

Introducing Cats and Dogs to Each Other



Whether you already have a cat and are considering getting a dog, or vice versa, it is very important to do a proper introduction. By letting a loose cat and an off-leash dog meet each other in an open room for the first time, you are probably setting up both animals to fail. Instead, plan ahead and take your time.

The introduction should be gradual. Taking it slow at the beginning will create the best outcome. Initially they should be kept separate from one another with no visual introductions. Set up a sanctuary room for your new animal and try not to restrict your resident animal's environment.

Step 1: Scent swapping

The first step is to swap each other's scent. Both cats and dogs rely heavily on scent and can gather information about each other by doing this. Give each animal the others blankets to sniff. Scent swapping can be repeated over a few days or however long the animals need.

Allow each to investigate the other's areas without the other being present. Once they go back into their own space, they can be allowed to investigate where the other has been exploring. It may take a new cat longer to feel relaxed in a new territory, especially one with a dog in it. When both appear calm or ignore the scent of the new pet, that is a good indicator that they are ready for the next step.

Step 2: Visual contact

If everything is going well, visual contact can begin. Do not put a cat or dog in a crate and allow the other to approach, as this can be stressful for whoever is in the crate. Instead, use a partially covered barrier, such as a baby gate covered by a draped towel. A lot of distance should be allowed between the pets and the sessions should be kept short.

Once both pets are relaxed with increasing visual access to each other, allow them to move a little closer to each other but keep the sessions short and provide lots of treats and praise when they behave calmly in each other's presence.

Always supervise and be constantly vigilant for any outward signs of emotional arousal such as fear or excitement, changes in body language or posture. End sessions while both pets are relaxed in each other's presence.

Step 3: Actual contact

Before you introduce the two pets, clip your cat's nails. Take your dog for a good walk or engage in playtime.

Allow both animals to be in the same room at the same time, but keep the dog securely leashed. Give the dog treats and praise anytime he focuses on you instead of the cat. It's better to do several short training sessions each day to minimize stress. Try to end on a positive note each time so the animals will be more inclined to advance in progress during the next session. During the introduction phase keep the cat and dog separated unless you're there to supervise.

Step 4: Allow unsupervised interactions

Unsupervised time together can occur after the cat and dog have been supervised around each other for a significant period of time (a month or so) and you are positive they will not hurt each other. Keep in mind that some cats and dogs never get to this point and may need to be separated whenever you are not there to supervise.

Environmental modifications should be made to ensure ongoing safety, even after the cat and dog are allowed to be loose. Provide plenty of escape options for the cat, such as a tall, sturdy cat tree or other elevated areas. Even after the pets have become friends, a cat may find a dog's play solicitation attempts to be disconcerting. The ability to escape to higher ground must be an option that's always available.

