



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

Cat-Dog Introductions

Contrary to popular belief, cats and dogs can get along! Even if they never become the best of friends, they can usually learn to tolerate each other living in the same household. It is important to remember, however, that dogs have the potential to seriously injure, or even kill, a cat. Therefore, before introducing cats and dogs, for the safety of your animals, please consult the following guidelines.

Before Adoption

1. Make sure both the cat and dog involved are good candidates to live with the other species.

Good Indicators for a Cat:

- a. The cat has lived with other dogs successfully in the past
- b. The cat is relaxed and laid-back, not too shy or skittish
- c. The cat has **not** been declawed

Good Indicators for a Dog:

- d. The dog has lived successfully with cats in the past
- e. The dog does not have a strong predation instinct (does not readily chase squirrels or other small animals)
- f. The dog's overall demeanor is gentle and relaxed

2. **Test the dog with a live cat to see how the dog will respond.** To do this, test the dog with a cat that has already had experience being around dogs. Keep the dog on a leash during this test, but do not confine or restrain the cat in any way.

Dog Behaviors that are Positive Signs:

- a. Cautious investigation of cat
- b. Tail wagging
- c. Backing away when cat gives defensive signals

Dog Behaviors that are Negative Signs:

- d. Dog instantly tries to chase the cat
- e. Dog is constantly straining on the leash
- f. Dog whines, barks, and appears greatly agitated

Be prepared that most dogs exhibit a combination of both positive and negative signs, so it can be difficult to judge from this initial test alone if a dog is a good candidate to live with a cat. The test will, however, aid you in making a more informed decision about whether to bring a cat and dog together in your home.

After Adoption

Once you have decided to have both a cat and dog in your home, be sure to introduce the animals in a way that is both safe and causes the least amount of stress for you and your pets.

1. **Prepare:** If you are bringing a new cat home, it is a good idea to practice basic obedience with your resident dog beforehand, so he or she will be easier to control during the introduction to your new cat.
2. **Separate your pets:** If you are adopting either a dog or a cat, when you first bring your new pet home, separate him or her from your resident pets. This will give your new pet time to adjust.
3. **Create a safe space for your cat:** This will be a place that your cat can access but your dog cannot. You can use a baby gate or a cat door to close off the area, or you can put your cat's space on a place that is high of the ground to prevent your dog from accessing it. Your cat's safe space should have food, water, and a litter box. Your dog should never be allowed to access your cat's litter box or food dish, as this causes stress for the cat (and for you, as dogs will often eat cat feces!).
4. **Feed your cat and dog on opposite side of the same door.** This will cause the animals to begin to associate a positive thing (food!) with each other's scent. If either animal becomes nervous and will not eat due to the animal on the other side of the door, move the food dish further from the door until the animal becomes comfortable enough to eat. Each time you feed the pet, move the dish a little closer to the door.



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5. **Swap your cat's bedding with your dog's bedding, and vice versa.** This will allow your animals to become even more accustomed to each other's scents.
6. **The First Introductions:** After about a week or so of separation, you can begin have the dog and cat see one another. For this first introduction, enlist the help of a friend or family member, so there are at least two people present. Have one person hold your dog at one end of a room. Have some yummy dog treats on hand, and begin doing some basic obedience with the dog (sit, lie down, etc.). Once one person has the dog's attention, have the other person bring the cat to the opposite side of the room. **Once the cat is in the room, do not restrain the cat in any way, either by holding it or putting it in a cage. The cat must have the option of escaping.** Try to entertain the cat with toys, catnip, and treats. Allow the cat to explore the room if it chooses. Reward and praise the dog for any positive behaviors toward the cat. Repeat these introductions. **Remember: Many short introductions are better than a few long ones.** If the cat immediately runs away, continue feeding the animals on opposite sides of the door and swapping scents, and then, a couple days later, again attempt an introduction.
7. **Go Off-Leash:** If these initial on-leash introductions go well, you can then remove the dog's leash while the cat and dog are in the same room. Be sure that your cat has access to his or her safe space, in case the need to retreat arises.
8. **Supervise, Supervise, and Supervise!** Until you feel entirely comfortable leaving your dog and cat alone together, continue to keep them separated when you are away and supervise them closely while you are at home. Every few weeks, reevaluate their behavior towards each other. Wait until their behavior is consistent and stable before leaving your dog and cat together unsupervised.
9. **A Note on Kittens and Puppies:** Never leave a kitten alone with a dog, and keep a kitten separated from an energetic dog until it is full grown. Most adult cats will show a puppy who's boss, but if a cat does not stick up for itself, separate the cat and puppy until the puppy matures.
10. If at any point you feel you are unable to achieve a successful introduction between your dog and cat, **please contact an animal behavior expert.**

For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.