

Introducing Cats & Dogs



When introducing a new cat or dog to your pets at home, slow and steady wins the race. It is extremely important that you allow your new pet to settle into their new home before introducing your resident pet into the mix. You must be prepared and in control of the situation to ensure both dog and cat have a positive experience during the introduction process. If you have multiple pets, each should be introduced to the newcomer separately.

Step 1: Setting up Home-base

Create a safe space for the newcomer in your home that is completely separate from your resident pet with everything they need (food, water, etc.). Your resident pet should have no visual or physical contact with the newcomer for at least a week before starting introductions. This will allow the newcomer to get used to their new home without overwhelming them. Be sure to spend quality time with your newcomer to build your bond while they settle in.

Step 2: Scent Swapping

Scent exchange is the first step towards making acquaintances. Exchange smelly items such as beds or blankets that each pet spends time on so they can become familiar with each other's scent.

Step 3: Shared Meals

Be sure both your pets are on a feeding schedule instead of being free fed. Your pets must be hungry for this step to be successful. Offer each pet their meal on opposite sides of the same closed door. This associates each pet's scent with positive experience of eating!

Start with their bowls a few feet away from the door, and gradually move them closer to the door each mealtime. The goal is for both pets to eat their meal directly on each side of the door. If either pet shows more interest in the door than their food, increase the value of the food (i.e. wet food or treats). If either pet shows fear or aggression, end the meal session and move the bowls back for the next session.

Step 4: Exploring New Territory

Once your newcomer is comfortable and confident in home-base, allow them to spend some time exploring more of their new home. Be sure that your resident pet is put away where they do not see or contact the newcomer so they can explore in peace.

Step 5: First Look

Have the dog on a leash and be sure that the cat can move away if it wants to. Open the door and set up a shared meal where the pets can see each other. Be sure that each pet can be distracted positively once the food is gone until the door can be closed again. Keep the food bowls far enough apart so that both pets are comfortable.

Step 6: Controlled Contact

Having a friend or family member assist in this step can be helpful. Choose a large room to introduce your pets. Block off spaces where the cat might hide down low such as under a couch or bed but be sure there are high places that the cat can get to if it wants to get away. Always have the dog on a leash and trim the cat's nails before the introduction. Allow the cat to enter the room with the dog at its own pace. Do not force the pets to interact with each other, instead, engage in play with each pet separately to positively distract them so they can share space while having a good time. If either pet becomes frightened or displays negative behaviors, separate them, and go back a few steps.

Repeat this multiple times until both pets are comfortable sharing space. Understand that they may never be best friends, but with your help, they can learn to live together safely and happily.

What to Avoid

- Never put a cat in a carrier when introducing it to a dog.
- Never leave the pets together unsupervised until you are completely sure they can coexist without incident.
- Never punish either animal for negative behavior toward the other. Simply remove them from the situation.
- Never feed the pets together after they are introduced to avoid resource guarding incidents.

If you need any additional support or have questions, please feel free to contact Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League's Behavior Department.

561.472.8815

Behavior@PeggyAdams.org