



Introducing your Dogs & Cats

Owner information sheet





As with introducing many pets, how you do the introduction can be key to the success of the relationship, and good preparation will help set up for the best possible outcome. Remember that even if your current animal has lived with a dog or cat before, each animal and therefore relationship is unique, so it is important to follow these steps carefully.

PREPARATION

1. Whether you are adopting a cat and already have a dog, or are adopting a dog and already have a cat, prior to adopting the second animal, you need to set up a safe space for your cat. If you are adopting a new cat, we would always advise to set the cat up in a safe place, ideally a spare room, to allow them to acclimatise and have a separate space from your dog. See our “settling in cats” and “settling in dogs” for general early days advice.
2. You can start “scent swapping” prior to adopting your second animal. Speak to our team to coordinate exchanging some of their bedding before adoption day so they can get used to each other’s scent. We recommend placing this on the floor of where your existing animal currently spends time. Scent is really important to both dogs and cats, and doing this will help both your dog and cat begin to become familiar with each other, before you begin physical introductions.
3. Before adopting the second animal, invest in a baby gate. If you have stairs, you can place a baby gate part way up the stairs, enabling your cat to roam freely upstairs and your dog to roam freely downstairs. This is really important to allow your cat a safe space where the dog is not able to go. It also means, in time, they will be able to see each other without being able to make direct contact, and also prevents your dog from chasing your cat. There are various types of baby gates – some are shorter, taller, and some have cat flaps. Take time to research and invest in the right baby gate, pending your individual animals’ needs (and sizes!) so this is installed and ready before adoption day.
4. Set up the safe space for your cat by placing all their essential resources in there. This includes their beds, litter trays, food and water bowl, hiding places and scratching posts, so they have everything they need. Make sure your cat has plenty of high up safe spaces too as this will help them feel more secure. Also consider using a Feliway diffuser – these release pheromones which help cats feel more safe and comfortable. Install this at least 24 hours prior to adopting the second animal.
5. If introducing a kitten to a dog, consider utilising a crate for introductions instead of a baby gate. Kittens will be able to get through a baby gate, so a baby gate will either need some modifications (such as additional mesh barrier) or you can get your kitten used to spending time in a crate before introducing the dog. The crate should have all the kitten’s resources in it, including a hiding space, and also be partially covered to help them feel safe.



INTRODUCTIONS

1. Once adoption day arrives, keep your dog and cat separate initially. Both animals, whether existing or newly adopted, will have a lot to adjust to, so take your time in allowing both to acclimatise. This also allows you to do more scent swapping. You can do this by spending time with one of your animals, including stroking, before spending time with the other animal (whilst they are still separated) and stroking them. You can also take a cloth and stroke the newly adopted animal around the head and cheeks, before taking the cloth and rubbing this against furniture and vertical surfaces in the home.
2. After at least a few days of settling and scent swapping, you can begin initial visual introductions. Ensure you have exercised your dog first and consider keeping them on lead. Depending on the setup of your home, you want to ensure that your cat has free access back to their safe space. For example, if the cat is spending time upstairs, you would take your dog to the bottom of the stairs, below the baby gate and on lead. Prepare some tasty food for your dog and allow them to see your cat (through the gate). Remember to not force any interaction – either your cat or your dog may find this frightening and allow either animal to move away should they need to. If your dog looks at your cat calmly, you can reward them with food. Allow your cat the free choice to either watch, approach or move away as they wish. If your dog becomes particularly animated – perhaps scrabbling and straining to get to the cat, then try to distract your dog and consider increasing the distance from your cat. If your dog is becoming more frustrated, end the session as this will become a negative experience both for your dog and also likely your cat.
3. Keep these initial visual and controlled introductions short and positive. Hopefully with repeated, calm exposure your dog will become less interested in your cat, and your cat will become more relaxed around your dog. We never advocate punishing any animal for any behaviour, including what you may see as a negative interaction during the introduction process. This will damage both the animals' relationships with one another and their relationship with you. If you see signs of stress or aggression, stop the session and go back to scent swapping. If you see the same signs on attempted visual introduction again, stop the introductions and contact an accredited behaviourist.
4. If you have completed several successful sessions where both animals are relaxed through the barrier, you can then move to having your dog on a lead in a room (again, after exercise) and then allow your cat to enter, if they wish. If your cat is comfortable and relaxed, and moving around, and your dog is relaxed and not showing signs of wanting to chase, you can swap the lead for a houseline. This is a light, loop-less line which can trail from your dog's collar. This will allow them to spend time together freely, without your dog being restrained but, as they're still getting to know each other, if you do need to intervene – for example if your dog is beginning to follow your cat repeatedly and your cat is trying to move away, you can pick up the line to intervene. Do not rush removing the houseline as this is what will help safely manage this stage.
5. Once you have completed several successful sessions with the houseline, you can then have supervised sessions with no houseline, again rewarding any positive behaviours. Even if the animals are relaxed with each other at this stage, they should always be separated when not supervised.



6. Your cat and dog should now be showing relaxed behaviours with one another whilst sharing the same spaces. As all animals are different, getting to this stage may have taken weeks, or even months. Continue to take care around routines like feeding, so there is no potential conflict or stress for either animal, for example, if your dog tries to eat your cat's food! Similarly, ensure your cat has litter trays in quiet areas where your dog can't access so they can toilet in peace. Cats always need safe spaces in any home, and take care to maintain dog free areas, and high up options where they can go to relax.

We always advise maintaining pet insurance and check that this covers behaviour advice. If you have ongoing issues with your cat and dog relationships, we advise contacting a Clinical Animal Behaviourist through the Animal Behaviour and Training Council.

