



**Nebraska Humane Society
Training and Behavior Department
Behavior Helpline
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Introducing Cats and Dogs

Cats and dogs can live peaceably, but it does take lots of patience and time on your part. It helps to have a dog that is well mannered and knows some commands like sit, down, stay and leave it. Without this, you may be putting your new cat and dog into a possibly dangerous situation.

Successful introductions have a lot to do with each animal's previous experiences with other animals, and how their owners introduce them. Before choosing an animal, try to find out the animal's background and if the animal has been around other animals.

First impressions between cats and dogs are as important as they are between people. Making sure there are as few problems as possible is an important guide to helping these animals form a lifelong friendship or maybe just tolerate each other.

Keep a positive attitude, try not to act stressed as the dog or cat will pick up on your vibes. In other words, if you are nervous your animals will be nervous too. This will certainly affect how they view the other animal and you may be sabotaging your efforts for a successful relationship.

Bringing the new pet home.

Begin by keeping the new animal in a separate room for several days. Make sure they are kept comfortable with food, water, bedding, and a litter box for cats. The resident pet(s) should have free roam of the rest of the house. Allow them to sniff and growl under the door. This will help them accept the presence of another animal. If you wish, you can let the new animal out for short periods of time. You should supervise the pet when he is out exploring and your resident pets should be confined in the new pet's room or another area of the house. It is helpful to "switch places" so they can get used to each other's scent.

Keep the resident pet's schedule as normal as possible. Feed both pets on opposite sides of the door. Make sure to start at a distance where both pets are eating and gradually move the dishes closer. This will help associate positive things with each pet.

Swap blankets for the new and resident pet. This is another way to accustom both animals to each other's scent. You may want to put the blanket under the other's food dish to associate the scent with positive events (eating).

Practice obedience command with all dogs. It is very important that the dog(s) understands basic commands and will respond to you.

Scent Tour:

The first way animals meet is through scent. After your pet new pet has spent time away from the resident pets to acclimate to the house allow the new pet to tour the area without the presence of the resident pets. This will allow the new pet to "meet" the resident pets with a face to face greeting.

Face to face introductions:

Once the grumbling has lessened, allow the animals to see each other through a slightly opened door. You can also use a baby-gate to facilitate a first greeting. This allows each animal to get to know each other without being able to harm each other. Do this exercise for several days until you feel comfortable enough to introduce them face to face.

When you can be home all day and are feeling relaxed, let the new animal out. Keep all dogs on a loose leash. Do NOT force the animals to be together!

When first introducing the pets, keep the dog in a down stay and reward the dog for appropriate behavior (following the command). It may be a good idea to offer the dog a "treat shower" or lots of goodies in a row for sitting still. Keep the dog on the opposite side of the room. Have a friend or family member sit down close to the cat and offer her special treats or catnip. Do not restrain the cat. Keep visits short and repeat this step several times.

Next allow the cat to explore the dog on her own. Keep the dog in a down stay and reward him for good behavior (maintaining the stay). During the introduction process it may be necessary to keep a leash on the dog at all times when the cat is around. Make sure the cat has an escape route. Do NOT leave the pets alone together unless you are sure the cat will be safe. It will also help to provide cats with an opportunity to get up above the dogs in order to not feel threatened. A perch or cat tree can provide a vertical location for cats to observe a dog's behavior from a distance.

Reward the dog for good behavior around the cat. If you are always punishing the dog when the cat is present, he will start to associate negative things with the cat.

Other helpful tips:

Young kittens and puppies need constant supervision until fully grown. Because they have not developed completely either physically or socially, they are more susceptible to being harmed or even killed by the adult dog or cat.

Dogs like to eat cat food and feces. To discourage this behavior, keep the cat food on a shelf or counter top. You can also schedule feed your cat in a separate room. To keep the dog out of the litter box, make the box area inaccessible to the dog by using a baby gate or prop the door so that only the cat can enter. A high topless cardboard surrounding the box may also work. Whatever you use, make sure the cat can easily access the box.

It is perfectly normal and expected that these animals growl, chase, swat and hiss at each other. This may go on for several days or weeks. Do not punish the animals, but be patient and let them work things out on their own. However, if there is severe fighting and an animal is in danger of being severely injured, separate the animals by making a loud noise or throwing water on them. Do not attempt to handle either pet.

Do not expect your cats and dogs to become best friends over night. Friendships take time to develop.