to. Give your pup plenty of treats if he stays calm!

If your dog attempts to chase the cat, barks at her, or becomes super focused on her, hold onto the leash securely and as soon as your dog looks away from the cat, reward him with a super high value treat (a special treat that your dog LOVES and doesn't get often). You want to help your dog start thinking "every time I'm not looking at the cat, good things happen!"

Don't punish your dog for any bad behavior he shows around the cat—he might start to think that the cat is linked to him getting punishment.

As long as the process is going smoothly, you can slowly increase the amount of time the animals spend together on leash.

If there is any fear or your dog continues to bark, try to chase, or focus intensely on the cat, stay on this step.

Once the dog is consistently calm and ignores the cat, and the cat is calm, eating, and using the litter box normally, you can move on to step 3.

Continue keeping either the dog or cat safely confined whenever you are not home.

Step 3: Unleashed Introductions

It can take days, weeks, or even months before your dog and cat are ready to meet each other off leash. There is no exact timeline that you need to follow—just remember that patience and positive experiences will be the strongest foundation for a good relationship between both animals.

Tip: Make sure your cat has multiple areas she can easily access that are out of the dog's reach when she needs a break. This can include her safe zone as well as rooms blocked with a baby gate, high shelves, a tall cat tree, or counters.

When you and both the animals are ready, keep your dog's leash attached to his collar and let it drag on the ground. If at any point your dog attempts to chase the cat, quickly step on the leash to stop him. Then go back to step 2 or contact a professional to help move forward.

After your dog and cat have had several safe and calm interactions, you can remove the leash from your dog's collar.

Wait until you're sure they're both fully comfortable with each other before leaving the cat and dog alone together.

Better Safe Than Sorry

Watch both animal's body language. If at any point you feel uncomfortable with how the animals interact, ask a professional for help. Animals can be severely injured in fights and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to fix.

Keep in mind that all of this training pertains to inside interactions only. Many indoor-cat-friendly dogs view outdoor cats as prey and therefore fair game to chase and even attack.