



INTRODUCING PETS

(information from the MSPCA, U.S. Humane Society, Tufts Veterinary School and Best Friends)

It would be wonderful if all it took to introduce a new pet to your resident pet were a handshake and labels saying, “Hello, my name is...”. Unfortunately, it’s not that simple. Your pets may never become best buddies, but in most cases, they’ll at least tolerate one another.

An animal’s upbringing, temperament, and genetics determine its sociability. If an animal was not raised with another pet, it has to learn how to socialize with animals before it can learn how to live with one. An 8-year-old cat who has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory with other pets. But a 12-week-old kitten separated from her mom and siblings will enjoy having an animal buddy.

First impressions are lasting for people and animals. If the introduction of an old and new pet goes badly, the animals may never recover from it. We can’t emphasize enough that pets must be introduced very slowly. The process can take from a few weeks to several months. If your new pet is younger, the process can go faster, but for older pets set in their ways, it can take a long time. Several short introductions over a few days or weeks are better than one long interaction that starts great and ends badly. Give each animal time to relax before moving forward with the next step.

Never let animals work things out on their own or force them to meet face-to-face – and never leave a small pet alone with a larger pet. The small animal could be seriously injured or killed.

INTRODUCING DIFFERENT SPECIES

Dogs, cats and small pets (such as rodents, rabbits and birds) are not natural allies. Although some become buddies, the odds are greater that the small critter could be harmed or killed. Even if your dog or cat is laid back, trying to establish an inter-species friendship is very stressful for the prey animal.

CAT AND DOG INTRODUCTION PROCESS

Before getting a cat, be honest with yourself about your dog’s temperament. If he has a high prey drive or won’t share his toys and food, it might not be safe to introduce another pet into the home.

Obedience: Before getting a cat, your dog needs to know basic commands like *come*, *leave it*, *off*, and *stay*. Learn what motivates your dog – try small pieces of cheese, hot dogs, tennis balls – whatever does it for your dog. These high value incentives will increase your dog’s motivation to perform, which will be necessary with the strong distraction of a cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, reinforce them often with treats.

Separation: Introduce dogs and cats through a baby gate or screen door. If it’s a solid door, they’ll smell and see one another under it. Feed the pets on either side of the barrier. Reward calm behavior with treats and praise. Slowly, move the food dishes closer to the barrier until they’re eating comfortably on either side of the barrier.

Controlled Meetings: After your cat and dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, put a leash on your dog and have him either sit or lie down and stay for treats. Have a second person offer your cat some treats. At first, the cat and dog should be on opposite sides of the room. The cat may hiss, swat the dog or run away. The dog may be very excited and want to chase the cat. Don't allow your dog to lunge at or chase the cat. The dog finds it fun; the cat's fear of the dog is confirmed, and the cat runs faster next time as does the dog. A cat can be the instigator, too, by harassing a dog beyond its ability to cope.

Watch for signs of intense fear, excitement, becoming very still and staring intently at the other animal. Even if a cat and dog seem to get along well, continue to supervising them until you are confident their interactions are safe.

Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

Give Your Cat Freedom: Next, allow your cat to explore your dog at her own pace while the dog is still leashed and in a down-stay command. Keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his stay position, reposition him with a treat and praise him for obeying the stay command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're going too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps.

Positive Reinforcement: Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with the cat is unacceptable, he must also be taught what is appropriate and be rewarded for those behaviors, such as sitting, coming when called or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around and never has good things happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression on the cat. Never punish either animal for its reaction, because it can create an association in the animal's mind between the

punishment and the other animal – and ruin any chance at a friendly relationship.

Supervise All Interactions: Keep your dog at your side and on a leash whenever your cat is free in the home during the introduction period. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Until you're certain your cat will be safe, keep the two separated when you aren't home.

Kittens and Puppies: Because they're so small, kittens are in more danger of being injured or killed by a dog. Keep a kitten separated from an energetic dog until she is fully grown except for supervised interaction. Even after the cat is fully grown, it may not be safe to leave her alone with the dog. Usually, a well-socialized cat can keep a puppy in his place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures to have more self-control.

CAT AND CAT INTRODUCTION PROCESS

Never walk into your home with a new pet and just turn it loose to work things out with the other pets. Most likely you will end up with traumatized animals who may never recover from that first meeting. You will also have fights that could injure or kill one of your pets; you could get hurt as well. All of that trauma and medical bills can be prevented by following these steps.

A cat's natural instinct is to find a hiding place to study a new animal or situation, which why cats need slow introductions, so they can get used to each other before a face-to-face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing.

Confinement: Confine your new cat to one room with a litter box, food, water, bed and toys. Feed your resident pets and the new cat on either side of the door, so they associate something enjoyable with each other's smells. Gradually, move the dishes closer to the door until the cats eat calmly just inches from one another with the door between them.

Switcherou: Swap the sleeping blankets/beds used by the cats so they become accustomed to the other cat's scents. Rub a towel on one animal and put it with the other cat. Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly, let her have free time in your home while confining the other cats in the new cat's room. This switch allows the cats to experience one another's scents without a face-to-face meeting that could scare them. Next, after the cats have explored one another's areas, open the dividing door just enough to allow the cats to see one another while you stand there. Repeat the process over a period of days.

If small spats (hissing, growling or posturing) occur between your cats, don't intervene directly to separate them. Instead, make a loud

noise, toss a pillow or use a squirt bottle with water to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down before reintroducing them to each other.

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional advice from your veterinarian or animal-behavior specialist. Luckily, most conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional guidance.

It can't be emphasized enough to introduce pets slowly. Expect a mild protest from either cat from time to time, but don't allow those behaviors to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them and start the introduction process over again. It's a tortoise and hare process: slow and steady wins the race.

