

Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Dog

Congratulations on bringing home a new feline friend! You may be wondering how to safely introduce your new kitty to your dog at home, and this is not a process you should rush into. Even though cats and dogs can be the best of friends, first impressions count, and if your dog learns they can chase your cat it won't be very fun for the newcomer. If you follow along with the steps in this handout though, you'll be on your way to ensuring a happy and SAFE introduction.

What to do when you FIRST bring your cat home:

1. Put the cat in their own room –a “sanctuary room”. A place where no other animals can get to. This will be your new cat’s headquarters for the next several days to weeks, so make it cozy and provide them with everything they need to be able to live in that room 24/7.
2. Do not let your dog see your cat as you are coming home and putting them in the room. Plan ahead if necessary
 - a. Leave the cat in the carrier, in the car, so you can run inside and put the dog somewhere out of the way, then go get the cat and set them up in their room
 - b. Have a family member take the dog out on a short walk while you get everything set up
3. Give your new cat 30 minutes alone in their new room. This gives you time to go out to your dog and let them smell the cat’s scent on your clothes/hands, and to help calm your dog down
4. DO NOT LET THE CAT AND DOG MEET TODAY

What to do while your new cat is confined to their room:

Cats are all about their territory. The more an area smells like them, the safer they feel. This is why we recommend confining your new cat to a smaller room, like a bathroom or spare bedroom. A smaller space will smell like the cat sooner, helping them adjust to the new environment sooner. If a cat is in a space that is too large it will not smell like them much, and they may spray or defecate to help get the room smelling like them sooner!

While your cat is acclimating to their sanctuary room, your dog may be very interested in the new animal on the other side of the door. Whether or not you should allow your dog to sniff at the door depends on them.

- If your dog is quiet, calm, and is able to be called away from the door/chooses to walk away on their own, then you may allow them to continue investigating.
- If your dog is sniffing intensely, pawing/digging at the door, and/or vocalizing, you should remove them at once and not allow them near that space until you are able to help train them through that scenario. Your cat will likely be frightened by the sound of a predator trying to get into their safe space!



Scent Swapping

Long before your new cat and dog meet face to face, they should meet scent to scent. Your dog will have already smelled the cat on you and at the door. Your cat can be introduced to your dog's scent from your clothes, or from some cloth that smells like the dog.



Simply letting the cat smell the dog is not enough for them to create a positive association with the dog, though. The cat could smell the dog, feel frightened, and have no reason to feel anything else. To avoid this, pair the smell of your dog with something the cat really likes. High value treats, or wet cat food, are good options, but so is play time if your cat loves to play!

Scent swapping is vital because both cats and dogs see the world through their noses far more than through their eyes, like us humans.

Myth: Feeding your cat on one side of the door while you feed your dog on the other side will help your cat make a positive association with the dog.

Though this method may work for two dogs, it is unlikely to help your cat feel better about the dog. This is because cats are solitary by nature, which means they do not find safety in numbers, and do not enjoy sharing their resources (normally. Of course there are always exceptions.) To think they would feel safer when forced to eat nearby an unfamiliar predator (your dog) just doesn't add up.

Getting a treat when *smelling* your dog is different than having to eat your whole meal while in the *presence* of the dog.

Face to Face Intros

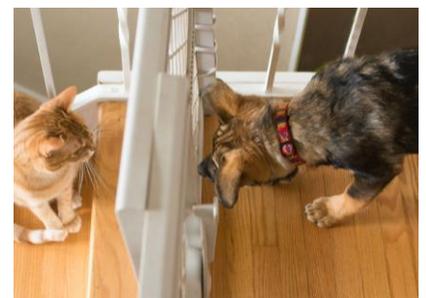
How soon you do a face to face introduction between your new cat and dog is up to your cat! Even if you know your cat is physically safe, if they don't *feel* safe then you have a problem.

Some cats are comfortable around dogs and may be ready to meet after a day in their sanctuary room, while others may be more nervous and need several weeks in their room.

When you are ready to try a face to face intro, think safety first. Your cat is likely going to be the smaller, more vulnerable animal, so they need to be allowed to move about freely. You should focus on finding ways to physically prevent your dog from getting to the cat.

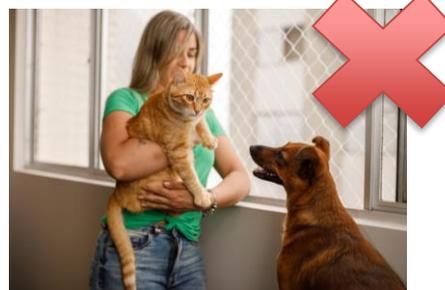
Some things you should try are:

- Putting your dog on leash and holding it
- Putting your dog behind a baby gate
- Putting your dog in their crate
- Putting your dog behind a glass door
- Use high value treats to teach your dog to focus on you and ignore the cat
- Giving the cat a place up high to see the dog from, like the top of a tall cat tree



Please do NOT:

- Hold the cat in your arms
- Confine the cat to a carrier/crate
- Corner the cat



Now that your dog is unable to rush up to the cat and potentially chase it, give your cat time to investigate and approach the dog when they're ready. You should use treats to help prevent your dog from fixating on the cat. All dogs have a prey drive to some extent, and you may not realize how weak or strong your dog's prey drive is until this moment!

Signs the greeting is going well:

- The cat doesn't approach the dog, but doesn't run away either
 - It's ok if they don't make contact on the first few tries!
- The cat approaches the dog and maybe tries to sniff it
- Your dog sniffs the cat but soon loses interest or is easily distracted by you/treats
- The cat sniffs your dog, hisses/growls/swats, and walks away (this is normal!)
- Your dog does not react poorly to being hissed/growled/swatted at
- Your dog is wiggly and looks like they want to play, but are easily controlled/distracted by the treats and can still follow simple cues like "sit"

Signs the greeting is not going well:

- The cat freezes, then runs away as soon as they see the dog and doesn't come out of hiding easily
- The cat has intense fearful body language
 - as a cat owner, it's your responsibility to learn about cat body language
- The dog fixates on the cat and won't look away, even for really yummy treats
- The dog barks rapidly in a high pitch while trying to get to the cat, but has a loose, wiggly body

These signs do not mean things can't get better; you just need to have more distance between the cat and dog the next few times you try an introduction.

Signs you need to stop the introduction immediately and maybe rethink having the cat:

- The dog gives a deep growl while staring directly at the cat
- The dog is intense on trying to get to the cat, pulling/thrashing on the leash, digging at the door/crate, etc.
- The cat yowls, spits, and attempts to attack the dog

By taking things at the cat's pace you're setting your new cat and dog up for success. They should learn to live peacefully together, and maybe even become the best of friends!

