



## Introducing Dogs and Cats

Introducing a new dog to your resident cat or a new cat to your resident dog can seem daunting! Here is a general guide to facilitate a smooth introduction. If you have further questions or are unable to progress through the following steps safely, please reach out to a professional, certified, positive-reinforcement trainer.

- **Separate and acclimate.** When you first bring your new animal home, *keep them completely separated from all other resident animals*. If your new family member is a cat, provide a small sanctuary space, like a bathroom, for the cat to first acclimate and decompress from their shelter stay or recent transition away from all other animals. If the newcomer is a dog, they should be either in the same room you are in and supervised or confined to a crate or puppy-proofed containment area, like an exercise pen, laundry room, or small bedroom. Keep new animals separated from other resident animals *for at least one week* before beginning introductions.
- **Discover Reinforcers.** Take some time to audition a few treats for both your cat and your dog to see what they like best. Does your cat like meat flavored baby food? Sandwich meat? Sardines? Dried fish? There are cat treats on the market that many cats find irresistible, like Temptations or Greenies. Discover what your pets find IRRESISTABLE. Most dogs will respond well to real, human-grade meat, like chicken, steak, beef heart or liver, chicken or turkey giblets, and lean pork chops. It's also a good idea to discover what longer enrichment items your dog enjoys, like bully sticks, marrow bones, or stuffed and frozen Kongs or Toppls. You can check out our *Enrichment Handout* for ideas!
- **Crate Training.** During the acclimation and decompression period, if your dog doesn't already love spending time in his crate, take advantage of this time to crate train them. You can check out our *Crate Training Handout* for a guide to successful crate training.
- **Set Appropriate Expectations.** Prior to getting started, it's important to understand that some successful introductions between cats and dogs take much longer than others. Some become fast friends immediately while others require painstakingly slow introductions over the course of a few months. Occasionally, a dog will have a high prey drive (hyper fixation, inability to redirect attention, quiet prolonged focus, quick darting lunges when given an opening) and consider cats on the menu. These dogs are not compatible with feline housemates. Similarly, some cats may have had a previous traumatic experience with a dog and may simply not be a candidate for cohabitation. Some indicators of this would be frequent soiling outside the litter box, consistent loss of appetite, or persistent hiding. Fortunately, with some patience and the following introduction, most cats and dogs can learn to tolerate each other and even bond like the loving family members we want them to be.

## Stage One: Crated Meet

- Decide where you want the initial introduction to take place. We generally recommend the living room or some other open space that is not the cat's sanctuary space.
- If your newest arrival is the cat, remove the dog from the intended introduction space, and allow the cat to explore the space without the dog. If the cat is timid, they may need several sessions over several days. We want the cat to feel completely at ease in this space before beginning introductions.
- Regardless of who lived with you first, make sure to have several escape routes available to the cat. This should include at least a couple of different elevated places to jump up (bookshelves, cat tree, stairs, counters, etc.) and room to move away and completely exit the introduction space.
- Once you have the environment set up, place the cat in a different room or in their sanctuary space. Then, bring out the dog and place them in the crate in the room where you intend the two to meet.
- Finally allow the cat into the same room while the dog is crated and provide plenty of tasty treats for the cat to find on the floor in the same room but not immediately next to the crate.
- *The moment the dog notices the cat, start raining treats into the crate and reinforcing calm behavior. We want the dog to learn that the presence of the cat means wonderful goodies will come from you.* Similarly, we want the cat to associate the dog with all the wonderful feelings that come with finding tasty treats.
- If the cat chooses to create more space by jumping to an elevated perch or moving away, let them. You can even deliver treats to the cat if they choose to observe the dog from a greater distance.
- *Only when the dog is able to relax in the crate with the cat moving freely about the room, sometimes even approaching the crate, will you move forward to the next stage.*

## Stage Two: Leashed Dog Behind Baby Gate

The next step in introducing your dog and cat involves setting up a baby gate with the cat on one side and the dog on the other.

- Start these sessions SHORT, 2-5min at a time. The dog should remain on leash. Again, provide some tasty treats or toys for the cat to discover on their side. Snuffle mats to keep the cat's body more still/less interesting are helpful.

- Initially, keep the dog several feet away from the gate, have a seat with them, and begin delivering tasty treats to the dog every time they look at the cat while remaining calm. If at any point the dog becomes agitated or excited, *calmly move the dog away from the baby gate to gain more distance while avoiding any scolding, popping on leash, or other forms of punishment*. Take a break, and then begin again *at a greater distance*.
- If the dog is able to completely relax, generally ignoring the cat, move a couple steps closer to the baby gate, and continue to reinforce relaxed behaviors with treats. If both animals appear calm, and they are interested in doing so, you may even allow them to sniff each other through the gate, after which, you can toss a cat treat to the cat, and promptly reinforce the dog for such a polite greeting. After a few calm meetings through the baby gate, you will be ready for Stage Three.

## Stage Three: Leashed Dog without Baby Gate

This step gives the cat and dog full, semi-protected access to each other. The dog will remain on leash, and the cat will have as much or as little access to the dog as desired. Be sure to have plenty of escape options for the cat, including elevated perches and ways to leave the room.

- Keeping a baby gate up in a nearby hallway or in a doorway is an excellent way to allow the cat to escape and feel safe without fear of pursuit. Of course, you won't allow the dog to pursue because they will remain on leash.
- While the dog and cat are sharing the same space, let the cat find tasty treats on the ground in the room, and continue reinforcing the dog for calmly hanging out with you. You may choose to watch television on the sofa together or sit down on the floor. *All that matters is that your dog is consistently reinforced for behaving in a calm and relaxed manner while in the presence of the cat.*
- If the dog does become agitated or excited and lunges on leash, allow the cat to escape or move the dog away from the cat to create distance. *You may need to spend a little more time at Stage Two.*
- If the animals are successfully sharing space in a calm manner, *continue at this stage for several days or even a couple weeks to normalize and heavily reinforce this type of interaction*. You may even drop the leash and simply let it drag so that you can pick it up in the event that the dog suddenly becomes excited. This will allow the animals to interact freely while still providing a measure of protection.

## Stage Four: Free with Supervision

Finally, it's time to remove the leash, and then let the dog and cat interact as much or as little as they choose. **Continue to supervise every moment of this interaction**, and make sure the cat has elevated perches and a way to escape the dog entirely such as a baby gate in a hallway or doorway to a separate room.

- After a couple weeks of reinforced, calm space sharing and free interactions, begin playing some mellow games with each animal, gradually increasing in intensity. Play a mellow game of tug with the dog, or a little chasing of a feather with the cat.
- Always watch the other animal for signs of agitation or potentially dangerous levels of excitement. We especially want to observe the dog for signs of prey drive or overly rough play. If the dog is unable to maintain an appropriate level of excitement while the cat plays or if he redirects onto the cat when excited by toys or play with humans, it may be necessary to only allow calm, supervised visits. However, if the two can successfully cohabit while playing separately or together in a mutually enjoyable manner repeatedly, you are ready for the final stage.

## Stage Five: Fully Integrated, No Supervision Required

**Never feel rushed to reach this final stage.** While it may be the goal, jumping to Stage 5 before successfully working through the four stages above can have disastrous results, but patiently taking your time and even going slower than you think you need can only benefit you, your cat, and your dog in the long run. *Even at this final stage, be sure your cat has multiple elevated perches the dog cannot reach as well as an escape route the dog cannot access* so that your cat can always feel safe and spend time apart from the dog.

If at any point during this introduction period you are not sure how or when to proceed, or if you are having trouble at any stage, contact a local professional, certified, positive-reinforcement trainer.