

Introducing Your Dog to a New Cat



Many dogs and cats get along very well, especially if they've grown up with each other or have prior experience living with the other species. But dogs who have never lived with cats are more likely to treat cats like other dogs and try to play with them—or like prey animals and try to chase and possibly kill them. Similarly, cats who have never lived with dogs will likely view them as predators and will run away or become defensively aggressive. Keep in mind that a dog can kill a cat very easily, even in play. But if your dog is gentle and friendly, and he's not a squirrel-chasing predatory type, he may be a good candidate for successfully living with a cat. And in general, kittens and laid-back cats are good candidates for successfully living with a dog.

It's up to you to protect your new cat and set up introductions carefully so that she feels safe and has a pleasant experience getting acquainted with your dog. Here are some suggestions for making the most of your cat-and-dog introductions:

- First impressions are important to a cat, so you want the initial meetings to be as stress-free as possible for her. Accordingly, prepare for the arrival of your new cat by working with your dog to refresh his obedience skills. Two exercises that are important for him to do well when asked are a recall (coming when called) and a “leave it” exercise. These skills will help you control your dog 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](#) [1], [Teaching Your Dog to “Leave It”](#) [2] and [Training Your Dog](#) [3]. Don't hesitate to contact a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) in your area for assistance. Please see our article, [Finding Professional Help](#) [4], to locate a CPDT near you.
- At first, confine your new cat in a room with her food, water and litter box (please see our article, [Introducing Your Cat to a New House](#) [5], for information on how to make your new cat comfortable in her new home). You can start to introduce your cat and your dog by the doorway to that room. Fill your pockets with treats that your dog loves, like bite-sized pieces of chicken or cheese, and treats that your cat will love as well, such as bits of meat

or tuna. Keep the door open but block it with a baby gate. Walk your dog slowly by the doorway several times each day for a couple of days. Praise and treat him for calm behavior, and then toss the cat a treat as well. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats. If your dog overreacts to the cat, 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 do basic obedience skills, like Sit and Down. Use delicious treats to reward him for his obedience in the presence of something as tempting and distracting as your new cat! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate to get closer to the dog or to retreat if she wants to. Reward her any time she approaches the baby gate by tossing her treats.

- Let your new cat set the pace. If she chooses to run and hide under the furniture when you and your dog walk by, let her. It simply means your introductions will take longer—maybe weeks longer. Taking things slow will help to avoid a bad first impression. Keep in mind that cats can take months to form relationships with other animals. 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 your cat doesn't seem afraid of your dog as you pass by the doorway of her room, or if she even tries to jump over the gate, you can introduce them in your living room or other large 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 higher than the dog.
- Keep your dog with you on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold onto it 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 very special treat.
- When you're not present or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of the house.
- 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.
- 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 skills for food rewards. Avoid scolding, yelling or jerking on your dog's leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your dog and cat to learn a pleasant association with each other's presence. You don't want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and bad things happen when the cat or dog is around. Dogs are more likely to engage in chase or prey behavior when they're tense or aroused.
- Most cats will accept a young dog and correct him when necessary. Be sure your cat's nails are trimmed before bringing her home so that she doesn't hurt your dog if she corrects him.
- 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 may eat the feces and litter.
- To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding your cat on a high surface, like a window sill, dresser, shelf or cat tree furniture.

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