



Helping Your Dog or Cat Adjust to a New Home

The key to helping your new “forever” cat or dog make a successful adjustment to your home is being prepared and being patient. It can take anywhere from two days to two months for you and your pet to adjust to each other. The following tips can help ensure a smooth transition.

DOGS:

FIRST, GATHER YOUR DOG'S SUPPLIES – Prepare the things your dog will need in advance. You'll need a collar and leash, food and water bowls, food, and, of course, some toys.

ESTABLISH HOUSE RULES IN ADVANCE – Work out your dog-care regimen in advance among the human members of your household. Who will walk the dog first thing in the morning? Who will feed the dog at night? Will Fido be allowed on the couch or not? Where will he/she rest at night? Are there any rooms in the house that are off-limits?

PLAN YOUR DOG'S ARRIVAL – Try to arrange the arrival of your new dog for a weekend or when you can be home for a few days. Get to know each other and spend some quality time together. Don't forget the jealousy factor-make sure you don't neglect other pets and people in your household!

BE PREPARED FOR HOUSING TRAINING – Assume your new dog is not housetrained, and work from there. Be consistent and maintain a routine. A little extra effort on your part to come home straight from work each day will pay off in easier, faster housetraining.

MAKE SURE ALL YOUR PETS ARE HEALTHY – Animal shelters take in animals with widely varying backgrounds, some of whom have not been previously vaccinated. Inevitably, despite the best efforts of shelter workers, viruses can be spread and may occasionally go home with adopted animals. If you already have dogs or cats at home, make sure they are up to date on their shots and in good general health before introducing your new pet dog.

GIVE YOUR DOG A CRATE – A crate may look to you like the canine equivalent of a jail cell, but to your dog, who instinctively likes to den, it's a room of his own. It makes housetraining and obedience-training easier and saves your dog from the headache of being yelled at unnecessarily for problem behavior. Of course, you won't want to crate your dog all day or all night, or he will consider it a jail cell. Just a few, regular hours a day should be sufficient.

The crate should not contain wire where his collar or paws can get caught and should be roomy enough to allow your dog to stand up, turn around, and sit comfortably in normal posture. If a crate isn't an option, consider some sort of confinement to a dog-proofed part of your home. A portion of the kitchen or family room can serve the purpose very well. (A baby gate works perfectly.)

Use training and discipline to create a happy home – Dogs need order. Let your pet know from the start who is the boss. When you catch him doing something he shouldn't, don't lose your cool. Stay calm, and let him know immediately, in a loud and disapproving voice, that he has misbehaved. Reward him with praise when he does well, too! Sign up for a local dog obedience class, and you'll learn what a joy it is to have a well-trained dog.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN – Dogs need an active life. That means you should plan plenty of exercise and game time for your pet. Enjoy jogging or Frisbee? You can bet your dog will, too. If running around the park is too energetic for your taste, try throwing a ball or toy, or just going for a long walk together. When you take a drive in the country or visit family and friends, bring your dog and a leash along.

BE PATIENT AND ENJOY THE RESULTS – Finally, be reasonable in your expectations. Life with you is a different experience for your new companion, so give him time to adjust. You'll soon find out that you've made a friend for life. No one will ever greet you with as much enthusiasm or provide you with as much love!

CATS:

THE RIDE HOME – Riding in a car can be traumatic for cats. Your cat or kitten should be confined to a carrier during the ride home as well as during subsequent trips to the veterinarian. Do not let your new cat loose in a moving car.

THE NEW HOME – Consider your companion's past experiences. Your kitten may have been recently separated from his mother and litter mates. The kitten or cat has had to cope with the transition of a shelter and the stress of surgery. The adult cat may have been separated from a familiar home and forced to break a bond with human companions or other animals. Now he must adjust again to totally new surroundings.

Allow your cat several weeks to adapt. It's not uncommon for cats to display behavior problems during the first days in a new home, but these usually disappear over time. New cats and kittens often bolt under furniture. Some may spend hours or even days hiding. Sit and talk quietly to the cat. If you must take the cat out of his hiding place, carry him gently to a quiet protected area where he will feel secure.

THE FIRST DAY – Introduce your cat to his new home gradually, restricting him to one room at first where there is a litter box, food, and water.

Isolate other animals from your new cat during this time. Supervise children, advising them to always be gentle with the cat. Have the litter box ready when you remove the cat from the carrier. Show him the location of the litter box. If you have 2 floors, place a litter box on each floor. Your cat may be bewildered, fearful or curious. Do not overwhelm him with attention or demands. It is not unusual for cats to leap on top of very high furniture to explore or to feel secure. When he is ready, he will come down alone. Try to spend several hours with your new cat as he becomes accustomed to your home. Your sensitive handling of the initial transition can ease the trauma and set the stage for a happy settling-in.

INTRODUCTION TO OTHER ANIMALS – The ability of animals to get along together in the same household depends on their individual personalities. There will always be one who dominates. A new cat will often upset the existing pecking order, or the old cat or dog may feel it necessary to establish dominance immediately. Wise handling of the "getting acquainted" period is an important factor in the successful introduction of a new cat. The first week or two may be hectic, frustrating and time consuming. Be patient. The adjustment will take time.

Keep your dog confined until the cat feels secure in his new home. Introduce them indoors with the dog under control on a leash. Do not allow the dog to chase or corner the cat, even out of playfulness or curiosity. Supervise them carefully and don't tolerate any aggressive behavior from your dog. The cat should have a safe retreat, either up high or in a room inaccessible to the dog.

An adult cat may swat a dog to set limits. Allow your animals to accept one another in their own time and don't leave them alone together until this is accomplished. Never force interaction. Many cats and dogs become companions and playmates while others simply tolerate each other. Be sure to give your dog lots of extra attention to avoid jealous reactions.

Spayed or neutered cats are generally more accepting of other cats. Adult cats are generally more accepting of kittens than of other adults. Two altered adult cats often become friends in the same home.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS -- Most cats choose several favorite sleeping spots where they can be comfortable, warm, and free from drafts. Providing a bed for your cat may discourage him from sleeping on furniture. A cozy box or basket lined with soft, washable bedding and placed in a quiet corner makes a suitable cat bed.