

Introducing Your Cat to a New Dog



Many dogs and cats get along very well. Dogs who are gentle and friendly and aren't squirrel-chasing, predatory types can be great housemates with cats. Even dogs who do chase small prey outdoors can often learn not to chase or harm cats indoors once they've grown accustomed to their household cats as family members. Although you should carefully prepare and supervise your new dog, you should have little trouble integrating him into your household if he's lived peacefully with a cat before or if your cat has lived with a dog. But keep in mind that dogs and cats, like people, need time to get to know each other. If they've never seen each other before, they probably won't be instant friends.

Since cats take awhile to accept new cats, your cat might not accept a new dog as quickly as you'd like. It might take years for a trusting, mutually agreeable relationship to develop between a cat and dog who live together. The younger, more energetic and more tolerant your cat is and the smaller, calmer and more obedient your new dog is, the more likely it is that your cat will accept living with a canine companion.

Know What to Expect

Dogs who have never lived with cats usually react to them one of three ways:

- **Play.** Your new dog might treat your cat like another dog and try to play with her, particularly if your dog is young and your cat is inquisitive and approaches him. If your cat is young and your dog is small, this interaction can lay the groundwork for a strong, relationship between the two. However, it's more common for cats to react defensively to an invitation to play from a strange dog—or even a new, young cat. Cats generally don't play as rambunctiously as dogs, and dogs often chase and bite during play. If your cat is older or your new dog is large, your dog's playful behavior can be even more problematic. Play between dogs and cats should be closely monitored. Playful dogs often don't respond appropriately to a cat's

- signals to stop, and the tension or aggression between the two can escalate rapidly, causing the cat distress and putting her in danger. Keep in mind that a dog can kill a cat easily, even in play. And a scared or angry cat can use her claws to seriously injure a dog.
- Prey. Unfortunately, dogs often perceive cats as prey. This is especially likely if your cat runs when she sees a dog. Your new dog might respond to your cat's movement as he would to the movement of a fleeing prey animal. He might chase and even kill your cat. Similarly, cats who have never lived with dogs will likely view them as predators and will run or become defensively aggressive.
 - Cautious interest or avoidance. An older or quieter dog might be intimidated by your cat, particularly if she's young or rambunctious. He might approach your cat cautiously or watch her from a distance and avoid her whenever possible.

Cats who have never lived with dogs generally react to them one of two ways:

- Cautious interest or avoidance. Cats who were raised with dogs, young or confident cats, and cats living in multicat households might accept a new dog as a safe and interesting intruder. Their reaction might be to watch the dog from a distance or approach him inquisitively.
- Defensive antagonism. Many cats don't accept the introduction of new animals well. They consider other animals as intruders in their territory. And cats, unlike dogs, don't have a built-in social system that helps them to peacefully share territory. They react defensively.

How to Set Up Safe, Successful Introductions

It's up to you to protect your cat and set up introductions carefully so that she feels safe and has a pleasant experience getting acquainted with your new dog.

Here are some suggestions for making the most of introductions:

- Trim your cat's claws to keep the interaction as safe as possible for your new dog. (To learn how, please see our article, [Trimming Your Cat's Claws](#) ^[1], for detailed instructions.)
- First impressions are important to a cat, so you want the initial meetings to be as stress-free as possible for her. Before you bring your cat and new dog together, prepare for their first introduction by working with your cat to teach her to redirect her attention to you.
- Begin by identifying some treats that she likes best. Most cats prefer soft foods heavy with scent, like tuna or small pieces of chicken.
- Bring your cat and the treats into the room where you'll likely do your introductions. Then wait for her to look away from you. When she's not looking at you, say her name. When she looks back, quickly praise her and give her a treat. Gradually allow her to get further away before you call her name so that she has to move toward you to get the treats. Never yell or discipline her if she doesn't react to her name. After some practice, she'll begin to respond consistently because she'll learn that when she responds to her name, you give her treats. If you attempt to discipline her for not responding, she could easily associate her name with your anger—and that's the opposite of what you want to teach her!
- Before you introduce your new dog and your cat, work with your dog separately to teach or refresh some obedience skills. Two important exercises for him to learn well are a recall (coming when called) and a "leave it" exercise. When your dog has learned these skills, you can control him if he gets overexcited around your cat. If you're not sure how to teach your dog these skills, please see our articles, [Teaching Your Dog to Come When Called](#) ^[2], [Teaching Your Dog to "Leave It"](#) ^[3] and [Training Your Dog](#) ^[4]. Also, don't hesitate to contact a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) in your area for assistance. Please see our

article, [Finding Professional Help](#) ^[5], to locate a CPDT near you.

- At first, confine your new dog to a room using a baby gate. Don't restrict your cat or change her environment any more than necessary. You can start to introduce your cat and your dog near the doorway to that room, with the baby gate between them.
- To prepare for this first meeting, start by taking your dog outside and running him around to help him work off a bit of energy. Bring delicious treats that your new dog will love, like bite-sized pieces of chicken or cheese. Practice sit, down and stay after he's run around for a while and seems to be getting tired. Then bring him inside and put him in his room, behind the baby gate.
- Next, fill your pockets with your cat's favorite treats. If your new dog is rambunctious, put his leash on him and have someone on his side of the gate to handle the leash.
- Sit in front of the door and call your cat. Have your dog lie down or sit to keep him from behaving threateningly as she approaches.
- When your cat comes, toss her a treat. Praise and treat your dog as well if he behaves calmly in her presence. Do this several times each day for a couple of days. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats and vice versa.
- If your dog overreacts to your cat and does something that makes your cat back away from him, distract him and get his attention focused on you. Avoid accomplishing this by using leash corrections. Instead, get your dog's attention by asking him to sit or lie down. Use treats to reward him for his fabulous obedience when something as interesting and distracting as your cat is nearby! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate and get closer to your dog or to retreat if she wants to. Reward her any time she approaches the baby gate by tossing her treats.
- Let your cat set the pace. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting her into a crate or carrier or restricting her movement in any way. If she doesn't seem afraid of your dog, or if she even tries to jump over the gate to see him, you can introduce them in your living room or another large room with your dog on leash. Once you're in the larger room, make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. She should have the freedom and room to retreat, run and hide, slip beneath a piece of furniture where the dog can't follow, or jump up on something that puts her above your dog. Continue introductions until your pets interact in a calm, friendly manner. Cats often bat at a dog they accept with their claws sheathed or rub against him, and dogs respond by gently nudging back or offering a play bow.
- Keep your dog on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold it firmly in case your dog decides to try to chase your cat. Use your recall and "leave it" exercises if your dog starts nosing or following your cat and she seems perturbed. When you ask your dog to come to you or leave your cat alone and he responds, be sure to give him a special treat.
- If your dog seems friendly or cautious, not much intervention on your part is required except to praise and reward your dog for his good manners and your cat for her tolerance.
- Be careful to watch your cat as well as your dog. One well-aimed cat paw with all claws extended can cause serious injury to a dog.
- Interrupt any chasing, barking or agitated behavior from your dog by using a leash to move him away from your cat. Redirect his attention to another activity, or ask him to do some easy obedience exercises for food rewards. To redirect your cat's attention, call her name and use treat rewards like you practiced before bringing your new dog home. Avoid scolding your dog, yelling at him or jerking on his leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your cat and dog to associate each other with pleasant experiences. You don't want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and that bad things happen when the other pet is around. Dogs are more likely to engage in chase or prey behavior

when they're tense or aroused, and cats develop many undesirable behaviors—such as urine marking, excessive grooming, hiding and aggression—when they're stressed or anxious.

- When you're not around or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of your house. Most dogs and cats can share a home in harmony once they've gradually become accustomed to each other over time. However, if your dog chases your cat or ever shows intolerance toward your cat in your presence—such as growling when she walks past while he's chewing a bone or being petted by you—keep them separated in your absence.
- Your dog shouldn't have access to your cat's litter box. If he does, it will be highly stressful to your cat, and your dog might eat the feces and litter.
- To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding her on a high surface, like a windowsill, a dresser, a shelf or cat tree furniture.

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c5974545-7461-4cbc-a371-9e5c44e848a6

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