



INTRODUCING CATS AND DOGS

Cats and dogs have traditionally been considered sworn enemies, but with selection of the right individuals and careful introductions, they can often get on very well – generally more so than cats and other non-related cats.

There are several aspects to consider in order to achieve successful introductions. Very close relationships between dogs and cats are usually a result of positive early experiences and socialisation for both species, but can also be achieved with careful and patient introductions of adult pets.

If the dog or cat has lived with the other species before, this will help the process as they will probably be much less stressed (*or excited in the case of some dogs*), by the presence of another creature. If you are unsure how your dog will react, then care must be taken – for example, terriers or chasing breeds may be much more driven by their natural chasing instincts than some other breeds.

PLAN TO SUCCEED!

When introducing cats and dogs, first and foremost we need to ensure that whichever animal is already resident in the home, is as unaffected as possible.

CONSIDER THE SPACE

Whether it's a new dog coming home to a resident cat, or vice versa, the existing pet needs to have a safe place to be, which contains all of their necessary and desired resources such as food, water, toys, sleeping areas etc (and litter trays, scratching posts, perching and hiding places for resident cats). Extra resources may need to be purchased and distributed throughout the home so the cat and dog do not have to share.

The safe space should ideally be where the pet normally chooses to be, and they feel safe and happy. For example – if a resident cat likes to spend their time upstairs then leave them there and make that the centre of their world for a while; likewise if a resident dog spends most time downstairs then let them stay there. Initially the home will need to be “*time-shared*” so that each pet can have their own safe space to happily occupy without needing to encounter each other, so plan ahead of who will live where.

The safe space should allow the resident pet to live without any major curtailments of freedoms, choices or permissions. For example, can the resident cat access the cat flap when it wishes, or its favourite perch on top of the bookshelf? Can the resident dog roam in and out to the garden as it usually does?

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SET UP NEW RESOURCES GRADUALLY

Plan ahead where new resources will be placed, such as the new pet's bedding, feeding stations, toys etc, and start gradually introducing them around the home a few weeks in advance to avoid too many changes all in one go. This will allow the resident pet to adjust to novelty in the home before the new cat/dog arrives.

ENSURE THE NEW ARRIVAL MEANS EXTRA GOOD THINGS HAPPEN FOR THE RESIDENT PET

As well as keeping things as normal as possible, it is vital to resist the temptation to spend too much time with the new arrival, meaning exclusion of the resident pet. Of course they should be allowed time to rest and not be bothered by people, but plan extra good things in your resident pet's life for when the new addition arrives – ideally little and often.

Extra opportunity should be provided for play time; puzzle feeders; human interaction such as strokes and cuddles (if the pet values that); additional walks for resident dogs; one-to-one training sessions. Basically, whatever the pet loves, increase it, to help build positive associations with their new situation and house-mate.

MAKING THE INTRODUCTIONS

Some new pets will take a while to settle into their new home, whilst others will settle quite quickly. Once they have had time to relax into their new environment and are confident to explore and access all of their resources, then its time to think about how to introduce your cat and dog to each other.

This should always be a gradual process – **taking things slowly in the beginning will give you the best chance of a good outcome and peaceful household with happy pets**, who may at best form friendly relationships, or at least accept each other's presence calmly.

Care should be taken to avoid any bad experiences during this time, for example, seeing each other when they are excited or fearful, which may lead to a barking dog or hissing cat, and potentially chasing. Such experiences will only set them up for future negative expectations of each other.



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STEP 1: Scent swapping

Before any face-to-face introductions, the new housemates should be introduced via scent swapping. Both cats and dogs rely heavily on scent and chemical communication, so will be able to start gathering information about each other by scent. This can be achieved by rubbing a cloth on the dog or leaving it in their bed, then placing it into the cat's area, and vice versa.

The scented item should initially be placed away from the cat's valued resources in case it causes anxiety and prevents the cat from accessing what they need. Scent swapping can be repeated over a few days, gradually rubbing each other's scents onto the other's resources, providing they appear relaxed about the other's odour. Some scent swapping will also occur naturally as owners move between each pet's space, carrying the odour of the other on hands and clothing etc.

STEP 2: Investigating each other's space

Once both pets appear interested (*but calm*) about, or ignore, the other's scent, then it's time to move onto allowing them to investigate each other's areas. Start by allowing the new arrival to explore the "gap" area outside their space (such as an adjacent corridor) and then beyond. Your resident dog can then investigate the area your new cat has been exploring, once the cat has returned to their current living space. As things progress and both pets appear comfortable, then your cat can be allowed to investigate your dog's living space whilst they are out on a walk.

Because of the nature of how dogs are generally trained, socialised and habituated, it will often be easier for a new dog to comfortably explore, whereas a new cat may take longer to feel relaxed in its new territory, especially one with a dog.

STEP 3: Visual contact

Once all is going well with the previous steps, small amounts of visual contact can begin. This needs to happen whilst both pets are calm, with no opportunity to directly approach one another, and both should be able to escape if they wish, without becoming trapped.

PLEASE NOTE – Neither pet must be confined or excessively restricted during this step. For example, do not place the cat or dog in a crate and allow the other to approach as this could prove very distressing for the individual in the crate who has no choice of escape in the face of an advancing threat. Your cat should be free to retreat / move away, with access to hiding places close by, whilst your dog should be gently restrained without force using a well fitted body harness connected to a loose lead.

A partially covered barrier such as a baby gate mainly covered by a draped towel, should be used for visual introductions. This should also happen whilst both pets are positively engaged in a calm enjoyable activity such as a toy-game with their human, or a self-directed puzzle feeder. Initially a lot of distance should be allowed between the pets, and sessions kept short.



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Visual access to each other can start to be increased (gradually uncover the baby gate), if both pets are relaxed, and you can allow them to move a little closer to each other whilst still keeping the sessions short and providing lots of calm and positive experiences and human interaction when each other are present.

Both pets should be under constant supervision for any outward signs of arousal such as fear or excitement, changes in body language or posture. Ensure sessions are ended whilst both pets are relaxed in each other's presence. As both pets get used to each other, reward-giving can start to be gradually thinned out, allowing them to take more time to engage with each other, and they can then be rewarded for calm behaviour.

STEP 4: Actual Contact

Depending on the individual's involved, there will come a point when your cat and dog have smelled, heard and seen each other for long enough to know about each other. They will have been kept apart to prevent problematic interactions, and they will have been rewarded for being calm around each other.

When it is anticipated that they will be able to share a space comfortably, then the barriers can come down for a while. Introductions should always be under direct supervision, with active monitoring and prevention of problems with positive distractions. A lure such as a toy or treat can be used to guide and reward positive behaviour and interactions, and also to create space between your cat and dog, by luring them away from one another if any tension occurs or one shows signs of being uncomfortable.

- It is important to avoid "*crisis management*" – i.e. swooping in and grabbing a pet if things look tense, as this will elevate arousal levels and lead to a negative experience which may be detrimental to their future relationship.
- The dog should be on a harness and lead, and their behaviour and body language monitored for increased arousal. The cat should be able to move and retreat freely, so long as they are not coming directly into the dog's space. The dog's lead should be viewed as a "*just in case*", rather than providing restraint – it should be loose with the dog relaxed; if the lead has gone tight then the situation is overwhelming for the dog. In this case, end the session and plan to try again when there is more space, and the dog is positively engaged such as feeding from a puzzle feeder. Try to pick a time when both pets are naturally calm and ready to settle. If the cat is boldly approaching the dog and the dog is not comfortable, then gently interrupt and divert them away from each other with food treats or play. If the cat appears anxious, gently encourage them to retreat, hide or perch to help them feel safe and observe from a distance. Both pets should appear relaxed – if there's any doubt they are not then end the session rather than allowing it to go wrong.
- Ideally have 2 people involved in the process. This means that one person can quietly watch and supervise a pet each, whilst communicating what each other are seeing and doing.
- Keep initial sessions brief and positive, gradually allowing more time for them to just be in each other's presence.
- As long as things are going well, when the time is judged to be right, then the dog's lead can be dropped and allowed to trail so that it can be gently picked up if necessary.

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