



How to Introduce a Dog to a Cat: A Step-by-Step Process

“Fighting like cats and dogs!” We’ve heard this phrase throughout our lives, but can cats and dogs live in harmony? Absolutely! Some dogs may not do well in a home with cats, but there are many homes across the country where both cats and dogs have learned to not only coexist, but become friends. When it comes to introducing two different species, first impressions matter. It’s better to move too slowly than too quickly. So, follow the steps below and take your time.

1. Before Bringing Home Your New Dog

Cats need time to adjust to change so it is best to start this process before you bring home your new pup. Move your cat into a secure area that your new dog will not have access to. A spare bedroom is a perfect example. Make sure the area you choose is a room your dog will not need access to at any time. Place your cat and your cat’s belongings (litter box, food and water bowls, toys, cat trees, scratching posts, etc.) in the secure area. If you are unable to set your cat up in a room before bringing home your new dog, that’s okay! Just be aware that it may take more time for your cat to adjust to the new room with the new dog present. As was mentioned earlier, this can and should be a slow process. Your cat may live in this secure area for a few weeks, so make it as comfortable as possible. Visit your cat often! Your cat can become stressed due to the limited access to your home, so be sure to set aside time for socialization as well as opportunities to be outside of the room with your dog fully secured or out of the home entirely.

2. Keep Your Dog Safe

We believe the best way to secure your dog is to crate train them. This will ensure your dog is in a secure place while you’re away or if you’re unable to supervise while home. Crate training can also help prevent many behavior issues such as chasing and harassing your cat or other animals, house soiling, chewing on inappropriate objects and more. Another option is to set up gates and exercise pens to limit the access for the dog until you know they can be left alone and remain safe. For more information on crate training and limiting access, please speak to an adoption counselor.

3. Scent Swapping

Allow your pets to become familiar with each other’s scents without meeting face to face. Feed each animal on opposite sides of a closed door. This will allow them to smell each other while associating that smell with good things (like dinner). You can also swap scents by swapping items from each animals’ living area. Good items to swap include blankets, beds, scratching posts, and toys. Make sure that you replace cat items in the room so that your cat can mark their scent and not feel that they are losing resources. This step may take a day or two. Don’t move on to the next step until both animals seem calm with each other’s smells. Cats that are stressed will stop eating, begin over or under

grooming themselves, and will stop using the litter box or eliminate elsewhere. Cats may also lash out or hide more than usual if they are stressed. Add stress signs for dogs. Don't forget to be aware of learning your new dog's stress signs. These can look like: pacing, excessive barking, refusing food when the cat is nearby, eliminating indoors, and destructive behavior.

4. Space Swapping

Take your dog on a long walk and allow your cat to leave their secure area and access the rest of the home. This will allow your cat to explore on his own time without the stress of your dog being present. Alternatively, you can also place your cat in another room while you allow your dog to go into the cat's room to have a look around. Be sure you are keeping your dog calm and on leash while they explore the cat's space. Always keep each animal in their separate areas when you are not able to supervise.

5. Look at That!

Once both animals are calm with each other's scent, put your dog on a 6-foot leash, open the door, and place a tall baby gate in the doorway. Sit outside the room with a big bag of dog treats and your dog on leash. You should be far enough away that your dog can see your cat, but not so close that your dog is overly excited by the presence of the cat. Every time your dog looks toward your cat, encourage your dog's interest by saying "Good Dog!" and giving your dog a treat. Repeat this training exercise while slowly moving closer to the doorway. Allow your cat to be free inside their secure area.

Do not force either animal up to the gate and do not pick up your cat. Instead, encourage your cat to walk towards the gate by placing cat treats on their side of the gate. Cats like to watch from afar before approaching new things, so allow them to have access to a high place where they can watch your dog. Try to keep your dog as calm as possible during this exercise. If your dog becomes overly excited, move further away from the doorway or go on a walk and try again later. You will need to repeat this exercise at least twice a day until both animals are completely comfortable with each other's presence. If your dog knows training cues such as 'sit', 'down', 'focus', or 'stay', you can use these behaviors to help encourage a calm experience. We believe all dogs living in a home should have some basic training knowledge. If you would like more information on basic obedience training, please speak to an adoption counselor or visit SAhumane.org/dogtraining.

6. Face to Face Introduction Phase

Once again, place your dog on a 6-foot leash and pull out the big bag of higher value dog treats. These treats should be ones that your dog absolutely loves. If your dog refuses these treats you may have to use something of higher value like cheese or hot dogs. Remove the baby gate and allow your cat access to the entire house. Continue rewarding your dog every time they look at your cat and interact calmly. Slowly decrease the distance between your dog and cat until they are face to face. If either pet is uncomfortable with the close distance, take a step back or try again later. Remember, this is an introduction phase not a one time event. They may not meet face to face the first day and that is okay! Keep your dog on leash during every interaction until you are 100% confident your dog won't become overwhelmed and chase your cat. NEVER allow your dog to even have the opportunity to chase your cat. Chasing cats is very fun for dogs and once they start doing it you will have a much

harder time training them not to. Remember to always keep your pets in separate secure areas if you are unable to supervise.

7. Contacting a Professional

If you are having difficulty introducing your animals, contact a professional immediately. The earlier you ask for help the easier it will be. Avoid using punishment or corrections when introducing two animals. Before taking drastic measures, please attempt to seek professional advice.

Introducing newly adopted pets to pets already at home can be an exciting and wonderful experience, but remember: **take it slow**. There's no rush when you are introducing future best friends.