

Introducing a puppy to your cat

Bringing a new puppy home is an exciting event for humans, but for cats it can seem as if their world has just been torn apart. Even if your cat has been used to living with a dog, the new puppy is nothing like their old, established friend, and can seriously disrupt the household order! Here are some tips on **introducing your puppy and cat**.

Most cats are highly territorial, and routine-oriented. The inner sanctum of their home is an important part of their security, and feeling that it has been 'invaded' in any way can be enough to trigger off a whole gamut of stress-related behaviours – including spraying urine on your furniture, leaving deposits in your shoes, or the dog's bed, or – at worst – leaving home altogether.



Preparing your home for the arrival of a new puppy is very important, but even more so if you have a cat (or cats) and want to make the arrival as calm and harmonious as possible. Simply bringing your puppy home, popping him on the floor, and allowing him to chase (or be chased!) across the carpet is not the best first introduction! Indeed, in one fell swoop it can create anxiety and a mistrust that can last for life.

Scent to save

Introducing a new puppy to an established cat really requires you to think about the world from your cat's point of view. Cats see the world in very different ways to humans – and to dogs! While our world is full of vision and colour, cats tend to gain much of their information from scent, which is why even a new piece of furniture in your home can be enough to upset a sensitive feline disposition! For this reason, accustoming your cat to the smell of your new dog, long before he or she even comes home, can be ideal. This can be done by taking a cloth with you when you visit your new puppy at the breeder's and stroking the puppy with it. You can then take this home and wipe it on your furniture, door frames, even your own hands, before stroking your cat. This way the smell of the new puppy will be transferred to all these areas and will be familiar to your cat before she ever lays eyes on the newcomer. Perhaps this is the cat version of seeing photographs of someone before you meet them – giving a much-needed sense of recognition in advance.

Once your pup is home, spend lots of time stroking your cat before immediately stroking your pup – he or she will then smell familiar and will be recognised as a part of your cat's family.

Mood food

With the imminent arrival in mind, think too about the practical areas of your cat's life that may be disrupted by the presence of a new puppy. If you currently feed your cat from dishes on the floor, you may choose to start getting her into the new habit of eating up on a high surface. This is for two reasons. The first is obvious – a dish left down with food in it will be eaten by your dog! Cat food is not good news for puppies for many reasons, and it certainly won't help with house training if your new pup has a stomach upset in the first few days. The second reason is that your cat's emotional security needs to be protected and she may well feel vulnerable eating on the floor with the possibility of a bouncy puppy suddenly appearing next to her (or on top of her!) while she eats.

Litter problems

Have a think too about the positioning and type of litter tray that your cat uses. If this is in a place where the puppy can access, you need to be aware that cat poo is a doggie delicacy! This might be a perfectly 'normal' canine behaviour, but clearly it is unhygienic, and pretty revolting! However, far worse from your cat's point of view is the fear that she might be ambushed by the puppy whilst using the tray! Even if your puppy does this in play, this has got to be top of the list of feline nightmares, and can lead to all kinds of messy behaviour problems in the future if your cat no longer wants to use the tray. Of course, no one likes the thought of being surprised by the door suddenly opening whilst we are at our most vulnerable in the loo – and the same goes for cats too. To avoid this, you may need to re-position the tray somewhere that only your cat can access, whether via a cat flap or the judicious use of a baby gate or barrier that your cat can get through or jump over, but your puppy cannot. Various types of litter tray can also help to prevent canine interest in the contents – the type that are covered with a domed lid, and are accessed by a cat flap can be ideal, but you need to accustom your cat to using a new tray before the arrival of your new puppy, not after!

High rise hides

On the whole, cats are wily creatures that work out very quickly that where they can go, puppies cannot always follow. However, in order to feel safe and secure it's important that they have high places that they can go to sit and look down on the new puppy in a superior, feline kind of way. For this reason, make sure that your cat has access to window sills, units, even bookcases, where you won't be worried about ornaments getting knocked or your cat struggling to climb up or down. How much your cat will need to use these 'safety platforms' will depend largely on his or her basic confidence, but even if you think that your cat is usually a big, bossy bruiser, it's best to provide some of these high-rise hides in advance.

On lead, under control

Without doubt, one of the main contributors to a harmonious cat and dog household is to ensure that your puppy never gets a chance to chase your cat, either in the house or the garden. The easiest way to do this is to create barriers in your home that your cat can traverse but your puppy can't. Baby gates (where the cat can slip through the bars, but your puppy can't) or low barriers positioned at doors or the bottom of the stairs where the cat can easily jump over, leaving your pup on the other side, are simple and practical. Keeping your pup on a lead or trailing line is also recommended when you are

there to supervise interactions. Combining this with training a 'settle down' on command can work wonders to keep everyone calm and happy.

My experience of keeping dogs and cats together has been a wonderful joy. Whilst there is little doubt who rules the roost in my house, (as all those who are 'owned' by cats will know,) to see all my animals lounging together on the sofa, or lining up for a spot of clicker training en masse, has been a huge privilege – and, quite simply – great fun.

When you need professional help

There are some cases where despite your best efforts, your cat and dog still aren't getting on. This might be because your cat is very anxious or fearful, and is hiding the whole time, or it may be because your new dog shows an inherent desire to be 'predatory' around your cat. This is normally seen in older dogs, rather than puppies, but tends to be characterised by the dog being obsessed with your cat, sniffing her out and hunting for her continually, or shaking with arousal and being completely fixed and focused when he sees her. Don't delay. These kinds of symptoms indicate that you need some professional help with assessment and possible intervention, as the welfare of both animals is at stake – as well as your stress levels!

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Introducing Dogs to Cats

Whether you already have a dog and are considering getting a cat, or vice versa, it is very important to think about their first introduction. By letting a loose cat and an off-leash dog meet each other in an open room for the first time, you are probably setting up both animals to fail. Instead, plan ahead and take your time.

MATCHING CATS AND DOGS

- If you're thinking of getting a cat for your dog or a dog for your cat, it's important to consider both animals' personalities. It may be helpful to look for a companion that has already been exposed to the other species in the past.
- If a dog attempts to aggressively chase, pin, pick up or otherwise "manhandle" any cat, it is best to not even consider getting a cat — or at least to proceed with caution. Additionally, a dog who growls, lunges at or obsessively barks at a cat would probably do best in a cat-free environment. Likewise, a cat who growls, swats at, runs from or hides from dogs would probably prefer to not live with a dog.
- If a dog loves chasing things, then a fearful, shy cat who runs away probably wouldn't be the best choice, as it could trigger the dog to chase. Similarly, an energetic cat who runs and pounces would fall into this same category. A better match here would be a calm, confident cat who will not run (in fear or play).
- If a dog plays roughly, it is best to avoid kittens or elderly cats who can easily be hurt. Instead, stick to playful adults who are interested in play, but are also confident enough to take care of themselves. If a cat is rambunctious or playful, a dog that is playful, but gentle, could be a great option.
- If a dog or cat is elderly, laid back, quiet or anxious, then a calm counterpart would be best. Avoid rambunctious companions who may annoy, frighten or otherwise bother the other pet.

THE INTRODUCTION PROCESS

Regardless of whether you are getting a new cat or a new dog, the first introduction between your current pet and your new pet is a very important part of the process. Here are four steps that can help you ensure a successful meeting:

STEP 1: CHOOSE THE PROPER LOCATION FOR THE FIRST MEETING

- *Resident cat to new dog:* If you are adopting a dog, you should not take your cat to meet him at a shelter, or other establishment which houses a number of animals for health and safety reasons. Instead, the introduction should take place at home.
- *Resident dog to new cat:* If you are adopting a cat, do not take your dog into a shelter and expose him to the cats, as this can be highly stressful or traumatic for all of the cats. Also, it

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is not necessarily a good indicator of how the dog will react at home. Instead, ask the shelter's adoption counselors whether they have any dog-savvy, confident cats they will allow to meet your dog under controlled conditions. If this is not possible, an alternative would be to have your dog meet a dog-savvy cat who belongs to a friend or relative. As a last resort, you can bring your new kitty home and do an introduction at home.

STEP 2: SEPARATE THE ANIMALS

- Across a few days, rotate which animal has freedom and which is confined to allow each animal plenty of time to investigate the other one's scent.
- Sometimes the dog should be confined to a crate or another room (or taken to another location if he can't be left alone) to allow the cat time to roam free and investigate the smell of the dog.
- If the dog obsessively digs at the separation barrier or barks at the cat for more than a day or two, the interaction likely won't work without proper training. You may need the help of a professional.
- When no one is home, the dog or cat must always be securely confined so unsupervised interactions are not possible.
- Once the dog is calm (or at least not obsessed with the cat) and the cat is calm, eating and using the litter box normally, you can proceed to the next step.

STEP 3: MAKE LEASHED INTRODUCTIONS

- Allow both animals to be in the same room at the same time, but keep the dog securely leashed.
- Continue with this type of introduction until the dog is calm and ignores the cat, and the cat is calm, eating and using the litter box normally.
- If there is any fear or aggression displayed on either animal's part, stay at step 2 longer.
- Continue indefinitely until both the dog and cat seem happy and relaxed around each other.
- When no one is home, the dog or cat should be securely confined to separate areas so unsupervised interactions are not possible.

STEP 4: ALLOW UNSUPERVISED INTERACTIONS

- Unsupervised time together can occur after the cat and dog have been supervised around each other for a significant period of time (a month or so) and you are positive they will not hurt each other.

TRAINING TIP:

If the dog stares at the cat or the door separating the cat, try to distract him and get him to look away with treats, a happy voice or by gently guiding the dog away on a leash. Once the dog is away from the cat, try offering a treat. If he takes it, repeat this process until he is no longer focused on the cat or door.

WARNING SIGNS

- If the dog remains overly focused, does not take his eyes off the cat or the door, completely ignores you or lunges suddenly as soon as the cat moves, this is probably a dangerous match. If you are looking for a dog for your resident cat, try another dog. If this is your dog, you should probably not get him a cat.
- If at any time the dog lunges toward, growls, snaps at or shows any aggression (<https://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/animals/pa-dog-posturespdf.pdf>) (PDF) toward a calm, quiet, still cat, this match will probably not work out. The same holds true if

a cat attacks a calm, quiet dog. If you are committed to make the relationship work, you will probably need a professional at this point.

- If you are looking for a cat for your dog, and your dog displays questionable behavior around a cat who is growling, hissing and swatting, try again with another, calmer cat. If he continues to display questionable behavior around multiple cats, it is likely he should not live with cats.
- If it is your cat who is growling, hissing or swatting (<https://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/animals/pa-cat-posturespdf.pdf>) (PDF), give the cat a break and try again on another day. You might also need to try a different dog. A cat who continually hisses and growls at all types of dogs will likely not want to live with dogs. Your cat may tolerate a dog, but she probably won't be happy — which is an unfair situation for her.
- If the cat stops eating, drinking, using the litter box or visiting with family members, she is not happy. You might want to consider finding a better match or contacting a professional animal behaviorist for advice.

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