



# Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat

Never leave your new dog and cat alone unsupervised, as dogs can injure or kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. Many dogs want to chase and play with cats which can make cats feel afraid and defensive. Other dogs who have had previous negative experiences with cats may be fearful as well.

Be prepared for the introduction to take several days, or more, and let the cat set the pace. Remember to always proceed slowly and safely, giving your cat space to get away from the situation.

Avoid any interactions between your pets that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. We want them to form a strong, positive relationship, which can be tough if they're afraid and/or fighting. It's better to introduce your pets to each other so gradually that both animals feel safe and comfortable. You can expect mild forms of corrections (hissing, swatting, growling, etc.), but don't give them the opportunity to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of even smaller, gradual steps.

## **Set-up**

Give your resident cat a safe room with access to food, water, litter box, and bed, where she can be safe and secure away from the dog if needed. Use baby gates or other barriers to ensure the cat can come and go but the dog doesn't have access. Do this before you even take the dog home and make it part of your cat's routine. You don't want your cat's daily life to be too disrupted by the new dog. Your new dog should have a confinement area where he is kept when you're not able to pay 100% attention to his behavior as he settles in to a new house. This can be another room, a crate (only if your new pup is crate trained), or an area in the home that is gated off.

## **Before the Introduction**

If your new dog doesn't already know the cues "sit," "down," "come," "stay," and "leave it," you should begin working on them, as well as working on attention-getting exercises like "touch" and "look at me." Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a cat. Even if your dog already knows these cues, continue to practice them with food treats as

a reward. Do keep in mind that even if your new dog is already excelling at “sit” or “come,” he may not be so motivated when the cat runs past him.

### **The Introduction Process**

Keep your new pup on a leash at all times during this process. This will help you and your cat feel safe as you both get to know your new family member. Allow your cat to resume normal activities, whether that means staying in the safe room or walking around the house. If your cat starts to approach your new dog to investigate him, keep him busy by practicing some of those new tricks he’s working on. We don’t want him to stare at or be frightened by the cat. Keep introductions short—if the dog or cat wants to sniff, let them for a few seconds (if both are comfortable), and then walk away with your pup. As much as possible, we want all interactions to end on a positive note.

You can help this process by scent swapping when the animals are not interacting. Either switch their beds or switch up some of their bedding. If your cat has special bedding, just put a new towel in both the dog and cat’s beds, then switch the towels after a few days. The goal is to give both animals an opportunity to smell each other without having to be face to face.

Try your best to not put tension on the dog’s leash during these interactions. He doesn’t need so much slack in the leash that he can run and chase the cat, but just enough so that you aren’t putting any tension on his collar. Adding this additional tension can make the dog feel unnecessarily tense when meeting the cat which can lead to a more negative outcome.

Remember that lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don’t drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable or either animal becomes uncomfortable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other’s presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

### **Positive Reinforcement**

Your new dog may need to be taught how to behave appropriately around the cat, so you’ll want to reward him often with lots of praise and treats. We want your dog to experience lots of good things when your cat is around in order to build that positive relationship. And remember, this goes both ways! Be sure to reward your cat when the dog is around as well.

## **Long-term Management**

Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe. This may take weeks, months, or you may never want to leave them home alone together. Either way, be sure your cat has plenty of escape routes to get away from the dog if necessary. This may include a separate room your dog doesn't have access to, a tall cat tree or tall shelving, etc.

## **Precautions**

Dogs like to eat cat food! You should keep the cat food out of your dog's reach. If you tend to leave food out all the time for your cat, it's best to put it up on a shelf or in the cat's safe room. If you only feed during meal times, you may be able to keep your dog occupied and away from the cat's food (either confined in another part of the house, out on a walk, etc.) and continue to feed your cat on the floor. Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behavior in dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it may not be a behavior you prefer. It also may be disruptive or upsetting to your cat to have their space occupied or invaded.

Unfortunately, any aversives you use to keep your dog away from the litter box will keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior either. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it, just be sure your cat still has easy access.

## **Kittens, Puppies, and Senior Cats**

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured or killed by a young, energetic, or predatory dog. Take extra care when introducing a dog and kitten, and never leave a kitten alone with the dog.

Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to teach a new puppy the rules of the house, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this, especially if your puppy is very playful and rambunctious. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to slow down the introduction process and manage the two more closely.

Senior cats may have trouble jumping up on tall shelving or navigating barriers to get away from your new dog, so be sure to take extra care to set them up for success and safety.

## **When to Get Help**

If introductions don't go smoothly or if you have any questions about the introduction

process, please contact Homeward Pet Adoption Center's Animal Behavior Manager or seek other professional help immediately. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve.