

## How to Introduce Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat

### **When you bring your new dog home...**

you are going to want her to be able to explore her new environment and meet all of her new family right away. STOP! Even though most dogs are super excited to run around and explore and meet new people and animals, you just brought this animal home from a very stressful environment. She may have just met you, then took a car ride to an unknown place, and now she is in this new place she's never been to! Your new dog is going to be very overwhelmed, even if she is taking it in good stride. Let her acclimate to you and your human family before she has to worry about strangers or other animals.

### **Your resident cat isn't going to be happy...**

Cats are very territorial by nature and most do not appreciate a stranger waltzing into their home and making themselves comfortable (how would you feel if you came home and a stranger was lounging on your couch?!). This abrupt newcomer is sure to stress out even the friendliest of cats, and you want to ensure your cat is able to cope with having a new dog around. Even if your cat has lived with dogs before, this does not mean he'll like this new individual.

### **SLOW INTRODUCTIONS = SMELL FIRST, SEE LATER**

*Even though this handout is directed towards owners bringing home a dog to their cat, the information below can also be applied to owners bringing home a cat to their dog.*

Before you even bring your dog into the house, set up a sanctuary room for your cat (somewhere with a door so he cannot get out and the dog cannot get in). Put his food, water, and litter box in here. Don't worry, it's only a temporary set up.

1. Before you even bring your dog inside, put your cat in his sanctuary room and close the door.
2. Get a towel or cloth and gently rub your dog with it -you can even put it in her bed and let her lay on it for a bit.
3. Put this dog-smelling towel in your cat's sanctuary room, under his food bowl or in his sleeping area. This will help him get used to the smell of the new dog.



4. Your new dog will smell your cat all over the house, but you can rub your cat down with a towel and put it in your dog's sleeping area to really help her get acquainted with the cat.
5. Do not let the dog or cat see each other for the first few days, even if they are really interested in checking each other out. Remember, your new dog is going through a lot of changes already!
  - a. If your cat is desperate to get out of the sanctuary room, you can wait until the new dog is put away for the night (in a room with the door shut). Then your cat can come out and sniff around the house without fear of being bombarded by an excitable newcomer! If your dog is in a crate and the cat has access to the crate, do not let the cat out -it is not fair for the dog to meet the cat while she's stuck in a crate, as she could become very frustrated! (And yes, some cats will taunt dogs!)

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT**

When you are ready to let your new dog see your cat for the first time, remember that first impressions count! If the dog is too loud, jumpy, or chases your cat, it could very easily ruin the relationship before it has begun.

### **Steps to making the meet go smoothly are:**

1. Keep your dog on a short leash -she should be very close to you.
2. Use treats to get your dog to pay attention to you (i.e. hot dogs, cheese, chicken).
3. Have someone else let the cat out and put him up high -a very tall scratching tree, a tall piece of furniture he is allowed on, etc. The higher up the better. This person should have high value treats for the cat (tuna, chicken, etc).
  - a. Make sure your cat has an easy escape route -he should be able to run away whenever he wants to.
  - b. If you don't have a person to help you, put out a bowl of high value treats right outside your cat's sanctuary room. Open the door, then move away quickly with your leashed-dog and wait for your cat to come out on his own. Your dog is not to go into the sanctuary room yet!
4. NEVER put your cat in a carrier, or hold him and let the new dog approach -this is preventing the cat from escaping a potentially terrifying experience and could result in long-term stress or defensive aggression towards the dog.
5. When the two animals see each other, calmly praise them and give them treats.
  - a. If they are able to look at each other and then ignore each other for the treats, this is a good sign! You can bring the dog a little closer and repeat.
  - b. If the dog is ignoring the treats and is too focused on the cat, move her further away from the cat and try distracting her with treats again. If this does not work, put the cat away and try again later. Keep trying until the dog learns to stay calm in the cat's presence.
    - i. If you don't have someone to help put the cat away, put your dog in another room and close the door, then put your cat back in his room and close the door, then let the dog out again.

- c. The dog and cat DO NOT have to touch each other to smell each other. There's no need to rush into getting the dog close to the cat, no matter how excited or friendly she may be.
6. Always let your cat make the first move; he is (probably) smaller than your new dog, and this was his home first. The transition will be much easier on him if he is allowed to do things at his pace. This is also a great time to teach your dog to be calm when the cat is around.
7. Keep doing these short introductions (5 minutes at a time is fine!) until both animals can remain calm around the other. Your cat will either start approaching the dog out of curiosity or walk away, either is fine.
  - a. If the cat hisses or swats the dog, do not punish him! Just praise your dog for taking it like a champ, and walk her away. Your cat just needs a bit more time.
  - b. If your dog cannot remain calm around the cat, even after several slow intros with treats, please call the Behavior Department at Mountain Humane for more tips!

### **For a long-term successful relationship:**

If you want your new dog to be respectful of your cat it is imperative that she learns that the cat is boring and you, the human, are the fun one! Always praise your dog for calm interactions with the cat (like walking up nicely to him, sniffing him, then walking away on her own, or for totally ignoring the cat). Try to avoid playing high energy games like "chase" or "tug" when the cat is in the room, as it is too easy for the dog to think the cat is in on the fun when he is not!



Some dogs and cats are going to be the best of friends and will start cuddling and playing together! As cute as this is, make sure you are supervising their interactions for the first few months, as you are still learning about your new dog and what she will and will not tolerate.

If you have any questions, or have concerns about how your dog and cat introductions are going, please reach out to the Behavior Department of Mountain Humane for free tips and guidance at [behavior@mountainhumane.org](mailto:behavior@mountainhumane.org).