



Cat to Dog Introductions

While “fighting like cats and dogs” may be a common phrase, it doesn’t have to be! Introducing your new cat or dog to your resident cat or dog can be successful with a strategic plan and a bit of patience.

Good canine candidates for living with cats.

- Puppies, or adult dogs that have successfully lived with a cat before.
- Laid-back, relaxed, friendly dogs.
- Dogs with a low predatory drive.

Good feline candidates for living with dogs.

- Relaxed, laid-back cats and kittens.
- Cats with dog experience.

Not-so-good feline candidates for living with dogs.

- Shy, skittish, and de-clawed cats. De-clawed cats are more vulnerable and are likely to behave aggressively when cornered.

Cats who have not lived with dogs almost always behave defensively the first time they meet a new dog. If the dog doesn’t come on too strong, and if the cat is given dog-free zones to retreat to, many cats will gradually get used to the dog and sometimes even become bonded. (But this can take weeks or months, so be patient.)

How to introduce cats and dogs

Step 1. Keep the dog and cat apart for the first week before you try an introduction.

Step 2. Have the dog on leash to avoid stressing the cat and any flat-out chasing. You can also employ the use of a baby gate for separation. Have the dog sit and take treats near the cat. Also have someone provide treats for the cat. Your dog should be able to be calm and focus on you in the presence of the cat. Look for the following signals from your dog:

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Good Signals

Play Bows
Loose Tail Wagging
Full Body Wiggling
Relaxed Mouth/Jaw
Soft Relaxed Eyes

Warning Signals (STOP!)

Stiff Body Posturing
Whale Eyes (Seeing the whites of the eyes)
Dilated Pupils
Tense Mouth/Jaw
Chattering Teeth
Growling or Barking
Teeth Showing
Hair Standing Up

Repeat Step 2 several times before moving on.

Step 3. If both your dog and cat are relaxed when a gate and/or leash is present, you can bring the dog over to meet the cat. Contact should be brief (3 seconds), then gently call your dog back to you and provide treats. Your dog should be able to easily return focus to you, and your cat should have ample opportunity to escape if they feel the need.

Step 4. If the initial intros go well, drop the leash and supervise closely. If the dog is friendly or cautious with the cat, don't get involved in their interactions, except to praise and reward the dog for good manners. Interrupt chasing and give a time-out by removing the dog from the room. To make this easier, keep the dog on leash around the cat until you have worked out a routine.

Step 5. Watch closely for the first few weeks. Are things getting better or worse? Supervise all interactions until you see a positive pattern in their relationship. If the dog is the newcomer, give plenty of extra attention to the cat so she doesn't associate the dog with reduced attention and affection. If the newcomer is the cat, make sure the dog associates the family addition with good things for him.

To be absolutely safe, separate your dog and your cat when you are not at home to supervise.

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General advice for dog/cat households.

- Above all, be patient. The more gradual and gentle you make the process, the better your chance of success.
- Have a dog-free room (use baby-gates, cat doors) as well as high places the cat can access but the dog cannot. The cat needs places where she can regroup in peace and then venture forward into 'dog territory' at her own pace. Make sure food, water, and litter are accessible in this area.
- Never force the cat to be close to the dog by holding her, caging her, or otherwise restricting her. This is stressful and, aside from being inhumane, stress is a common reason for cats to break litter box training.
- Dogs should not have access to the cat litter box or feeding area—it is too stressful for the cat.
- A useful management exercise for cat-dog interactions is to practice sit-stays for treats with your dog when the cat is present.

If you are concerned about the safety of your pets, or have questions about the introductions, please call us for training advice! Our team of certified behavior professionals are ready to offer counseling and training when you need it.

For more resources about learning to understand cat and dog body language, we recommend creating a free Fear Free Happy Homes account. There are many articles and videos about how to help your multi-species family live together harmoniously. <https://fearfreehappyhomes.com/>

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