

# How to Introduce a Dog and Cat

Despite the stereotype, many dogs and cats learn to live together peacefully. Be patient and take the introduction process slowly. Know that whether or not your pets get along will also depend on their individual personalities. Follow these steps to maximize the chances for success.

## Getting Started

- Make sure your cat has a dog-free sanctuary at all times. Sanctuary rooms can be any size but must have a secure door and ceiling. The space should include a litter box, scratching post, water, food bowl, and toys. Make sure to cat-proof the space by removing any poisonous plants, medicines, and fragile knick-knacks, and hiding or tying up cords. You might also set up some hiding places or tunnels to help your cat feel safer.
- Be prepared to manage pet interactions over the next several weeks, if not longer.
- Ideally, your living space will have multiple high areas (like shelving or furniture) that your cat(s) are allowed on so they can easily escape the dog if needed.



## Keep the pets separate at first

Keep the pets separate for at least the first 3-4 days. Prevent any contact until your new pet has had a veterinary check-up and been cleared of any illness. Confine your new pet in a sanctuary room with the door closed, or a separate floor of your house. The goal is to allow the pets to get used to each other's presence without face-to-face contact. Even if they can't see each other, they can hear and smell each other.

## Feed them on opposite sides of a closed door

The idea is to teach them to associate the presence of the other pet with pleasant things, such as food. With each feeding, move their food bowls a little closer to the door. Continue this process until each pet can eat calmly right next to the door.

## Teach basic commands

If your new pet is a dog, start teaching them basic obedience cues, such as "sit" and "down." Keep training sessions short, pleasant, and rewarding for your dog.

## Begin face-to-face meetings

Once your pets can eat their food calmly right next to the door, conduct meet-and-greets in a common area of the house. Don't use either animal's sanctuary space. Keep the first few sessions short and calm. Keep the dog on a leash and let the cat come and go as they wish. Do not restrain either pet in your arms, as injury could result if either pet behaves aggressively. Ask the dog to sit and reward them with small, tasty treats for calm behavior. Give your cat treats as well. If either pet demonstrates aggression, calmly distract and redirect them. Toss a toy for the cat to lure them from the room, or call the dog's name and reward the attention. Return the pets to their sanctuary spaces.

## **Repeat sessions daily**

Repeat these face-to-face sessions daily. Save your pets' favorite treats for when they are together. If the cat attempts to leave the room, allow them to do so, and don't let the dog chase them. Try to end each session before either pet shows stress or aggression.

## **Allow pets loose together**

When the animals appear to be getting along well, allow them to be loose in the room together, keeping the dog's leash attached and dragging on the floor. This allows you to step on it and prevent your dog from chasing your cat if they get excited. If tension erupts, go back to the earlier introduction steps and repeat the process. Make sure the cat has access to a dog-proof sanctuary room at all times.

## **Proceed with caution**

Continue to separate the pets when you are not there to supervise.