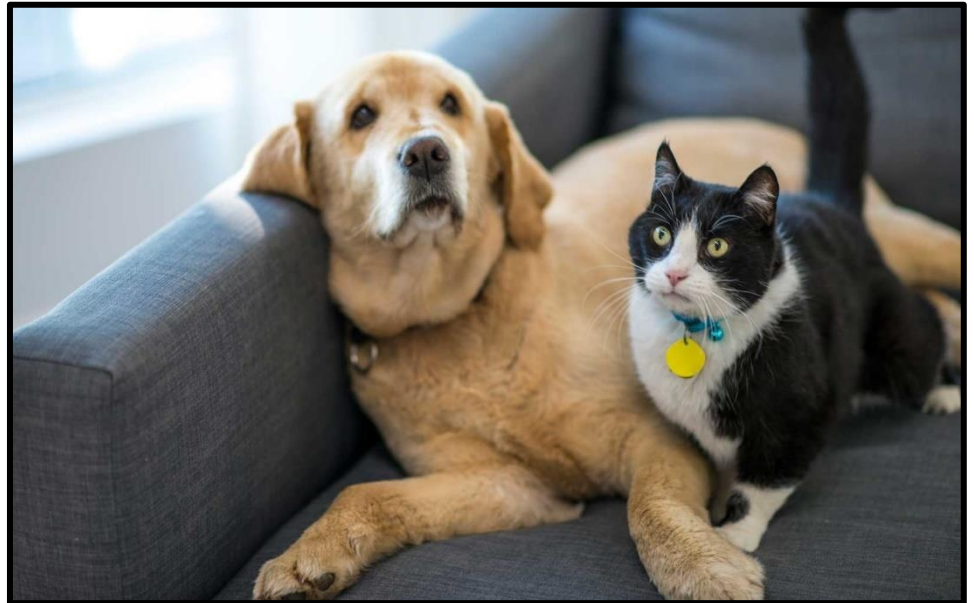


Successfully Introducing Cats and Kittens to Dogs

Many dogs and cats can live harmoniously together if introduced properly and supervised appropriately. Whether you are adding a new cat or a new dog to your household, the top priority is always safety. A cat might be able to live safely and happily with some dogs, but not others, so even if your cat has lived with dogs before, use caution and proceed slowly when introducing your cat to a new dog.



When introducing your cat to a dog, it is best to introduce her to only one dog at a time. It is also important to have at least two people present, one to handle the dog's leash and the other to tend to the cat. In the initial introduction, make sure that the two animals first clearly see and become aware of the presence of each other. If one of the animals has not seen the other before the other gets too near, fear and panic may result. Even if the two animals appear to be exhibiting playful behavior, slow down any approaches until it is clear that neither pet is anxious or frightened.

Observing canine and feline body language

The first thing you want to do is pay attention to the body language of both animals. Ideally, the body language of both pets will be loose and relaxed. Watch how they look at each other. As you watch the dog, notice whether he can look at the cat and then look away. If he cannot, this may indicate that he is too excited or aroused. Observe the dog's head and face; if the dog appears excessively focused on the cat, try calling him or snapping your fingers. If you can distract him relatively easily, his behavior suggests he does not have an unhealthy degree of interest in the cat.

If your dog has a strong prey drive, he might become very focused on the cat. (A prey drive is the inclination to seek out, chase and potentially capture animals seen as prey — usually smaller animals such as cats or rabbits.) He will stiffen, stare, glare, and may start barking or whining. If you see these signs, do not let the cat and dog get close to one another (yet). It is OK if the dog pays attention to the cat, but you do not want to see him fixated on her.

How the cat looks at the dog is equally important but pay attention to the other forms of feline body language, too. Once the cat has seen the dog, observe whether the cat seems relaxed. A relaxed cat will move about calmly and confidently, will not glare at the new dog, and will not try to flee from the dog. If the cat is growling, hissing, or attempting to scratch, it means she is currently uncomfortable. That does not necessarily mean that she won't accept the dog; it might just take a little more time.

Keep in mind that a new interaction or relationship may not succeed in the first few minutes or even the first few days. During the introductory period, you want to always supervise and be ready to separate the animals if any conflicts arise.

In addition, keep in mind that a cat's interaction with a dog can change depending on the environment. For example, your cat might be fine with the dog when they are inside the house, but outside in the yard, the cat may feel more exposed and therefore show more fear. The dog might fixate on the cat and start chasing her when they are outside together. So, be aware of their body language around each other in each new situation, until you know how they respond to each other.

Ways to introduce a cat to a dog

You can introduce a cat to a dog in several different ways. Even if the cat has had experience with dogs and the dog has lived with a cat before, always proceed with caution. As mentioned above, it's best to have a "handler" for each pet. And again, if you have more than one dog, introduce each dog separately to the cat.

Here are some basic steps for introducing a cat and a dog:

Before starting the introduction, let your new family member settle in by confining him or her to an enclosed area of the house for a few days.

Start exposure through a single, closed, solid door. The dog and cat won't be able to see each other, but they will be able to hear and smell each other. Start with very short exposure (less than a minute) and gradually prolong the duration of the sessions.

Next, let them see each other at a distance, through a barrier like a strong gate or a screen door. A double barrier is recommended at first. Don't use glass doors, since some dogs get anxious when they can see but can't smell or hear the other animal. If the dog is large or especially enthusiastic, have him leashed as an extra precaution. Working at a distance helps both animals get used to each other at their own pace. Again, start with short sessions of letting them see each other, and gradually lengthen the sessions.

Watch the body language of both pets to get clues about how they are feeling. If you notice any signs of stress, stop and allow them to calm down. Then try again later with shorter sessions and more distance between them.

If there are no signs of stress, work on training the dog to give you eye contact and calm behavior whenever the cat is visible.

When the cat and dog no longer respond to each other when they see each other from behind the barrier, start doing sessions with no barrier, but with the dog securely on leash (and muzzled for extra safety, if you wish, and if your dog has been trained to wear a muzzle).

For more detailed information on several different options for introducing cats and dogs, see "How to Introduce a Dog to a Cat."

Calming products for cats

These products can help calm cats who are fearful, anxious or very excitable:

NurtureCALM 24/7 feline calming collar

Feliway pheromone diffuser or spray

Nutritional supplements (including Nutri-Calm, Zylkene and Solliquin), to be used as advised by your veterinarian

ThunderShirt or Ace bandage wraps

Kitten and puppy introductions

Kitten and puppy introductions require special consideration and caution. Kittens may not be scared of adult dogs or puppies at first. Nevertheless, kittens are small and fragile and can be easily hurt, especially if an adult dog has a strong prey drive. Supervise their interactions whenever they are together to ensure that everyone stays safe.

Some well-socialized adult cats tolerate puppies well. However, if your puppy is super high-energy and wants to chase your cat, you will need to intervene to prevent the puppy from making a habit out of chasing the cat. Consider keeping the puppy on a leash to manage his or her behavior and read this resource for more tips and advice.

Seeking professional help with dog-cat introductions

Dogs and cats who are well-socialized often adjust quickly to a new animal in the family. However, if either animal is struggling with the change in your household, you may want to enlist the help of an experienced relationship-based dog trainer or behavior consultant. One of the most important things to remember is to never punish either animal because it will not solve the problem and could make the situation worse.

“Successfully Introducing Cats and Kittens to Dogs.” Best Friends Animal Society, resources.bestfriends.org/article/successfully-introducing-cats-and-kittens-dogs.